

# MASTER PLAN

Biblical Foundations for Living Churches

**Brian Woodford**



FOREWORD BY PATRICK JOHNSTONE



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BIBLICAL FOUNDATIONS FOR LIVING CHURCHES

"Well researched and skillfully written, *Master Plan* is a refreshing look at church planting basics. Woodford answers the most vital strategic question of church planting teams—what are the essentials of church? A useful guidebook for the fields as well as the classroom, it offers a model that is universally communicable—a simple home of five rooms."

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*International Director, WEC International*

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~ DR PHILIP M. STEYNE

*Professor of Missions emeritus,*

*Columbia International University, USA*



BRIAN WOODFORD

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## Foreword

I am excited about the model Brian Woodford has developed and described in this refreshing book. We, as evangelical church planting mission agencies, have seen immense growth in the Church in Latin America, Africa and Asia over the past four decades. Never before has such a harvest been gathered. However, my concern is that often this has been in spite of us; our mistakes, our culture and our history distorted the understanding of the biblical Church and the expressions of that Church in local congregations. Our mission agency, WEC International, is a church planting mission, but it dawned on me in 1983 that we had little idea how to plant effective, multiplying churches and networks of churches that impact the world. Our church planting missionaries went out without any real help in how to go about their work, and they often reproduced failing or deficient models of church from their homelands. This pushed us into a long process of investigation and discovery which Brian has ably picked up and refined with the publication of this book.

Brian, and others in the evangelical missions world, are at last coming forward with clear, well-thought-out principles enabling a new generation of cross-cultural church planters to do better than we have been able to do in the past. Brian's approach is the most biblically comprehensive of all publications of this type that I have so far seen. His emphasis on the five-fold structure of the church and his twenty four principles for church planting are clear and helpful. They provide the keys which will allow locally relevant and culturally appropriate bib-

lical congregations and church planting movements to develop.

I look back over the twenty six years of working together, not only as colleagues in WEC in our International Office and in travelling together in multiple countries, but also as friends, so I am delighted to contribute in this small way to a book that is such a valuable tool. My only complaint is that I would have loved to have seen such a resource made available years ago! May it be a Holy Spirit-inspired tool that results in some of the least reached peoples on earth becoming the birthplace of vital, multiplying indigenous churches that impact their own and other cultures. May we soon see the day when Jesus' command will be fulfilled with active disciples in every nation and people of the world!

PATRICK JOHNSTONE

WEC International

Author of *Operation World* and *The Church is Bigger than You Think*

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I want to begin by thanking Dr Dieter Kuhl who, as WEC International Director, first challenged me to seek out the fundamental principles of the church to provide a guide for all our church planting teams. I am grateful, too, to all who received me into their homes in many parts of the world, and for church leaders who graciously responded to my many questions.

I owe a special debt of gratitude to Dean Gilliland, my patient mentor at Fuller SWM, and to Chuck Van Engen, for inspiring me not only with his teaching, but also with his passion for the church. I also acknowledge the work of Avery Dulles in *Models of the Church* (Gill and Macmillan 1987), which first alerted me to the possibilities of understanding the church from different perspectives.

Special thanks must go to Gerald and Doreen Cheah, my colleagues at Eastwest, who have worked tirelessly to turn a manuscript into a book. Above all, I am grateful to God for my wife Lyn and my lovely daughter Hannah, who have patiently endured my absences, and provided the inspiration to keep going over the years. Nothing beats being part of a team that God has put together.



# INTRODUCTION

This is a book about the church. It has been written out of my own struggles as a church planter. As a young missionary, by the grace of God, I was able to see a church emerge among a people group that had never before heard the name of Jesus. Later I was asked to help in the training of other church planters, both in the classroom and in field situations around the world. But one need always seemed to remain unmet.

Although we have had many books about church planting strategies, I and many of my fellow church planters struggled with knowing exactly what it is we are trying to plant. When all the cultural specifics are stripped away, what are the universals of the church? That is what this book seeks to answer.

The initial work was done at the request of WEC International to provide church planters with an introduction to the principles of the church that would be applicable in every context. The next seven years were spent working on the project, involving field visits to churches at various stages of development in all corners of the world, and repeated trips from the UK to the School of World Mission (as it then was) in Pasadena.

Eventually a D.Miss dissertation resulted, and this provided the basis for classroom teaching and field seminars that have occupied me over the past decade. Now I believe it is time to share this material, re-written in a simple, non-technical way, with all who long to see churches established and multiplying in places where the light of the gospel has yet to shine.

The title *Master Plan* will alert you to the fact that this is an overview. It simply seeks to offer a comprehensive survey of all that the Scriptures teach us about the church. The usefulness of this book is, however, not limited to church planters. You will find that the twenty four principles covered provide exactly the kind of biblical teaching needed by new believers—the solid biblical foundations that will allow churches to grow strong and multiply.

# 1

## CHURCH PLANTING ACROSS CULTURES

*I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen.  
I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice,  
and there shall be one flock and one shepherd.*

Jn 10:16



I began my working life as a quantity surveyor. That is the job of someone who figures out exactly what work, and what materials, will be needed to turn the architect's drawings of, say, a hospital into a gleaming new building on the hill.

The quantity surveyor (or QS) has another job too. Once the building starts going up, it is the QS who goes on site to check that all the work is being done exactly as the architect intended. I can still remember climbing down into muddy trenches to make sure the foundations would be deep enough, and hanging on to steel girders high above the ground, measuring, and making sure every strut was in place.

### **NEEDED—A SET OF PLANS**

But for most of my adult life I have been involved with the building of living churches in mission fields all over the world. As a result, I have come to realise that most church planters are looking for help in understanding just what is involved in building this beautiful structure called church. If only we had a blueprint! Or at least a drawing or two! Or perhaps the need is for a sort of ecclesiological QS—someone to explain step-by-step what needs to be done in order to turn the Architect's plans into living reality; someone who will walk with them through the unfinished work, making sure that they are building according to the plans.

That is what I attempt to do in this book. Together, we will

look at the biblical pictures (or "drawings") of the church. We will examine the structure as a whole, and then see how the various parts all fit together.

But let me give you an advance warning. I will not be presenting a specific picture of the church that you are planting. I simply don't know what it will look like. I merely hope it will be different from any church I have ever seen—because when the Architect has a hand in the growth of his church, he always creates something new. On the other hand, every church is meant to express the same basic realities, and to fulfil the same tasks intended by its Creator. It is these two aspects—nature and functions—that we want to look into. But just how they find expression will vary enormously, reflecting the complex mosaic of peoples, histories and cultures that make up our world.

## WHAT EXACTLY IS THE CHURCH?

What, then, are the essential marks of the church? The variety of groups claiming to be "church" seems almost endless—the Church of Latter Day Saints, the Church of Christ Scientist, the Presbyterian Church, the Roman Catholic Church. We find Christian groups looking (and sounding) remarkably like discos, and others where those present spend most of the time sitting in silence. Then there are those who have given up on "church" altogether, but still meet informally in homes. Where do they fit in?

Go global and the variations are mind-boggling. Take the thousands of different prophet-led churches in Africa. The excitement level is high; plenty of noise and drama, speaking in tongues, waving handkerchiefs, some might be rolling around in a sandpit confessing their sins, or having a large Bible pressed against a painful part of their body. Elders in striped uniforms can be seen expelling demons with much sword waving. I find myself asking, Are these really Christians? This is perhaps the most basic question we are faced with.

## Deciding Priorities

The missionary church planter is called, on the one hand, to faithfully lay foundations of truth that are the same for all peo-

ples, and on the other hand to allow the creative energy of the Holy Spirit to bring into being a unique expression of the body of Christ. It is obvious by now that the only way we are going to cope with this kind of tension will be by having a very firm grasp of this reality called church. (For simplicity's sake I will use mostly a small "c" for church, whether referring to the one universal body of Christ, or to a particular local church).

How then are we to recognise the church of Jesus Christ? Examine any sizeable church and you will find an extremely complex set of dynamics—personalities, finances, expectations, programmes, leadership styles, tensions, maturity and immaturity, hopes and fears. And you ask yourself: Where is God in all this? Is he pleased with what he sees?

Church planters long for answers to questions like:

- How can the church be made more attractive to the passer-by? How far should this be our aim?
- Are we *really* expressing worship by our meetings?
- Are there still apostles and prophets in the church today?
- What is the church's responsibility to the poor?

## Different Cultures – More Questions

If such questions confront us within our own familiar culture, things are going to get even more complicated when we find ourselves working in a totally different culture. Just think:

- How can I be sure that my understanding of the church, which I have absorbed within my own culture, still has relevance in the new and different setting?
- What is non-negotiable? And what can go?
- Is it just the outward forms (our language, music, leadership style and so on) that need to change? Or are there new ways of looking at the church itself that need to be considered?
- What does it mean to be a member of the church? Do we include all those who meet together in the name of Christ?
- What about those who want to be identified as Christians, but rarely show up in our meetings?
- How do we know if someone is genuine?

- What about those who fear to meet with others because of fear of persecution?
- How quickly do we baptise believers?
- How important is it to share in the Lord's Supper?

The questions keep coming.

Clearly, every church is different—not just in its location and social make-up, but also in the spiritual maturity of its members, the mix of spiritual gifts that are present, and in the particular temptations they face. The Book of Revelation describes seven churches all within a few miles of each other, but each one was different and heard a unique word from the Lord.

### Different Forms—One Faith

Today, if we were able to take a magic carpet and visit groups of true believers in a hundred different cultures, what differences we would find! Would we even recognise them all as church? And if we could add the historical dimension, and travel through the ages of the church, the diversity would be even more amazing.

Missions professor Andrew Walls comments:

More and more I was forced to consider what held the incredible cultural diversity of historic Christianity together. What united observant Pharisaic Jews of the post-Pentecost period, Greek theologians at Nicaea, wild Irish ascetic monks, zealous Victorian supporters of missions, and white-robed Nigerian congregations chanting in the streets about the power of the Spirit? (*The Missionary Movement in Christian History*, 1996: xv).

So we come to our key question: What are the essentials of the church—in every time and in every place? Whether we are working among the nomads of Central Asia, the high-rise dwellers of Madrid, or the villagers of North India, what are the common features that will allow us to say: Yes, here is the church that Jesus said he would build!

That is what this book will try to answer.

## MEET THE NT CHURCH PLANTER

If we look for a model church planter in the pages of the NT, probably all of us would think of Paul. Over a period of about ten years (roughly AD 48-57) he appears to have planted at least a dozen churches in key centres across the eastern Mediterranean region. He then explains to the Roman church, "*There is no more place for me to work in these regions*" (Ro 15:23).

How did he do it? He tells the Corinthians, "*I planted the seed*" (1Co 3:6). Paul saw each place he came to as being like a field across which he was planting living kernels of truth. Whenever one of these living seeds took root in someone's heart, that individual became another multiplying source of new life. As a result, within a few short years there was no longer any need for the outside seed-sower. The seed sown had produced a harvest. And the harvest had now become the seed. The pioneering work was over.

This was exactly how Jesus had described the process in his two parables about seed-sowing. The harvest that resulted from the good soil in the first parable (Mt 13:8) becomes the seed that the Son of Man sows in the second story. Jesus himself sows the sons and daughters of the kingdom, in anticipation of the immense harvest that will be gathered in at the end of the age (Mt 13:38-39). The kingdom grows by multiplication.

## Sowing Seeds – Not Transplanting Bushes

These images are clearly intended to remind us that the church is a *living* entity, and that its growth comes entirely from God. "*Neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow*" (1Co 3:7). Although we have the amazing privilege of being "*God's fellow workers*" (v. 9), nevertheless we need to remind ourselves constantly that the life and the multiplying power of the church come only from God. To speak of church planting is to remind ourselves that real church growth is something that only happens when God is at work.

The church planter is a seed-sower. Notice that he or she is not in the business of transplanting bushes! It is a good thing to remember that the Bible nowhere asks us to take what God is doing in one place and transport it, lock, stock and barrel, some-

where else. When you sow a seed, it will take on a life of its own, developing its own shape and pattern of growth to suit the new context.

## Laying Foundations

However, it is when we come to the image of the church as a *building* that we actually discover the most important role of the church planter. In writing to the Corinthians Paul obviously senses the need for this new metaphor too. "*You are God's field, God's building*" (1Co 3:9). In fact, the NT portrays the church planter as essentially a foundation layer. Paul says, "*As a wise master builder, I laid a foundation*" (1Co 3:10 KJV). His ambition was always to go where the gospel was not known, so that he would not have to build on someone else's foundation (Ro 15:20) since he knew that nothing was more important than laying good foundations.

Why was Paul so concerned about foundations? There are several reasons. For one thing, he understood clearly that there can be only one lasting foundation for any church—"the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ" (1Co 3:11). Without that, our labour will be in vain. It will have no eternal value.

But what does it mean to build on Jesus Christ? Does it mean that I proclaim Jesus Christ as the only way to heaven? Or does it also have something to do with the way I live out my faith?

I believe it is not simply a question of what we teach or even of how we live. To build on Christ touches the fundamental issue of my relationship with him. Total dependence on him in all that I do will be the one factor above everything else that will determine the strength, and even the survival, of my work. The heart of Paul was not, in the first place, to plant churches; it was to know Christ.

Furthermore, Paul clearly saw that the foundation he laid would be fundamental to the shape of the building to come. Walls can only go up where foundations have been laid. This means that the one who lays the foundations has an obligation to understand the intentions of the architect. The church planter needs to know what the divine Architect and Master Builder has in mind. What is God's plan for his church? What "rooms"

are needed in this building?

Paul's commitment to foundation laying was rooted above all in his awareness of having been commissioned. There is a note of deep personal fulfilment in his words to Agrippa, "*I was not disobedient to the vision from heaven*" (Ac 26:19). Perhaps we each need to ask the Lord to give us just such a determination to obey the call of God—that we in turn will be ready to give whatever it takes to see the vision fulfilled. Because there will be many obstacles.

## The Number One Task

Foundation laying is the number one task of the church planter. I am likely to find a thousand ways I could fill my days, a hundred jobs that need to be done. But if I am called to be a church planter, I must learn what it means to lay foundations. It will involve more than widespread evangelism, more than giving good Bible teaching, more even than leadership development. It will most likely include all these things, but they will become part of a master plan that has a clear goal in view—the establishing of churches that will become a steadily multiplying force for the kingdom of God, despite all the attacks of the enemy.

We need to remind ourselves constantly that every church we plant will always be a building under construction. All churches are works in progress. They are always unfinished. New living stones are being constantly added (1Pe 2:5), and the saints are being brought to "*the whole measure of the fullness of Christ*" (Eph 4:13). And the end result?—the Holy City that shines with the glory of God, the "*city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God*" (Heb 11:10).

## WHAT DO I REALLY BELIEVE?

Probably all of us have discovered that it is not until we are faced with a problem that we take the trouble to find out how to solve it. This is why "in-service training" or Just-in-Time workshops are often more meaningful than the preparation we were probably obliged to go through to get to our place of ministry. Faced with a whole set of new experiences and unexpected challenges we wonder why we never took the trouble to do the nec-

essary research or think through issues before. Or, if we did, the conclusions we reached then seem less than convincing to us now. But don't despair! It is when questions stare you in the face that you are ready to discover God's answers.

## Personal Foundations

As a young missionary I found myself the only Christian among ninety thousand animistic Birifor people in what was then the Republic of Upper Volta, in West Africa. No one else around me thought like I did. As I walked up and down those hot dusty paths between the mud-walled homes, making friends and learning the language, I began to ask myself, "Is it really possible that I am the only one in step?" Everyone else had idols—and the reality of spirit powers was pressed home on me day after day. What did I truly believe? What were the realities for which I was prepared to risk my life?

After years of Bible training, confronted by another culture and a totally different set of beliefs I needed, as never before, to spell out for myself the foundations of my faith. I wasn't looking for a complicated theology. But I did need to get a grip on the essentials. What constitutes the essence of Christianity? What are the basic building blocks of my personal faith?

I went back to the beginning. Yes, I believe that God exists; that he is good; that he communicates with human beings; that he revealed himself in Jesus and that the word of God is utterly reliable. These truths were the rock under my feet as I faced the full force of dark spiritual powers determined to expel me from the land! Physical, moral, and spiritual confrontations all came, but I never once had to go back and revise my faith.

## The Marks of a Church

I believe that as a pioneer church planter, going where Christ is not known, you will inevitably face something of the same struggle regarding the church. You wonder:

- How is a genuinely biblical church going to be recognised?
- If every church is meant to fit into the local culture, what

are the elements that will still need to be introduced from outside?

- What are the universal marks of a genuine Christian church?
- How far can we go in adapting to local customs?

As you travel, it will not be long before you come across groups which profess to be Christian churches but which are virtually unrecognisable as part of the body of Christ. Are these cases where adaptation to the local culture has gone too far?

As Professor Walls points out, "There is. . .a lurking peril in all successful indigenisations. The more the gospel is made a place to feel at home, the greater the danger that no one else will be able to live there" (*The Missionary Movement*, 1996:84). But if the church is totally "foreign" then local believers are not going to feel "at home" at all.

## FAMILIAR HYMNS OR MODERN ROCK —DOES IT MATTER?

In any cross-cultural church planting it will be of enormous help if we can have in our minds a clear understanding of what we are really aiming for. For example, who will decide what kind of music is appropriate? I know of one church in London, part of a well-known denomination, that reverberates with the sound of heavy metal and punk rock music and draws in hundreds of oddly dressed young people, many of whom have come to a living relationship with Jesus.

Very likely you already have your own mental picture of what the church should look (and sound) like. It probably has a lot to do with your experience of church life within your own culture, possibly within just one particular denomination. But before we have been long in another culture, most of us who thought we knew what the church should look like, run into two major difficulties.

### **The Trouble with the Familiar**

The first difficulty is that the familiar routines of church life don't have much in common with the daily life of those in our

new cultural world. If we decide, nevertheless, to transplant the patterns from back home, we will end up with a very foreign looking church, and one that needs perpetual input from us just to keep it going. People may come to such a church, but in doing so they will be saying good-bye to their own cultural heritage. Local leadership will be slow to emerge, and when it does, it will need the missionary's help for a very long time. This kind of church is unlikely ever to reproduce itself. It is sterile.

For those of us who work with inter-denominational missions, yet another hurdle awaits us. We may well find that our co-workers come from quite different church backgrounds and have very different ideas about how the work should develop. Tensions can easily develop as we struggle to decide whose agenda will win the day. In addition, there is the challenge of the generation-gap. New workers often have very different ideas about how a church should look and feel.

### **Beginning With the End in View**

By now it is obvious that what we need is a scriptural agenda for the church that we can all agree to. I am not thinking of a rigid list of behaviour patterns, or details of doctrine, but a clear picture of the "end results" for the church that Jesus promised he would build. If, for example, we agree that believers in Christ are called upon to love one another, that doesn't mean we have to lay down rules for how that love is to be shown. Each situation will have its own way of translating this principle into practice. The same applies to praising God. We know he is to be praised by those whom he has redeemed. But perhaps we ought not to set the decibel level or the dress code too rigidly.

Our task, then, will be to search out basic principles that will provide us with a biblical understanding of church life, whether that church meets in Buenos Aires or Bafwasende. Such an outline "drawing" must clearly be thoroughly biblical, but it must also attempt to be comprehensive. We want to get, at least in outline form, a view of the whole church—of all the "rooms" that God intends for his redeemed to occupy. That is the challenge before us.

## THE CHURCH THAT GETS TOGETHER

At this point it will help if I explain what church I am aiming to describe. Sometimes we use the word "church" to talk about the one great company of saints which Jesus promised to gather out of every nation and people. This is the universal church to which we now belong, but which includes all the believers who have ever lived. At other times, we use the word church to mean the Sunday congregation that meets in such and such a building. Or perhaps just the handful of believers meeting under a tree in the African savannah. Then again, we speak about the Presbyterian church, or the Evangelical Church of Ghana, meaning a particular denomination or group of local churches.

I will be talking about the church that is the visible congregation, the community of believers, the spiritual new creation that Paul refers to as the body of Christ. I am writing specifically about the church on earth. However, I am not thinking of any particular denomination or form of church government. My focus is on the local church, any group of Christians, anywhere in the world, who gather together in Christ's name.

### Two Realities – One Church

Many Bible scholars have concluded that "ecclesiology" is one of the most difficult areas in all theology. This is because, in the church, we are confronted with two seemingly irreconcilable realities. On the one hand, the church is presented to us in the Scriptures as a spiritual reality, made up of holy people, seated with Christ in heavenly places. On the other hand, the church as we experience it is also earth-bound, made up of very imperfect people, subject to divisions, and often indistinguishable from the world around. It often appears quite un-Christ-like. How do we sort out this relationship?

Some theologians have tried to get around this problem by saying that there is, on the one hand, a *visible* church which is made up of all the people who meet for worship—a church which is understood to be a mixture of weeds and wheat. On the other hand, there is also an *invisible* church known only to God, and which is made up of all the saints throughout the ages

who have been truly born again. Although the Bible nowhere explicitly uses this particular terminology the distinction is clearly implied.

The visible church is not the earthly church as distinct from the heavenly church. Nor is it the church now living as opposed to the church made up of believers of all ages. The biblical reality is simply that the membership of the church as we see and know it is not exactly the same as the membership of the church as it is seen by God. What he sees, theologians refer to as the invisible church. It is doubtless both *more* and *less* than what we see. We just don't have a final say on who is a member in God's sight, and who is not.

For the church planter, two things are especially worth remembering:

- First, the church on earth is, as we have already said, *both* a spiritual reality *and* an earthly, sociological reality. These are not two kinds of church. The church is both at the same time. We are, indeed, already "*seated...with him in the heavenly realms*" (Eph 2:6), but we also find ourselves living the nitty-gritty of everyday life, with all the limitations of time and space here on earth. There is ambiguity at the heart of every church.
- Second, you will never find a perfect church. Every church that you or I encounter will always be less than the ideal. It is not yet all that God intends. It needs the daily, hourly, renewing and purifying work of the Holy Spirit. Just as none of us has reached perfection, so we will find every local church is marred by failure of some kind. Our trust is in the Master Builder; the Lord has not yet finished his work.

## The Need for Institutional Life

If we have to live with imperfection should we, then, include everyone on our church membership list? No, of course not! As evangelicals, our desire is to have a believers' church—one whose members are truly the children of God, born from above, and made members of the body of Christ. Such people are not

simply members of a local congregation, they are also members of the universal church, sharing in the apostolic faith presented to us in the Scriptures. This is the true church defined in spiritual terms.

Why, then, do we need to concern ourselves with institutional matters? The NT clearly portrays an organised church that meets together to celebrate the Lord's Supper, is governed by elders, and maintains links with other such groups/churches on quite a wide scale. New members are introduced into this church by baptism, and there is a revolutionary set of behaviour norms that are presented as the standard for all members. When we talk like this we are, in fact, discussing the institutional life of the church.

These two aspects of the church, practical and spiritual, must not be separated, even though at times they appear to pull in different directions. Our aim is that the membership of the earthly organisation should match, as closely as possible, that of the spiritual community.

But what standards ought to be required of believers? What happens when a believer falls into sin, or denies the faith? How are they to be confronted with their actions? Can they be welcomed back if they change their minds? (Different views on this split the North African church in the fifth century).

## **The Gift and the Task**

Charles Van Engen, professor of ecclesiology at Fuller Seminary School of Intercultural Studies, gives what I think is the most helpful way of relating these two dimensions. He says that the earthly church is an *emerging reality*. It involves both a *gift* and a *task*. God already sees the church in its ultimate, perfect form. This is his gift, and our destiny. But here on earth we are called to work towards this ideal, knowing that God will, without doubt, bring it into being. This is our task. (See *God's Missionary Purpose*, 1991:65).

When we speak in terms of the four great marks of the church—one, holy, universal and apostolic—we are speaking about the true nature of the church as God intends it to be—his gift. But for us who are members of that church, these are also the tasks to which God is calling us. The church, then, is called

to become what it already is. We can never become more than God intends, nor should we ever settle for less.

For those of you who share Paul's great ambition to preach Christ where he is not yet known, I want to describe what I have found to be *God's pattern for the church* as it is revealed in the NT. I want this to be a tool by which you can plan your work as a master builder, and by which you can measure its progress as it develops into a living outpost of the kingdom of God, bringing light to those who still sit in spiritual darkness.

## THE TRUE PIONEERS

A word of caution needs to be introduced at this point. As we wrestle with these issues and come to feel that we have some insight into what Scripture teaches about the church, it is all too easy to assume that we are the experts. But even though we may know the essential features of church life, this does *not* mean that we are the ones who will have the best insights into how to turn these biblical principles into practice in the new context.

That challenge really comes to those who first turn to Christ within that context. No one has ever lived the Christian life within their particular world before. They are the real pioneers.

### To Dance or Not To Dance

When we are faced with cultural or context issues that baffle us, I believe that our wisest approach will be to look for those fresh insights that will come from the local believers as we encourage them to depend on the divine Indweller.

On one occasion the very first Birifor Christians in Burkina Faso came to me to ask if it would be OK for them to have a Christian dance at the local market. (I think they intended it to be a platform from which they could share their new-found faith). I told them that I had no idea. And I wasn't going to tell them, even if I thought I knew. I reminded them that the Holy Spirit was now living in them, and he would show them what to do. In any case, if I told them what to do then, how would they act when I was not around? I was not called to be a policeman.

So they went ahead. The drums were set up, and a dozen or

so believers began leaping about, circling the musicians and singing Christian songs. Their sweating bodies were quickly covered with the dust kicked up by their stomping feet. Within minutes others began to dance, and soon the songs became louder—and anything but Christian. Other musicians joined in, and the Christians, sensing that they were no longer in control, melted back into the crowd.

Later they came back to me. "We can't do it," they said. "That kind of dancing is not right for us any more. That's part of the old life, and we are new people." God had shown them. I didn't need to say anything.

This approach needs to be taken right from the beginning. The new birth means that we can expect believers (who clearly understand their culture much better than we do) to discern where the message most urgently challenges their traditional lifestyle.

Of course, there are times when new believers will benefit from the guidance that the church planter can give. But this should not mean that he (or she) takes on the task of directing the life of the church as if there was no other source of wisdom. When they have questions, we do all we can to help them find answers in the word of God. It is their questions that provide the key to relating the Scriptures to everyday life.

We believe that it is the Holy Spirit who imparts the new life of Jesus to every member of Christ's body. Is he not the indwelling Helper, able to instruct even the newest convert? So we can ask *them*—What is God saying to you?

## Scripture and Culture

For the church planter, the first days of the emerging church are both the most exciting, and the most critical.

- What are the topics that most need to be addressed in our teaching?
- How do we know what is *really* troubling the new believers?
- Are they getting answers to these big questions?
- How do we enable the word of God to have its prophetic

impact on this society?

- What steps are needed to ensure that the church is truly rooted in this society, and not seen as a foreign body?

One of the key roles of the church planter is to lead new believers in reflecting on their own customs, rituals and traditions in the light of biblical teaching. Often this will mean sitting down and examining each practice in as much detail as possible. The church planter needs to gather together some of the most able local believers and work with them to carefully consider each issue, one at a time, digging into the Scriptures, and seeking God's mind on the matter.

The approach I am suggesting is that, as outsiders, we are careful not to condemn local practices that at first sight may trouble us. This does not mean that we agree to everything uncritically. Instead, we will work with local believers to examine each belief, tradition, ceremony or whatever, in the light of scriptural principles. Some things they will reject as having no place in Christian living in their cultural context. Others they will probably accept, or modify.

## **Can We Trust the New Believers?**

At times we will be disappointed that a more radical approach is not taken—perhaps concerning respect for certain taboos, or involvement in ancestor veneration. Polygamy is a major issue in much of Africa. Almost every Birifor man wants to have at least two wives, with bridal payments spread over seven or more years. During this time babies are usually born to the couple, although they do not belong to the father until all the work is done, and all the sacrifices made. There is no clear-cut marriage ceremony.

What was I to do? I decided I should teach them from the word of God. So for twelve weeks, we studied the Scriptures (using my imperfect translations done for the occasion) to see what God has to say about marriage and about male/female relations. About a dozen came faithfully. At the end, the men agreed to meet to decide what to do. I was apprehensive. What would they decide? I sat and listened as they talked back and forth late into the night on the flat mud roof of one of their

houses. Finally, they came to a conclusion. "What you have taught us is good," they said. "It is God's word. But many of us are unable simply to end the relationships we have now and the contracts we have entered into. But we will teach God's way to our children."

I was disappointed, but I knew it had to be their decision not mine. Even though we long for the ideal standard for ourselves and others, our trust is in the Spirit to lead them towards that higher level. Now, looking back I can see how God has honoured that decision. Some remained polygamists, but usually the whole household became clear disciples of the Lord. Today, polygamy is almost unknown among the new generation of Birifor believers.

Often we find that, because of the old beliefs that are still associated with certain objects or practices, these cannot be used by the first generation of believers although later generations may be able to reintroduce them. For example, the Birifor people decided they could not use the traditional xylophone or drums in the church because of their association with spirit worship at funerals. Other drums, specially made and of a different type, were used. However, the older type of instruments are now being re-introduced where the original connotations have been lost.

## **Revelation and Response**

There is one important factor that determines whether new believers will play a significant role in the establishing of the church. Are they responding positively to the teaching of Scripture? This is the key. The process of all Christian growth is one of revelation and response. God reveals some truth to me, I respond positively, and more revelation is given.

One of the greatest thrills of my church planting experience has been to share the word of God with those who had never heard and yet were ready to respond. Step-by-step, as they obeyed, the Holy Spirit revealed to them how to apply the word of God in a transforming way to a culture that I had scarcely begun to understand. In a very real sense they, not I, were the true pioneers.

Wherever the church is planted in a new cultural setting we

will also find that some new practices will need to be introduced. For example, it is likely that baptism will be unknown. Equally, the Lord's Supper will be new. That doesn't mean we should not introduce them.

In both these examples, the ceremony itself and the meanings conveyed are very closely linked. In fact, the outward visible practice is a vital part of the message itself. This is a part of the "newness" of the gospel. Of course, the church will want to ensure that what is done in the way of ceremony reinforces the intended message, rather than making it so mysterious that it loses all meaning. Some things will probably need to be done differently from what we are used to.

## THE CHURCH PLANTER'S ROLE

Who then lays the foundations for the church planted in a new culture? Is it the missionary church planter, or the first believers from that place? It may well be the church planter who first proclaims the Good News. Although God is certainly already in the culture working out his purposes long before the missionary comes, the Scripture and its Good News are not there; they must come from outside.

We will be wise to think through carefully how best to build relationships with those to whom we are called. Just as any major construction project needs to be planned in advance, so we need a strategy for how we plan to plant the church.

For three months, way back in the 1950s, before leaving the UK, I lived with the ideas of McGavran and Roland Allen and others and drew up a plan for the Birifor project—how I would live, what I would teach, what I would do in order to see a church established among this neglected people group in the West African hinterland. By the amazing grace of God I was able to turn that plan into reality. Today the Birifor church is growing without any overseas workers, fed by the word of God in their own language, shepherded by faithful pastors and teachers, and reaching out with the Gospel to neighbouring people groups.

But as I have reflected on the experience of those years, and visited newly emerging churches all over the world, I am con-

vinced that we as church planters really need more than just a plan of campaign. Our biggest problem is not strategy—learning the language, sharing the Good News, gathering the converts, training the leaders and so forth. Our major difficulty is that often we do not always know exactly what it is that we are trying to plant.

Getting a clear biblical picture of the church is an increasingly urgent need on the frontlines today. All around the world we are currently seeing God at work creating the kind of spontaneous expansion described by Roland Allen eighty years ago. We call them church planting movements. Those of us who are privileged to work at these growing edges of the church have an enormous responsibility to enable these multiplying new churches to stand on solid biblical foundations. That is the issue that has prompted this writing. What we are after is a comprehensive overview of the church, both in terms of what it *is*, and what it *does*.



# 2

## A FIVE-ROOM MODEL OF THE CHURCH

*By the grace God has given me, I laid a foundation  
as an expert builder, and someone else is building on it.  
But each one should be careful how he builds.*

*For no one can lay any foundation  
other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ.*

1Co 3:10-11



**F**or the church planter, a crucial need is to understand the biblical nature of the church. After all, a builder needs the architect's plans in hand before he begins to lay the foundations. However, when we look into the Scriptures we are baffled to note the absence of any statement that comes even close to encompassing all the truly important things that need to be said about the church. We are confronted, not with technical definitions, but with an almost endless succession of word pictures, each having reference to the called-out people of God. In the words of one writer, the Bible presents us with,

an overwhelming variety of symbols, images, and metaphors [that] crowd upon one another. The church appears as a flock of sheep, a marching host, a temple and a field, a vine and a pillar. . .Nor is the profusion queued up for cataloguing. Figure blends with figure; the building grows (Eph 2:21; 1Pe 2:5); the city comes from heaven dressed as a bride (Rev 21:2). The buzzing, blooming garden of figures may delight the preacher seeking vivid word-pictures, but what is the theologian to make of them? (E. Clowney, "Interpreting the Biblical Models of the Church." In *Biblical Interpretation and the Church: Text and Context*. D. A. Carson, ed., 1984:64).

If you add to this kaleidoscope of metaphors the host of ways in which church members are described, such as "the forgiven" or "the family of God," you have over one hundred different descriptions for the church in the NT. Great, you say, but also

confusing! I agree. Sometimes we are not sure if we are meant to be building a holy community separated from the world, or leading an army out into battle with our verbal guns blazing, as we take the nations for God.

## LIFE NEEDS STRUCTURE

We have already thought about some of the reasons for this richness of biblical description when it comes to God's global family. Let me stress here one point that we need to constantly keep in mind. The church is living—made up of people in touch with the Living God. Therefore everything that is true of any living thing is also true of the church. It has structure, and yet it is constantly changing. There are an endless number of variations, each one unique, and yet each built from the same basic building blocks.

In laying out the structural plan for God's church, I am very aware that I can be accused of attempting the impossible. Whenever we try to put fences around what God is doing, he will reveal something new. Nevertheless, just as our human bodies, varied and complex as they are, provide the essential focus of study for anyone who wants to be a doctor, in a somewhat similar way, I want to propose a basic model for the church that will serve as a framework for our church planting efforts.

Having the basic structure firmly in our minds will allow us to plan better. It will give us a basis for the step-by-step evaluations we will want to carry out as the work develops. And, perhaps most importantly, it will make us aware of the main elements that make up healthy church life, and so save us from getting bogged down in peripheral details that have very little to do with laying foundations.

## DISCOVERING THE MASTER PLAN

As church planters in a cross-cultural context we will not simply be aiming to reproduce what is familiar to us, or what we see has worked well somewhere else. The fact that certain church practices have proved effective in one place is no guarantee they will fit a new situation. What we need is a firm grasp of the

essential nature of the church—to understand just what Jesus meant when he said "*I will build my church*" (Mt 16:18).

In seeking to understand human biology, the student needs to understand the workings of each part of the body: the nervous system, the circulation of the blood, the digestive system and so forth. Each is a distinct area of investigation and yet is related to all the others. All the systems are needed for the functioning of a healthy body.

Similarly, when it comes to the church, a priority task is to find a way of grouping similar biblical descriptions or images together so that we can get a handle on the major components of church life. What we need is the big picture—the master plan. The details of all that needs to take place in a new church involving people of another culture will not come clear until the Holy Spirit begins working in the lives of the first generation of new believers.

As I have closely examined all the Scripture texts and images relating to the people of God, I find that there are five important ways of looking at the church. Each viewpoint can be studied separately, giving valuable insights into church life. But only when all five aspects are brought together do we have a complete biblical perspective.

## Five Rooms—One Building

How then might we imagine to ourselves this overview of the church? What are we to call these systems that make up the amazing body of Christ? My suggestion is that we draw on the image used by Jesus in promising to build his church. Imagine the church as a divinely planned structure with five rooms, all inter-connecting and all having Christ himself as their meeting point.

In speaking about five rooms, I am not, of course, referring to literal rooms. We are talking about a spiritual house made up of living stones. "[*You also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices*]" (1Pe 2:5). Within this house, the five rooms represent the five ways in which the NT describes the church—not some churches, but all churches, whatever the country, culture, or social setting.

Obviously it will help if we have a name for each room, so that we know which room we are talking about. I have adopted as headings some of the descriptive terms for the church found in the NT, but the labels are not really the important thing; you may be able to think of better ones.

## A Double Reality and Three Tasks

As we look at what the Bible teaches we discover that every living church represents both a spiritual reality and a socio-cultural reality. It is both from heaven and on earth.

The FAMILY ROOM deals with the spiritual nature of the church. The church is "*the family of believers*" (Gal 6:10). The church is a spiritual community.

In the HOUSEHOLD ROOM we will be looking at the structures and activities that allow the members of the church to live and work together on earth. We will be thinking about "*how people ought to conduct themselves in God's household, which is the church*" (1Ti 3:15). The church is a structured community.

The remaining three rooms deal with what I believe to be the primary tasks, or functions, of the church.

The WORSHIP ROOM is where we focus on the church's first great responsibility, that of worshipping the King. In the MESSAGE ROOM we consider all that is involved in proclaiming the kingdom. Finally, the SERVICE ROOM looks at what it means to manifest the kingdom by being God's servant in the world.

These five rooms form a master plan for the church that shows both the two dimensions of its nature and its three primary responsibilities. The model allows us to deal, at least in an introductory way, with all the main themes relating to church life that are found in the NT. As church planters, it is our primary responsibility to lay the foundations for each of these rooms—foundations upon which a beautiful superstructure can be securely built.

Keep in mind that, to an outside observer, the same room may appear quite differently as we move from one culture to another, just as the construction materials, the style of architecture, or the furnishings of literal rooms, vary from one part of

the world to another. Nevertheless, in a truly biblical church, all five rooms will be found.

## A Comprehensive Model

Many will have read *The Purpose Driven Church*, by Rick Warren, or perhaps studied his later *Purpose Driven Life*. Warren, too, has five dimensions of church life: Worship, Fellowship, Discipleship, Service and Mission. These books have been inspirational to many and provide solid teaching at many points. However, some areas (administration, or cross-cultural mission, for example) receive little attention, since Warren's intended focus has been to help pastors and members of existing churches within a western context.

I believe that, as cross-cultural church planters, we need a somewhat different approach. We need all the main NT teaching concerning both the nature and functions of the church in manageable format. And we need it in terms of NT principles that can be translated into a great variety of practices depending on the context.

Seeing church life in terms of five rooms makes the information more manageable, but more importantly, it allows us to cover all the significant NT teaching. Each room is needed, but incomplete in itself. Only when all five dimensions of church life are brought together do we get the full picture of the significance and beauty of the church as God intends it to be.

## PRINCIPLES NOT PRACTICES

The Five-Room Model is based on more than one hundred descriptions of the church and its members scattered throughout the NT. Related texts have been brought together and summarised in a brief statement that can be seen as a biblical principle of the church. In all, twenty four principles have been identified, covering all the main aspects of church life.

Each principle provides a simple statement about a particular aspect of church life. Together they represent what we might call the twenty four universals of the church. They summarise God's intention for all churches in whatever culture they are

found. Four or five principles make up each of the five rooms.

The authority for these principles comes directly from the NT. I take the Scriptures to be the inspired word of God, and have sought to interpret each text according to its plainest meaning, helped by a considerable library of evangelical commentaries and dictionaries.

What we are seeking are the *principles* of the church. This is a key word. Alongside it we will need to add the word "practices." Principles are the features of church life that God intends for every church, whatever the size, whatever the culture, whatever the education level. Practices refer to how these principles are applied or worked out in everyday life. Principles are the same for all. Practices will be as varied as the myriad colours that sparkle from a diamond.

### Different Words – Same Meaning

Just as the same meaning needs to be communicated by different words when you move from one language to another, so we find that the same meanings needing to find expression in the church can be formulated and demonstrated in a wonderful variety of ways. For example, the kind of leadership needed in a house church of a dozen members is vastly different from that in a mega-church. But the principles of leadership and administration for the church remain the same.

Cross-cultural outreach by a team of two believers from a small congregation will be very different from the global work of Wycliffe Bible Translators. But the biblical principles of mission are the same.

The principles are presented as brief statements about one aspect of church life expressed in the simplest possible terms. I do not claim any special inspiration for the words used. Please feel free to express things differently if you feel it makes the point better.

### Expecting Something New

A principle-based approach to church planting is truly liberating. It means that we are not too hung up about the surface

appearance of things. Our concern is that God's purposes for his children are being fulfilled in each particular context. Are the new believers growing in their faith? Are they becoming more like Jesus? Is the kingdom of God being expressed in and through this community? Are their neighbours being reached with the Good News?

To begin with *principles* rather than *practices* sets us free to begin afresh in each new church planting situation. It allows us to be open to the Holy Spirit to direct us into paths that we have never trodden before. We anticipate that every new church will be different from anything we have ever seen. We expect God to be at work in new ways among those who hitherto have not known him. Since every context is different we will watch with intense interest as the Spirit reveals himself, sometimes in unexpected ways, in the emerging church. God delights in new things, and he often surprises us.

As church planters, we are essentially foundation layers. Our responsibility is to work according to the master plan set out in the Scriptures. The Five-Room Model, with its twenty four principles, provides us with a simple plan of the foundations of the church, covering all the main NT teaching relating to both the nature and the tasks of the church.

## LIVING CHURCHES

On the next page you will see a simple diagram representing the Five-Room Model of the church. The five rooms are arranged around the cross in the centre, to emphasise the fact that without the presence of God there is no real church. Whatever else may be happening, if Jesus is not present in the power of his Spirit we do not have a church.

Next, we can note that all the rooms open on to the centre. This reminds us that every aspect of church life depends on the life of Jesus flowing into it. The cross is the gateway to the resurrection life we have now received. It is his life that flows through the church, just as much through its administration as in its teaching or its worshipping.

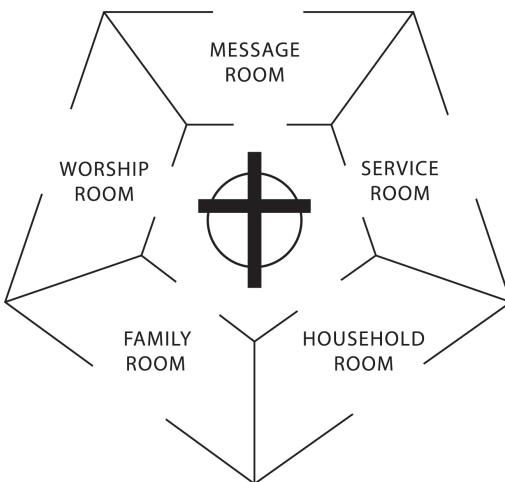
As church planters, we know that the quality of our work depends directly upon our relationship with Jesus. This is the

one thing that must be guarded at all costs. Whenever anything comes between us and him, our one responsibility is to seek his face and do whatever is needed to bring us back into a place of intimacy. If we fail here, all our efforts will be in vain. "*If any man builds on this foundation (Jesus Christ) using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, his work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light*" (1Co 3:12-13).

To build on Christ is not so much a question of theology—what we talk about—as of relationship. Our true success does not depend upon the response we get, but on the intimacy of our relationship with Jesus Christ. Only what he does through us will last for eternity.

If the flow of divine life comes outward from the centre, it is equally true that the purpose of every aspect of church life is to lead us to the centre—to a living encounter with the Lord Jesus. Some will first discover him through worship, others through hearing the message, or any of the other rooms. But once a person has met the Lord, they will quickly find that there are other rooms.

Everyone who encounters Jesus will find they need to be supported by other believers (part of the Household Room). They will also discover a hunger to hear God's word (they have discovered the Message Room) and so forth. Any room can provide initial access to the church. But none can stand alone and claim to be the church. All five rooms are needed.



*The Five-Room Model of the Church*

### CHOOSING THE SHOP FRONT

One further point must be stressed. The open doors around the outside of the model show that there is a way into the church through any of the five rooms. In other words, any room can become the "shop front."

Even where all the rooms of the church are present, a church is likely to find that one particular room provides the most attractive entry point for outsiders, since it offers to meet a need that remains unmet in that setting or culture.

Every church needs to ask: When an unbeliever passes by, what is most likely to make him take notice of this church? Let this room become the shop front.

We may not be able, in our context, to start with a verbal presentation of the gospel, but we may be able to start with a more practical ministry. In many situations people will be attracted by the service that is given in the name of Christ (even if they, at first, are unaware of that name). As relationships develop questions will come and answers can be given, leading enquirers, as it were, into another room.

We may not want to use "The Four Spiritual Laws." But a series of well-planned "Discovery Lessons" can provide the

basis for further understanding. Or perhaps another approach is needed that begins much closer to where the people are now.

We need to ask ourselves questions such as:

- What is this person looking for?
- What does this society long for?
- What might God have to offer them?

This is where the church planter must begin. The challenge for a pioneer church planter is to discover the appropriate, or most attractive, shop front for the context and culture of the people he or she is working with. Different shop fronts will generate different church planting strategies.

If people are lonely, or facing social dislocation, they may be most attracted by evidence of caring relationships in a close-knit group. Here, a cell church approach might be tried. The practical expression of support offered by a typical cell group is likely to be appealing to those living in fragmented societies, or to students away from their families. This is the Family Room in action.

In some of the Creative Access Nations (CANs) an effective shop front can sometimes be found through the links that have already been established with a registered church. This allows seekers to investigate Christianity without breaking any laws. Links with such a church may become an entry to point through the Household Room which will lead to discovery of Christ as the true Centre.

Many times people have been drawn to Christ through the written Word (the Message Room) but only later discover the church. This sometimes happens where traditional missionary work and Christian witness are not possible. Buddhist monks in a remote monastery were found to be gathering every day to listen to a series on the Life of Christ broadcast over Christian radio.

In many Latin countries the power of corporate worship becomes a magnet attracting outsiders to seek out the One who is being worshipped. For many animistic peoples the demonstration of the power of the name of Jesus overcoming demonic

forces has often been a reason for people turning to Christ. Such a demonstration of God's presence leads directly into the Worship Room.

Pioneer church planters quite often start with an inappropriate shop front. The results will be discouraging, but they should lead us not to despair but simply to try another approach. To continue doing the same thing expecting a different result is said to be the ultimate mark of stupidity! Fresh thinking and taking time to wait on God are needed. Several shop fronts may have to be experimented with until the right one is found. Research into church planting efforts among similar people groups can often provide help.

## **Who Decides?**

As we have seen, any of the five dimensions of church life can become the shop window. But who decides? It may be the church planter, or it may be the emerging church itself. Most often the pioneer church planters take the initiative in determining the church planting strategy. But, if they are wise, they will make it a policy to try and lead, as it were, from behind, so that emerging local leaders are never in any doubt that their opinions and insights are taken seriously and that all decisions reflect that.

What may be the most effective method in the pioneering stages may not be the best missionary method for the church that comes into being. This calls for both humility and sensitivity on the part of the pioneers.

The way each room takes shape will vary from situation to situation. The important thing is that all are planned for. All should have their place in the life of a healthy church, even though not all rooms may be "fully furnished" by the original church planters. The pioneers' task is to lay foundations, not complete the finishing touches.

## **A Holistic Approach**

The biblical view is that every part of our life is important to God. Body, soul and spirit all make up what it means to be human. God clearly intends for us to experience his blessing in

every area. This is pictured in the Hebrew word *Shalom*, or peace, so often promised in the OT. The blessing included physical security, emotional health and material sustenance, as well as the continued presence of God.

The five rooms of the church reveal that God still wants to touch every part of our lives. This means that, as church planters, we will want to adopt a holistic approach. Not that we change our viewpoint on the importance of eternal salvation. The goal must always be the same: to lead people into a personal relationship with the Lord Jesus, and into the fellowship of his church. But it does mean that we recognise the breadth of human need, and seek the Lord's leading about how we ought to make our initial approach.

If people need food we will want to help them, perhaps with their farming, or with improved stock or seed. If people are sick, we will look for ways to help. Sometimes this can be done on a small scale, as a demonstration of God's love through us to those in need. In many places practical assistance has been provided through working with NGOs or government agencies. In this way many doors have been opened for the Gospel. The important thing is never to undertake any project that we do not believe to be directly related to the goal of church planting.

Regardless of which room proves to be the shop front, the development of other rooms must not be neglected. Always remember that a shop front is not the whole building. God intends that the church should bring his presence into every aspect of life. For example, if we only serve, but never see people come to Christ, we have only the shop front but nothing behind it. But equally, if we only preach but never reach out to those in need, the church is not complete. It will be like the film set with rows of what look like houses or stores that are really only façades. Whatever approach we take, our aim must always be to establish a fully functioning biblical church.

## LIVING FOUNDATIONS

So there you have it—five rooms making up a biblical master plan for the church in every culture. The Five-Room Model describes the NT church as a structured community, made alive

by the Holy Spirit, which expresses itself in worship, the proclamation of the Word and service. Just as a diamond reveals its full beauty and colours only when viewed from different directions, so we begin to get an insight into the beauty of the church when we come at it from these five perspectives.

From the church planters' perspective the outward evidences of all this may still be faint—the walls of this spiritual house may only just be visible above ground. But if biblical foundations have been laid the Spirit will surely be at work, often in ways we do not anticipate and cannot see.

The richness, and mystery, of the church coupled with the complexity of the world's cultural mosaic make it imperative that the church planter understands the biblical principles upon which every church is to be built. The five rooms, made up of twenty four principles, allow us to get a comprehensive view of God's plan, yet without the need to describe all the details that need to be worked out in practice.

## DIGGING DEEPER

Having introduced the Model we are now ready to take a closer look at each of the twenty four principles found in the NT. Related principles have been gathered into each of the five rooms that, together, make up the NT church.

In the following five chapters we will consider each room in turn.

- Chapter 3 looks at the Family Room: Principles 1-5
- Chapter 4 looks at the Household Room: Principles 6-10
- Chapter 5 looks at the Worship Room: Principles 11-15
- Chapter 6 looks at the Message Room: Principles 16-20
- Chapter 7 looks at the Service Room: Principles 21-24

A summary chart is provided at the end of each chapter, listing the key NT images relating to each principle, and giving their main teaching points.



# 3

## THE FAMILY ROOM

*Pointing to his disciples, he said,  
'Here are my mother and my brothers.  
For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven  
is my brother and sister and mother.'*

Mt 12:49-50



**I**n NT times, the followers of Christ quickly became recognised as a new kind of people. Most of them were definitely not Jews, and yet neither did they share the values and rituals of the polytheistic nations among whom they lived. Although they spoke many different languages, they shared a common identity. They lived among their own people, and yet they were different from them.

This sense of identity and separation still marks the global family of believers. So what is it that makes them different? If we are to understand the church, first we need to be clear about its membership. Who belongs to it, and how do we recognise them?

In the OT, God consistently refers to Israel as "my people." In the NT, Paul calls the church "the body of Christ." The basis for their uniqueness is their *relationship with God*. Seeing the church in this way reminds us that relationships are at the heart of what we are after. If we are to plant a living church we must therefore be sure that we begin with those who are truly members of God's family, men and women who have discovered a personal, covenant relationship with God, through their faith in Jesus Christ.

The Family Room brings into focus the biblical insistence that the true church is made up exclusively of those who, by the power of the Spirit, have been born into the family of God. This has to be the beginning point for anyone concerned about church planting.

## Evidences of Belonging

However, recognising those who belong to the family of God often presents a significant challenge to the cross-cultural church planter. Even within our own culture we are sometimes unsure. In another culture, and with the language barrier only partially overcome, it can be even more difficult. We all agree that to belong to the family of God you must be born again. But how can we tell? What signs are we to look for?

The NT points to five clear evidences of the new birth by the Spirit.

1. Peace with God
2. Unity with other believers
3. Assurance
4. Growth
5. Perseverance

These are key indications that someone truly belongs to the *spiritual community* we call church. They will all be found, at least to some degree, in every true child of God regardless of their culture or previous religious heritage. The miracle of new birth has taken place.

It is true that not all five evidences will be equally apparent to begin with. Sometimes we will see one or two signs, but not others. How do we explain this? Perhaps an illustration will help. Remember the old films we used to use to take photos? Press the button and the image was imprinted on to the negative. It was there, but you couldn't see it until the film had been developed. It needed the chemicals to make the image visible on the film. In somewhat the same way, when a person is born again, the imprint of the Spirit's presence writes these five marks on the life. They are there, but they need developing.

Knowing what to look for allows us to focus on the key areas where a new believer needs support. The devil will do all he can to bring doubts and discouragement, and it is our job to make sure new believers get the nurture of the Word and fellowship that will allow them to develop.

It is these marks of the new birth that give us the first five principles of the church to be considered on the following pages.

## Principle 1

### Peace with God

*Church members are those who, having heard the gospel, have put their faith in the Lord Jesus and found peace with God and new life by the Holy Spirit*

The church is the community of those born again by the Spirit of God. "No one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again" (Jn 3:3). But how does this happen? What needs to take place for someone to be born again? A careful look at the NT leads to the discovery of four key elements that are found in every genuine new-birth experience.

#### *Revelation*

For the new birth to take place, first there has to be revelation. Peter knew that Jesus was "*the Christ, the Son of the living God*" only because the Father had revealed it to him (Mt 16:16-17). Coming to Christ is always a response to a prior work of God. "*No one can come to me unless the Father. . .draws him*" (Jn 6:44). The process is always: revelation and response.

But how does this revelation come? Perhaps we can say that there are degrees of revelation. Certainly God reveals his power and divinity in creation. Wonderfully, in recent days an amazing number of new converts have spoken of seeing Jesus in a dream or a vision. But in nearly every case we find that these are only preparation for a fuller revelation.

The revelation that brings salvation is the gospel message itself. "*The mystery of Christ. . .has now been revealed. . .through the gospel* (Eph 3:4-6). "*In the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed*" (Ro 1:17). This is the great reason why the whole world must be evangelised. It is why Paul cries out, "*Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel!*" (1Co 9:16).

The task of mission is to ensure that "*the Gentiles might hear the gospel and believe*" (Ac 15:7). God uses the hearing of the gospel to create faith. "*Faith comes from hearing the message*" (Ro 10:17). That is why evangelism is so vital.

### **Response**

Whenever the gospel is proclaimed we are to look for a response. Revelation is needed, but there also has to be a personal response of faith. "*To all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God*" (Jn 1:12). A seeker may come perhaps for forgiveness of sins, or to find an answer to shame, or deliverance from sickness or oppression. God, in his grace, will meet that need even though understanding is small.

Faith is always born out of a sense of need. The way that need is understood will depend in part on personal history, although culture and worldview appear to be the primary influencing factors. There are at least three, perhaps four, major cultural blocks, each with a different dominant felt need.

Western cultures, founded on biblical foundations, have for centuries been dominated by a consciousness of guilt, and a longing for forgiveness. This is reflected in western theology. The good news of forgiveness of sins has touched the hearts of millions.

In the Middle East on the other hand, and in much of Asia, the felt need is not so much for forgiveness as for honour. The greatest fear is that of being shamed. For such people the gospel is that Christ has removed our shame through his death on the cross. In him we are made sons of God, and heirs of his kingdom.

African thinking is largely dominated by the problem of fear and oppression, both by men and by the unseen powers. Here, the predominant search is for power over the oppressors and freedom from fear. The gospel is that Jesus offers deliverance from bondage, and victory over every spiritual power.

Some see another pervasive sense of need arising in the post-modern world. This has introduced a culture deeply scarred by loneliness and a sense of isolation. People are lost, without moral foundations or lasting relationships. To this post-modern world we bring the gospel of the One who came to seek and save the lost. We bring news of One who offers a relationship with himself that will never be broken.

The differences are not exclusive. In every culture we will find some awareness of all of these inner longings. Yet one will

tend to be uppermost. Our task in evangelism is to point to the One who is ready to meet every person at the point of their deepest sense of need. When the response of faith is there, the work of salvation is begun.

I was having lunch one day in my mud house among the Biri-fors when a tall man came by. He said that he had come to hear about God; could I tell him? "Who sent you?" I asked. "God sent me." I was intrigued. In a dream God had told him to get up, destroy his idols, and come the fifteen kilometres to my village. He had never heard of Jesus, and never met a Christian before.

For the next couple of hours I did my best to tell him about God and how he sent Jesus to seek and save the lost. Finally I suggested he go back home and think about it. His response was immediate. "I came here to become a child of God, and I'm not going home until I am one!"

So we knelt together and, with a bit of help, he confessed his sins, and asked the Spirit of God to give him new life. He stood up, a big smile on his face, and walked away without another word.

Next morning he was back with his wife and two small sons. I went out to greet them and found them sitting under a tree, singing and clapping. He said simply, "I told my wife what you told me yesterday and now she is a child of God too. So we are singing praises to him." From day one he had become a church planter.

### ***Reconciliation***

When God sees my response of faith two miracles happen. The first is that God reconciles me to himself on the basis of what Christ has done on the cross. God takes away my sin. This is an objective work, finished and complete, bringing me into a totally new relationship with God. "*God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. . .God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that we might become the righteousness of God*" (2Co 5:19, 21).

The gospel is that "*while we were still sinners, Christ died for us*" (Ro 5:8). There was no possibility of finding peace with God by anything that we could do. We were without hope, and without any means of finding salvation. In other words, we were

lost. Then Jesus came "to seek and to save what was lost" (Lk 19:10).

This is the greatest good news it is possible for any human being to hear. What God has done in Christ represents a total reversal of our situation. There is no greater cause for rejoicing than the gift of reconciliation with our Creator. This is why the church sings songs of praise. "*[W]e also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation*" (Ro 5:11).

### ***Renewal***

The second miracle is that I am born again. My spirit, which was dead because of sin, is brought to life by the Holy Spirit. This is the subjective, or experiential, dimension of salvation. "*For if, when we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life!*" (Ro 5:10).

When the first step of faith is taken, God begins his work of salvation. Having been reconciled, my spirit is made alive by the Holy Spirit, and I discover peace with God. I have been brought from death to life, and the process of radical renewal has begun. "*If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come*" (2Co 5:17).

This work of the Holy Spirit is the key to the development of the church in the book of Acts. On the day of Pentecost Peter's message is: "*Repent and be baptised for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit*" (Ac 2:38). Later on, the Gentiles are baptised because, says Peter, "*They have received the Holy Spirit just as we have*" (Ac 10:47). Our task is both to preach and to pray that the Holy Spirit will be given to all who respond (see Ac 19:1-6).

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## For Reflection and Discussion

1. Who are the people God has commissioned us to reach with the gospel? How widely has the message spread? What percentage has still not heard?
2. What do these people perceive to be their greatest unmet needs? How does the gospel provide an answer to these needs?
3. What would make it possible for everyone to hear the gospel?
4. How can we discover those whose hearts God is preparing? What kind of media outreach, or social invitations, might we use to discover those interested?
5. How clearly does our presentation of the gospel explain why Jesus died on the cross?
6. What is understood concerning the role of the Holy Spirit in conversion? What do we believe? What do we teach?

## Principle 2

### Unity

*Believers have found unity in Christ, and show their love for each other in practical ways without regard for cultural or social differences*

The new birth brings peace with God. But this "vertical" reconciliation brings about a second, "horizontal" reconciliation. This is beautifully pictured in the description of the church as "*the family of God*" (1Pe 4:17). To find peace with God is to discover the family of God. Here is the second principle of the church.

Clearly, the gospel has revolutionary social implications. The miracle of salvation is that God brings peace at the horizontal level. "*He himself is our peace, who has made the two (races) one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility*" (Eph 2:14). Mutual hostility has been dealt with on the cross. In Christ, people of different cultures and religious backgrounds are made into "*one new man*" (Eph 2:15). It is as if a totally new race has been created, one that supersedes all the old allegiances.

Whenever we see love expressed between different groups in the multi-coloured family of God, we are looking at a miracle, a clear sign that God is at work. But this is not a unity that can be imposed. It is a gift of God. It follows the new birth, and must never be made a condition of it. But once a group of believers comes into being, the new multi-cultural family is there to be discovered.

The prayer of Jesus shows that this unity is not automatic. "*I pray also for those who will believe in me. . .that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you*" (Jn 17:20-21). Oneness is something to be nurtured. "*Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace*" (Eph 4:3). We cannot have more than God has given us, but we should never settle for less. God makes us one in Christ by the gift of his Holy Spirit; but we are called to express that unity by our actions. God's gifts become our tasks.

So what is the basis for our unity? If we understand this, we will understand the foundations upon which it must be built.

### ***One Saviour, One Salvation***

Our beginning point is the recognition that we all stand under the same judgment before God. "*Sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men, because all sinned*" (Ro 5:12). The fact is that we all die. This is certainly a universal, but it is no basis for unity; just the opposite.

What unites the people of God is not their sinfulness, but their salvation. We are "*those who believe and are saved*" (Heb 10:39). We all shared the same great need, and in the Lord Jesus we have all found the same salvation. "*Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved*" (Ac 4:12).

### ***One Father, One Family***

The second basis for our unity is that God is now our "*Abba, Father*" (Ro 8:15). If I can call God my Father, I am joined at the deepest level with everyone else who calls him Father. The prayer Jesus taught us is a constant reminder of this. By the new birth, we have become one family, "*the family of believers*" (Gal 6:10). And that gives us a whole new set of both privileges and responsibilities.

In the early 1990s I began to hear reports of many pygmies turning to the Lord in the Ituri forest of north-east Congo. I determined to make a visit and find out. Pastor Mongu (not a pygmy) was assigned by the church to be my guide and interpreter, and we set off together into the forest.

We came upon one pygmy settlement after another without finding a single person of whom we could say, "Yes, this person knows the Lord Jesus." Then, after five days, we came across a camp of about twenty pygmies who welcomed us with shining faces. They told of their faith in Jesus who died to forgive their sins, and of the heaven that awaited them. As they sang their joy was irrepressible.

I moved on to another area but several weeks later, when I came back, Pastor Mongu reminded me of that meeting. "I didn't believe that a pygmy could be saved, until that day. But these pygmies have the same faith that I have! God has opened my eyes and shown me that I am to give the rest of my life to planting churches among them." Today the multiplying pygmy churches are filling the forest with their songs.

### ***One Spirit, One Body***

"*For we were all baptised by one Spirit into one body*" (1Co 12:13). We are one because we all share the same life by the Spirit of Christ. Just as each of our bodies has its own unique life, so by the Spirit we have been formed into one body, sharing a common life.

The diversity we see among us is like the diversity within the body. "*You are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it*" (1Co 12:27). We cannot function alone. We need each other. Harmony within the body is created by its common life under one head. "*In Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. We have different gifts, according to the grace given us*" (Ro 12:5-6).

### ***One Destiny, One Hope***

The fourth thing that unites us is our future. Through the gospel we have become "*heirs together. . .members together. . .sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus*" (Eph 3:6). We have one hope, the same glorious destiny as "*heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ*" (Ro 8:17).

Peter says that husbands must be considerate towards their wives, treating them with respect "*as heirs with you of the gracious gift of life*" (1Pe 3:7). According to Paul, not only the sexes, but believers of all races and every social class are made one through their status as sons (and daughters) of God. "*You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. . . There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus*" (Gal 3:26-28).

These are the same four foundations Paul gives (though in a different order) as the basis for the unity of the people of God. "*There is one body and one Spirit. . .one hope. . .one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all*" (Eph 4:3-6).

- one body
- one hope
- one faith
- one Father

All this has enormous implications for the kind of churches we will want to see planted. Robert Banks maintains that the pur-

pose of NT church gatherings was primarily for fellowship. The Jews gathered around the Torah. This formed the major content of their synagogue services. The Greek cults looked for mystical experiences and dramatic rituals. Their focus was the cult. But for Christians, their gatherings were primarily about fellowship. (*Paul's Idea of Community*, 1994:108).

All of these ideas can be still found in churches today. Gatherings of the Roman Catholic Church are centred on the cultic and the ceremonial. Protestant churches usually give central place to the Book. However, in the NT the church is essentially relational.

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### For Reflection and Discussion

1. If church gatherings are primarily about fellowship, how well do our meetings allow for this to be expressed? Would a variety of meeting formats be helpful?
2. To what extent do we expect non-Christians of different languages or cultures to come together to hear the gospel? Would more be accomplished if we focussed on just one group?
3. How might believers of different cultures be brought together to share with each other about their differing backgrounds and what being a Christian means to them?
4. What kind of teaching would help nurture unity between believers of different backgrounds? Is there a need for biblical teaching on the relationship between the sexes?
5. How could we arrange to meet with other leaders to pray for the unity of all believers in our area?

## Principle 3

### Assurance

*Believers have assurance of their salvation, knowing that God has given them eternal life*

A common hope is one of the reasons for our unity. But I have been surprised to find how faint that hope often seems to be. All around the world I find faithful church members unsure of their relationship with God. Assurance is lacking even though they sincerely want to follow Jesus. I am left wondering why. Perhaps it is simply that the gospel has never been adequately heard and understood? "*Faith comes from hearing the message*" (Ro 10:17). And biblical faith includes hope.

If the message lacks clarity even a sincere believer will be vulnerable to the doubts that the enemy will bring. Some are wondering if they are good enough to get to heaven. Or, "Have I earned enough merit?" Others are unsure about what happens when they sin. Does the Holy Spirit leave them? Have they lost their salvation?

Doubts like these mean that believers are unable to share their faith effectively with others. Churches are weak, and fail to multiply. Believers lack the solid biblical foundations needed for faith to grow.

But when truth is grasped, assurance comes. Hope for eternity is a confidence based on the gospel message itself. The initial experience of salvation will vary greatly. Some will be filled with joy. Others will feel little or nothing, but simply determine to believe. Much will depend on the spiritual and cultural background. But when the gospel message is truly heard it brings a deep assurance of salvation that is based, not on subjective experience, but simply on what God has done in Christ.

How can we best communicate this great good news? The basis for assurance is the authority of the word of God. The Scriptures provide the foundation for our faith as the full extent of our salvation provided through the work of redemption is made known. Preaching that is limited to exhortation does not bring assurance. Biblical hope rests on what God has done, not

on what we do, and therefore needs to be at the heart of all our teaching.

We can best begin with the burdens people are carrying. Do they struggle with shame? Or fear of spirits? Or a sense of meaninglessness? Or guilt? Assurance comes when these felt needs are seen to be met through what Christ has done. In addition to teaching, the hope of believers is often strengthened from two other major sources: the personal testimony of believers, and the evidence of victory over the grave. We will look at each of these in turn.

### ***Teaching***

Assurance comes, first, through the biblical revelation of what God has done for us in Christ. From the scriptures we discover the amazing breadth and depth of what salvation means.

- In relation to bondage: we are set free. "*It is for freedom that Christ has set us free*" (Gal 5:1).
- In relation to guilt: we are forgiven. "*In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins*" (Eph 1:7).
- In relation to defilement: we are washed. "*You were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God*" (1Co 6:11).
- In relation to our status: we are sealed as God's own possession. "*He anointed us, set his seal of ownership on us, and put his Spirit in our hearts as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come*" (2Co 1:21-22).
- In relation to our destiny: we are made heirs of God and of his kingdom. "*Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ*" (Ro 8:17).

### ***Testimony***

Biblical assurance is clearly linked to a view of time that includes both a beginning and an end. "*I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End*" (Rev 22:13). Yet many of the world's cultures do not share this biblical view of time. Time may be seen as a series of repetitive cycles, or as totally unknowable. Promises about the future seem to make little sense. In some languages, words such as

"hope" do not even exist.

How, then, is the promise of eternal life to be grasped? It appears that the biblical connection between cause and effect, of the fact that past experiences give rise to future hope, is often introduced through the sharing of simple testimonies. A story of how God delivered from sickness or danger in the previous week becomes the basis for a new confidence that he will be equally faithful in the future. It confirms the biblical teaching about what God has said and done, and provides a firm basis for trusting him for the future.

The author of Hebrews uses the history of the "heroes of faith" of the OT in just this way. *"Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us . . . run with perseverance the race marked out for us"* (Heb 12:1).

God evidently used the testimony of the Thessalonian believers in a similar way. *"Your faith in God has become known everywhere. . . They tell how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, and to wait for his Son from heaven"* (1Th 1:8-10).

Personal testimony not only strengthens the faith of those who hear. It is also the key to personal assurance. Faith becomes real when it is confessed. Salvation goes beyond justification in that it includes assurance. *"For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved"* (Ro 10:10). This is also a major part of the significance of public baptism. Faith arises out of personal declaration.

### ***Victory Over the Grave***

The attractive power of the gospel message lies in its promise of eternal life. This is *"the hope held out in the gospel"* (Col 1:23). The new birth leads directly to the glorious expectation of resurrection beyond the grave. *"[H]e has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead"* (1Pe 1:3). Christ in you, says Paul, is *"the hope of glory"* (Col 1:27). At no time does the truth of the gospel become clearer, both to believers and to unbelievers, than when a Christian dies.

Among the animistic Birifor people, part of the three-day funeral ceremony involves carrying the deceased person, wrapped in a sleeping mat, balanced on the heads of two bearers while the priest questions the corpse to discover why it died.

Even though the bearers stand very still, the corpse responds by rolling violently to one side—to the right for a "Yes," and to the left for a "No"—with the bearers having to move quickly to stop it falling to the ground.

But wherever a Christian died and the usual rites were attempted, the whole village quickly discovered that the spirits no longer had any power to work. The corpse refused to respond. The musicians found themselves unable to play their xylophones because the spirits did not possess them. When divination sacrifices were made, either there was no answer, or the answer was always "No." It was the death of the first believers that provided the most dramatic evidence of the new life, and strengthened the faith of the young church.

News came that a lone believer had died in another village, so I went to see how he was being buried. The funeral was in full swing when I arrived, with loud wailing, gun shots and animals lying bound, ready for sacrifice. I asked if I could speak, and to my surprise, suddenly everything went quiet. God just seemed to put words into my mouth. I told them they were right to wail, but that they were not wailing for the man who had died, as all his sufferings were over. They were wailing for themselves, as their turn to die was coming, and they were not ready. I told them of "Jeju" who had died in their place, and who offered them life that would never end.

Almost immediately the dead man's wife, who up to this point had refused to listen to the gospel, came up to me asking how she could become a Christian. I asked her why she had waited so long. She said simply, "I never saw anyone die with a smile on his face before. I want to go where my husband has gone." That day she and her five children became the foundation members of the church in that village.

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## Reflection and Discussion Questions

1. How well do believers understand the basis for their salvation? How do they deal with doubts?
2. What do Christians think they need to do when they fall into sin? What are they being taught?
3. How can we help believers to find assurance of their salvation? What aspect of salvation is most readily understood? What other dimensions of salvation need to be taught and explained?
4. What opportunities are there for believers to share testimony about what God is doing for them in their daily lives? What more could be done to make use of testimony to strengthen the faith both of those who share and those who hear?

## Principle 4

### Growth

*Believers' lives are being transformed and brought to spiritual maturity through their response to the word of God and participation in the fellowship of God's people*

The fourth principle of the church is that real Christians grow. Life and growth go together. Christians are like trees; they never stop growing. If they do they are dying!

The NT gives us four different growth images, and each carries its own important lesson.

- Babies: growth is normal
- Bodies: growth is corporate
- Plants: growth comes from God
- Building projects: growth must be planned

#### *Growth is Normal*

Peter says new believers are "like newborn babies" (1Pe 2:2). God creates babies with a huge capacity for growth. They instinctively cry out to be fed. But babies who don't get food don't grow—they die. So God has also given babies voices that demand attention!

In the same way, a new believer is given a built-in hunger for spiritual food. It is a mark of normality—a sign of new life. Feeding is perhaps the most urgent task of parenting. The need for food must be met or the appetite will vanish. And if we want babies to grow healthy, we must give them the right food. In the same way spiritual parents need to prepare the right spiritual nourishment—even if it means staying up all night.

For a cross-cultural worker this will often mean a struggle with the language. It may take tears and lack of sleep! But almost nothing will repay greater dividends. If we want the word of God to speak clearly in our target language, then someone needs to find the right words to talk about grace and hope and faith and eternal life, for how else can the good news be

understood? With God's help the gospel *can* be expressed well in any language. Sadly, many emerging churches are weak, not because the hearers are unresponsive, but because the preachers have never made the effort to find the right words.

### ***Growth is Corporate***

What are the best conditions for growth? The NT answer is that growth occurs best within the context of the body. "*The whole body. . . grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work*" (Eph 4:16). Bible teaching is certainly needed, and where it is missing serious spiritual malnutrition weakens the church. But it is not the complete answer. Teaching in the NT appears to have been given in the context of meaningful, inspirational relationships. Many of the members were involved, not just one or two specialists. "*When you come together, everyone has a hymn, or a word of instruction. . . All must be done for the strengthening of the church*" (1Co 14:26).

This means that the church needs to become a functioning reality from the earliest possible moment. We need to think community as soon as there are converts. The growth Paul talks about is not an increase in numbers but the spiritual growth of believers towards "*the whole measure of the fullness of Christ*" (Eph. 4:13). This is a major function of a local church.

### ***Growth Comes from God***

Paul writes about the church at Corinth, "*I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God made it grow*" (1Co 3:6). We can sow seeds, but we cannot give life to the seeds or create the plant; the source of all life is in God. This is true not only biologically but also spiritually. All spiritual growth comes from God.

But the fact that spiritual growth cannot be manufactured, doesn't mean it should be neglected. The gardener has to tend the plants even though he cannot make them grow. Our job is to do the watering, while we watch for the miracle of growth. And growth leads naturally to the miracle of multiplication. As new believers share the gospel and nurture the faith of those who respond, they will find their own spiritual roots being deepened and strengthened.

All growth is measured by steps of obedience to God's

Word. Teaching, therefore, always needs to lead to a response. This kind of obedience-oriented teaching is always found in churches that grow spiritually and multiply rapidly.

### ***Growth Must Be Planned***

"*You are God's field, God's building*" (1Co 3:9). God brings the growth, but this growth must be planned for. Where there is spiritual life we can expect to see growth. And as we have seen, personal growth is linked to corporate growth. Believers are "*being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit*" (Eph 2:22). But it requires the skills of an "*expert builder*" (1Co 3:10).

Wherever you see a movement of multiplying churches you can be sure that someone has grasped a vision of what God wants to do, and has worked hard to develop plans and find the necessary resources.

As soon as the first believers are baptised they can be encouraged to organise their own gatherings in a way that fits their context. Some can be chosen for in-depth discipleship with a view to multiplying leaders. New churches can be encouraged to start other churches made up of converts they have won. The pioneer church planter becomes the coach and the equiper. He helps believers to discover their gifts and put them to use. When he cannot do these things himself, he will find someone who can. "*The reason I left you in Crete was that you might straighten out what was left unfinished and appoint elders in every town*" (Tit 1:5). Wherever you see a building growing fast, you will find a project manager who knows how to plan.

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## For Reflection and Discussion

1. How well are new-born believers being spiritually fed? How is this monitored?
2. How adequate is the spiritual nourishment they are receiving? How could the quality be improved?
3. Is the language used well understood by those who hear? How do we ensure that we are using the best expressions for all the key concepts?
4. What style of gathering best contributes to the spiritual growth of believers? How can greater participation be encouraged?
5. What benefits might there be in having small relational groups as well as bigger gatherings, or conferences?
6. How response-oriented is our Bible teaching? How well is obedience to God understood to be the basis for all Christian growth?
7. What plans do we have for growth by multiplication?

## Principle 5

### Perseverance

*Church members manifest joy and perseverance in the face of difficulties, trials or persecution*

Our God is a "God who gives endurance" (Ro 15:5). Real Christians persevere. This is obviously not something which can be detected straight away, but it will soon become evident, especially in high risk areas. To be a true disciple will always be costly.

Why are God's people prepared to persevere even when they are called upon to suffer for their faith? I think we can sum up the reason in one word—hope. To discover the Lord Jesus as Alpha and Omega, the one who has gone ahead into glory to prepare a place for us, introduces a totally new perspective on life. "*For here we do not have an enduring city, but we are looking for the city that is to come*" (Heb 13:14). The NT uses a number of different, though related, images to describe this.

#### *Strangers on Earth*

Missions professor Andrew Walls defines the church as "a pilgrim people." To each believer, he says, God "whispers. . .that he has no abiding city and warns him that to be faithful to Christ will put him out of step with his society" (*The Missionary Movement*, 1996:8). This has been the mark of Jesus' disciples from the very beginning. As Jesus faced the cross he knew how much his disciples needed this perspective. "*Do not let your hearts be troubled. . .In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so I would have told you. . .I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am*" (Jn 14:1-3).

Like the OT heroes of faith, we know that we are "*aliens and strangers on earth*" (Heb 11:13). This sense of an expanded horizon, this vision of the future, provides the anchor for those who face persecution or trials. "*We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure*" (Heb 6:19).

#### *The Narrow Road*

According to the NT, the call to follow Christ is always a call to

take the narrow road. "*Small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life*" (Mt 7:14). We should never present the gospel as an easy option. The Greek word for "narrow" is related to words like groaning, being in anguish or in distress. Discipleship demands everything. It means that I agree to die, knowing that resurrection life is on the other side!

Why does God call us to a difficult path? A major reason is that only through difficulties will our character be developed. There is no easy road to Christian maturity "*Suffering produces perseverance, perseverance character, and character hope*" (Ro 5:4). James had the same conviction: "*Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature. . .*" (Jas 1:2-4). New believers, especially those in hostile environments, need to be strengthened with this perspective from the beginning. Without it they will quickly fall away.

Arriving in West Africa to plant a church among the Birifor people, I found one lone believer. Samba lived alone in a ruined mud house, on the edge of his village, the only house that did not have idols. Many years before, an Irish missionary called Ben had made a visit from the neighbouring tribe. He had told about the living God who made the heavens and the earth, and who sent his Son to die for the sins of all people. Then he had appealed for anyone who was willing to put their trust in this living God. Only Samba responded. So that night, under the stars, Ben and Samba had knelt together on the flat mud roof of his house, and as Samba prayed it seemed to Ben that he could almost hear the angels singing up in heaven.

For the next twenty years Samba remained the only Birifor believer: ridiculed, beaten, and cut off from his people. Once he was tied up and left to die on an anthill until his young daughter found him and set him free. Yet, when I met him, I immediately knew he was my brother in Christ. He longed to learn more. All he knew was that the name of the living God was Jesus (he pronounced it Jeju); that because he trusted in him he could have no idols; and that when he died he would go to God's country and sit on a stool next to Ben!

Not much deep theology. But Samba had found peace with God. And he had a hope, and because of that hope, he

endured. And because he had prayed, I had come. The Birifor church today owes a lot to that one man.

### ***Broken Jars***

Paul says our bodies are like clay pots containing treasure (2Co 4:7). The treasure is Christ, but his life is only seen as the pot is broken. "*We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may be revealed in our body*" (2Co 4:10).

Different cultures interpret suffering in quite different ways. Some regard suffering as an evil inflicted by hostile spirits. Others see it as evidence of too great an attachment to life. In the Muslim world, suffering must be the will of Allah—but it has no redemptive purpose.

The biblical perspective is that God calls his children to perseverance so that his glory may be revealed. "*If you are insulted because of the name of Christ, you are blessed, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you*" (1Pe 4:14). Believers who endure trials for Christ's sake are giving a powerful testimony to their faith.

### ***Runners in a Race***

"*Let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us*" (Heb 12:1). Races are run to win a prize. "*Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize. . . They do it to get a crown that will not last; but we do it to get a crown that will last forever*" (1Co 9:24-25).

The scriptures have a lot to say about rewards. Jesus says that to be insulted and rejected for his sake is to be blessed. "*Rejoice in that day and leap for joy, because great is your reward in heaven*" (Lk 6:23). Paul says that he is "*straining toward what is ahead. I press on towards the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward*" (Php 3:13-14). He considers that "*our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all*" (2Co 4:17).

As new churches are established in spiritually hostile places we are likely to be amazed at how God enables his children to endure. Perseverance and faith go together. "*[A]mong God's churches we boast about your perseverance and faith in all the persecutions and trials you are enduring*" (2Th 1:4).

## For Reflection and Discussion

1. Does our gospel message make the cost of discipleship clear? How are believers being prepared to face opposition for their faith?
2. If some have fallen away from the faith what might have been the cause? What lessons can we learn?
3. How has the suffering of believers furthered the cause of the gospel? How can the stories of local "heroes of faith" be used to strengthen believers?
4. How well is the idea of the Christian life as a journey or pilgrimage understood? What scripture teaching or memorisation would strengthen this understanding?

## THE FAMILY ROOM—SUMMARY CHART

ASPECT	PRINCIPLE	NEW TESTAMENT IMAGES	TEACHING
<b>1</b> PEACE WITH GOD	Church members are those who, having heard the gospel, have put their faith in the Lord Jesus and found peace with God and new life by the Holy Spirit	<i>Revelation through the gospel Eph 3:4-6</i> <i>Receiving and believing Jn 1:12</i> <i>Peace with God Ro 5:1</i> <i>Reborn and renewed Tit 3:5</i>	Salvation requires revelation Salvation requires response Salvation means reconciliation Salvation means renewal
<b>2</b> UNITY	Believers have found unity in Christ, and show their love for each other in practical ways without regard for cultural or social differences	<i>Those who are saved Heb 10:39</i> <i>The family of believers Gal 6:10</i> <i>The body of Christ 1Co 12:27</i> <i>Sharers in the promise Eph 3:6</i>	One Saviour, one salvation One Father, one family One Spirit, one body One destiny, one hope
<b>3</b> ASSURANCE	Believers have assurance of their salvation, knowing that God has given them eternal life	<i>Christ has set us free Gal 5:1</i> <i>Forgiveness of sins Eph 1:7</i> <i>Washed and sanctified 1Co 6:11</i> <i>Sealed as God's own possession 2Co 1:22</i> <i>Co-heirs with Christ Ro 8:17</i>	In relation to bondage In relation to guilt In relation to defilement In relation to status In relation to destiny
<b>4</b> GROWTH	Believers' lives are being transformed and brought to spiritual maturity through their response to the word of God and participation in the fellowship of God's people	<i>Newborn babies 1Pe 2:2</i> <i>The whole body grows Eph 4:16</i> <i>God made it grow 1Co 3:6</i> <i>Being built together Eph 2:22</i>	Growth is normal Growth is corporate Growth comes from God Growth must be planned
<b>5</b> PERSEVERANCE	Church members manifest joy and perseverance in the face of difficulties, trials or persecution	<i>Strangers in the world 1Pe 1:1</i> <i>The narrow road that leads to life Mt 7:14</i> <i>Treasure in jars of clay 2Co 4:7</i> <i>Runners in a race Heb 12:1</i>	Because of an expanded horizon Because trials produce character Because suffering reveals Jesus Because of a prize to be won



# 4

## THE HOUSEHOLD ROOM

*I am writing you these instructions so that,  
if I am delayed, you will know how people  
ought to conduct themselves in God's household,  
which is the church of the living God.*

1Ti 3:14-15



In the Family Room we thought about the church as the spiritual community of all those who are truly born again. But for the church to function as a community, it must have structure. In the past, any discussion about church life was often dominated by debate over its external forms. Some older books on the church scarcely address anything else. Evangelicals, on the other hand, hesitated to admit the need for church structures because they were afraid of destroying the freedom of the Spirit.

We have, I think, now recognised the weaknesses of both extremes. Forms do not have to mean formalism. There are dead churches certainly; but a few dead trees do not mean that forests are out of date! We only have to look around to discover that everything that has life also has structure. That is how living things grow.

It is the same with the church. We accept that the church is at the same time both a spiritual community and an earthly community. It must have life, but it also needs structure.

People need rules, although perhaps unspoken rules, if they are to live and work happily together. The church is not only a family, it is also a household. Paul writes to Timothy so that he "will know how people ought to conduct themselves in God's household, which is the church of the living God" (1Ti 3:15). The living stones need to be built together. This is a vital part of church planting.

The challenge before us, especially in a cross-cultural situa-

tion, is to discover what forms of organisation are going to be best suited to the social setting, and most likely to result in the growth and multiplication of churches. The issue can become especially difficult when the church planting team involves more than one organisation, or its members come from different church backgrounds.

## No Ready-made Model

To reach anything like the vitality we find in the Pauline churches requires more than simply copying a popular current model, or even what some refer to as the NT model. Some have tried hard to base their church planting methods solely on the practices of the NT churches. An example of this approach is found in Alex Hay's book, *The New Testament Order for Church and Missionary*. Although published back in 1947, some continue to hold this book up as a model for church planters. However, I have taken a different approach.

If we copy everything that was done then, we either have to say that today's world is not significantly different from that of the first century, or that contextual issues are not relevant. I believe that we would be wrong to make either assumption. We cannot simply import a ready-made structure from somewhere else—not even from the NT. We have to dig deeper, to find the principles underlying the practices.

Evangelical scholar John Stott has some wise words of warning about taking NT practices as our rule. Commenting on the communal ownership of property described in Acts 2:44-45 and 4:32-37 he asks,

Are we to deduce from this that they set a pattern which all Christians are meant to copy, and that private property is forbidden to Christians? Some groups have thought so. Certainly the generosity and mutual care of those early Christians are to be followed. . . But to argue that all private ownership is abolished among Christians. . . is plainly contradicted by the apostle Peter in the same context (Ac 5:4) and by the apostle Paul elsewhere (e.g. 1Ti 6:17). This example should put us on the alert. We must derive our standards of belief and behaviour from the teaching of the New Testament,

wherever it is given, rather than from the practices and experiences which it portrays (*Christian Mission in the Modern World*, 1975:16).

Stott's words have particular relevance when it comes to decisions about the institutional life of the church. There are simply no prescriptions that will be right for all situations. No one can tell you exactly how the newly planted church should look. There is no manual because the church is infinitely translatable.

### A Question of Fit

Two simple guidelines may help to keep us on track. First, any organisation should be there to further the purposes of the church. What does God want from his people, and how can we best achieve this? Organisation does not have to be complex. Church planting movements which are happening all over the world teach us that simple structures are far more likely to reproduce.

The second guideline (almost a warning) is that if we are willing to trust the leading of the Holy Spirit and the written Word of God, we can expect a church to take shape that you or I have never seen before. This is because every situation is different and, under the guiding hand of the Holy Spirit, the biblical principles are likely to find a unique expression appropriate just to that particular context.

It is not the task of the foreign church planter to decide just how everything should be done. Since the Holy Spirit within them is also given to even the newest convert, we will be looking for those who are obeying his Word, and be expecting him to guide them too. Part of the thrill of working in another culture is to work together to see how the Scriptures can best be followed within that setting. Ultimately patterns of church government must become the responsibility of the church itself, and they will probably reflect some of the features of the social landscape in which it is set.

## THE FIVE DIMENSIONS OF CHURCH LIFE

How then will we know what sort of organisation a new church

should have? We each have our own experience of church, and sometimes getting agreement about how a church should be structured, or what style of worship is best, can become a major problem. What impact should culture have? What are the really important elements of church life? What advice should we give to new believers?

Here is the good news. In spite of all our debates about different forms of church life, the NT teaching about church structure is basically very simple. If we leave aside all the cultural factors, and all our traditions, we find there are just five basic elements to the structure of the church. They are not detailed prescriptions for how to do things, but principles from which every church needs to develop its own particular patterns.

According to the NT, every church (i.e. local group of believers) needs to develop its community life around the following five elements:

- regular gatherings
- leadership and administration
- membership standards
- the celebration of the ordinances
- links with the wider body of Christ

Having these principles allows us a wonderful freedom to discover new ways of "doing church." Principles are universal. Ignore any one of them and an essential aspect of NT church life will be missing.

Principles say *what* should happen, but they don't say anything about *how* it should happen. The Holy Spirit can be trusted to reveal how each principle can best become a practical reality in any particular situation.

This doesn't mean that we always have to look for something new or radically different. There is a lot we can learn from two thousand years of experiments! But at the same time, our job as church planters is not to try and reproduce what may have worked elsewhere. Our task is to encourage new believers to discover God's pattern for their particular situation, and in doing so we may well share with them the models God has used in other situations.

## Principle 6

### Regular Gatherings

*Believers meet together regularly for worship, fellowship and the study of the Scriptures*

We begin with a principle that may seem obvious to many, but is certainly not universally practised: Christians are meant to meet together on a regular basis. The church is the family of God. Its unity is a given. But it is a unity that needs to be nurtured and developed. Meeting together regularly plays a key part in this. "*Do not give up meeting together*" (Heb 10:25).

We do not find any instructions about having big or little meetings, although it seems clear that there were both. There are no rules about where we should meet, or even how often. The NT says little about how long church meetings should last, or who should lead them.

Perhaps the key question is: *why* should we meet together? If we know the purposes for which we gather, we can plan our meetings so as to make sure they provide the opportunities that God intends for his children.

The NT record includes at least seven reasons why believers met together. Together they form an agenda for many aspects of church life that I deal with more fully in other places. But the summary here will allow us to reflect on our own meetings and assess how fully the needs of believers are being met.

#### *Meeting for Worship*

The first reason for meeting together is that God calls us both to himself, and to each other. The NT word for church, *ekklesia*, simply describes a gathering. But it also has the added implication that someone has called the people together. And that Someone is God. They are "*God's churches*" (1Th 2:14). The church is both a God-gathered and a God-centred community.

Therefore, our first response when we come together must be to worship the Lord who is among us and who leads us in our worship, since we "*worship by the Spirit of God*" (Php 3:3). It is true that we can worship God in the secret place. But in com-

ing together to bring our corporate praise we are giving visible expression to the unity of the body of Christ.

We are not simply meeting with those we see around us. We are also, in a spiritual sense, joined with those who are already part of the community gathered around God's throne in heaven. *"You have come to Mount Zion, to the heavenly Jerusalem. . . You have come to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly, to the church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven"* (Heb 12:22-23). Whenever we meet to worship, we are participating in the worship continually being offered in heaven.

### ***Meeting for Teaching***

Another reason for meeting together is to be instructed from the word of God. From the beginning the church *"devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching"* (Ac 2:42). Those who had been taught by Jesus knew that this was their primary task. *"It would not be right for us to neglect the ministry of the word of God"* (Ac 6:2). Years later, Paul writes to Timothy, *"Preach the Word. . .with great patience and careful instruction"* (2Ti 4:2).

### ***Meeting for Participation***

We also meet together because as members of one body we need each other's contribution. The gifts of the Spirit belong to the whole body, not to one individual. Paul recounts what was happening when the churches met together in Corinth: *"When you come together, everyone has a hymn, or a word of instruction, a revelation, a tongue or an interpretation. All these must be done for the strengthening of the church"* (1Co 14:26). We all need the gifts of others. We have been given different gifts and most of them only become effective as we meet. *"Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another"* (Col 3:16). We are created to be an inter-dependent community.

### ***Meeting for Fellowship***

Another important reason for coming together is that all of us need the support of other believers. We meet for mutual encouragement. *"Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another"* (Heb 10:25). God does not intend for us to stand alone.

The greatest gift we have to share is the gift of love. Love is the keynote of the new nature that has been placed within us. "*God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us*" (Ro 5:5). But love must always find expression. It is both a gift and a duty: "*Keep on loving each other*" (Heb 13:1). We meet to experience the power of God's love reaching out through every member.

### ***Meeting to Celebrate the Ordinances***

The Lord clearly intended that both baptism and the Lord's Supper normally be celebrated by the church when it comes together as a community. The first churches "*devoted themselves to...the breaking of bread*" (Ac 2:42). Paul's instructions about the Lord's Supper show that it was celebrated in community. His clearest teaching is given as part of his concern about what was happening "*when you come together as a church*" (1Co 11:18). Where these meetings took place is not made clear, but the inference is that it was normally in a home setting.

Where and how baptisms were held is not specifically stated, although John's baptism and those carried out by Jesus' disciples were clearly public, and by immersion. We read of the baptism of households (Ac 16:15, 33), and of groups being baptised at one time (Ac 8:12). As an ordinance marking membership of the church it is safe to assume that it normally took place in the context of the community.

### ***Meeting to Pray***

The disciples made prayer the focal point of their meetings even before Pentecost. "*They all joined together constantly in prayer*" (Ac 1:14). Paul instructs the church in Colossae, "*Devote yourselves to prayer*" (Col 4:2). He describes the important place intercessory prayer should have in the churches of Ephesus. "*I urge, then, first of all, that requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone*" (1Ti 2:1).

### ***Meeting for Accountability***

Finally, we meet because we need the encouragement and protection of mutual accountability. Believers are to submit to the authority of leaders since they "*keep watch over you as men who*

*must give an account*" (Heb 13:17). This is not meant to be a blind following, but simply a recognition that we all need wise leadership. Since God has made us one body, we are to live in mutual dependence, not quickly insisting on our own way. "*Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ*" (Eph 5: 21).

## Choosing the Format

The NT shows that the churches met both in small groups and in larger gatherings. Most references are to house churches, perhaps naturally, since church buildings did not exist. Suggestions of larger meetings are, however, also found, as in Paul's mention of the "*whole church*" coming together (1Co 14:23).

When we look at the variety of reasons for meeting it is hard to see how one format, whether large or small, will be right for everything. Some of the purposes can only be properly achieved in fairly small gatherings. For others, such as corporate worship and perhaps authoritative Bible teaching, large gatherings may well be better.

The important thing, of course, is not simply to meet, but to know why we meet; to discover God's pattern by which every member will be brought to spiritual maturity, and the churches will multiply through their witness.

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## For Reflection and Discussion

1. How far do our church meetings fulfil each of the seven purposes mentioned?
2. To what extent are people conscious of God's presence when we meet? What might strengthen this?
3. How far do our gatherings allow for active participation? What other format might allow for more mutual ministry?
4. What place does prayer have in our gatherings? How could we develop the prayer life of the church?
5. How can we encourage accountability in a way that members will appreciate?
6. Does the form of our meetings include anything that is not locally reproducible? If so, will it hinder the rapid multiplication of groups?

## Principle 7

### Leadership and Administration

*The church has a recognised leadership that provides both spiritual direction and the wise administration of its resources*

Questions about leadership seem to be the one topic that always comes up in any discussion about church life. What kind of structure should we have? How do we choose the leaders? Who will be in charge? Should we have a paid pastor? And the questions go on.

#### NT Leaders

From the earliest writings, we find that the appointment of elders was an important step in the emergence of new churches. "*Paul and Barnabas appointed elders for them in each church and, with prayer and fasting, committed them to the Lord*" (Ac 14:23). Paul left Titus behind in Crete to "*straighten out what was left unfinished and appoint elders in every town*" (Tit 1:5).

We also read of overseers (sometimes translated "bishops") and deacons: "*To all the saints in Christ Jesus at Philippi, together with the overseers and deacons*" (Php 1:1). It is important to note that the references are not to official positions but rather to functions or responsibilities within the church.

In the Jewish system of the time, a group of elders provided leadership within each city, while a "synagogue ruler" was responsible for each local synagogue, together with one or more assistants. The first churches appear to have followed a somewhat similar pattern.

On the one hand, elders appear to have had responsibility for the house churches found within a city. "*Paul sent to Ephesus for the elders of the church*" (Ac 20:17). These are described as the ones "*who direct the affairs of the church*" (1Ti 5:17).

On the other hand, "overseers" probably refers to those who hosted the individual house churches, assisted by deacons (either men or women). The Jewish term "synagogue ruler" was

not adopted since the only ruler (Gk. *archē*, lit. "the first") in the church is Christ. "*[H]e is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy*" (Col 1:18). He alone is Lord, and all who lead in the church have the honour of being his servants.

The more important model for the emerging churches was that of the household. Leaders had first to prove themselves by managing their own households well. "*If anyone does not know how to manage his own family, how can he take care of God's church?*" (1Ti 3:5).

Other leaders are also mentioned, not on the basis of appointment to a "position," but because of their evident function and ministry gifts within the church. The founding apostles (including Paul) clearly had a unique position within the early church as guarantors of the Gospel message. But other apostles, as well as prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers are also recognised, often with a ministry extending beyond any one local church (Eph 4:11; Ac 13:1; 2Ti 1:11).

We may also note here the important role that many women played within the early church. They included apostles (Ro 16:7), prophets (1Co 11:5) and teachers (Ac 18:26).

God can clearly be expected to provide leaders for his church. Some will have administrative gifts and others various spiritual gifts, but their task is always to serve rather than to control. They are to be honoured and respected by the church on the basis of their service. "*Now we ask you, brothers, to respect those who work hard among you, who are over you in the Lord and who admonish you. Hold them in the highest regard in love because of their work*" (1Th 5:12-13).

## Models of Church Government

The NT does not prescribe any one model for church government. It is likely that several models were in use even before the NT was completed although, significantly, the strongly hierarchical pattern is not found in the NT. Its roots are found in the Roman system of government that came to dominate church life from the second century onwards.

There are three main models we can draw upon, although each has almost endless variations. In Episcopalian-type churches, authority rests with a hierarchy of leaders, with one person at the top. Presbyterian churches are those governed by representative elders. Congregational churches are led by the members themselves, in a democratic process. Which model a church adopts should be a locally-made decision, and will usually reflect in some measure the prevailing social patterns.

Above all, we must remember that the church is essentially a spiritual community, and its organisation must be always judged by the measure in which it enables its members to "*become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ*" (Eph 4:13). If it is focussed merely on the development of its own organisation it has lost its way.

## Keys to Effective Leadership

After studying churches in all parts of the world, I have come to the conclusion that almost any model of church government can work well, provided the leaders manifest two qualities: first, they must be strong, and second, they must be spiritual. We see this combination in OT leaders like Moses, Joshua and David.

Leaders must clearly have the inner strength to lead if others are to follow them. Leadership is a gift given by God to some but not all. "*We have different gifts, according to the grace given us; . . . if it is leadership, let him govern diligently*" (Ro 12:6-8).

But above everything else, leaders must be spiritual. When new leaders were needed in the early church two criteria were set by the apostles. "*Brothers, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom*" (Ac 6:3).

The spiritual leader is one whose life reveals the Spirit of Jesus, and who sees his leading as an opportunity to serve the needs of others. In the world, a leader commands, he does not serve; and a servant serves, he does not lead. But within the kingdom of God, things are turned upside down. "*You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them. . . Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant*" (Mt 20:25-26). Spiritual leadership is servant leadership.

In many parts of the world, the very idea of servant leader-

ship is completely foreign. It sounds totally contradictory. Therefore the revolutionary biblical pattern needs to be carefully taught and modelled by the church planters before local leaders are appointed.

## Leadership Roles

Leadership is a complex task, as reflected in the variety of gifts and roles described in the NT. The actual titles we use for different kinds of leaders are of minor importance. What is significant is to understand the functions that need to be fulfilled.

The NT reveals five different leadership roles. The first four are also found in almost any well-run organisation, while the fifth is uniquely Christian. I call this the "Four-Plus-One" model of leadership.



*"Four-Plus-One" Model of Christian Leadership*

### *Modelling*

Leading means showing the way to go, by first going there oneself. Emphasis is placed today on leaders having vision and setting goals, and giving direction is certainly a task of leadership (1Ti 5:17). But in the NT, character comes first. *"Remember your leaders, who spoke the word of God to you. Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith"* (Heb 13:7). Paul, Silas and Timothy expected the Thessalonians to follow their teaching because their lives had provided *"a model for you to follow"* (2Th 3:7-9). Paul's criteria for leaders focus almost exclusively on issues of character. (1Ti 3:1-13; Tit 1:6-9). They are to be *"examples to the flock"* (1Pe 5:3).

### ***Managing***

Managing is the task of ensuring that tasks are shared, and things flow smoothly. Managers organise, so that people know what is expected of them. Overseers and deacons both have this role, and are required to prove themselves by managing their own households well, before being asked to look after the household of God (1Ti 3:4, 12, 15).

### ***Shepherding***

Shepherds watch over the flock. They are the overseers. "*Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God*" (Ac 20:28). Shepherds care for each individual, watching out for dangers, and bringing back those who stray.

### ***Equipping***

A fourth key function of leadership is the equipping of those who are led. They are given by God "*to prepare God's people for works of service*" (Eph 4:12). Leaders are to teach so that those they teach "*will also be qualified to teach others*" (2Ti 2:2). Good leaders don't just lead; they enable others to lead.

### ***Intimacy with God***

The fifth role is uniquely Christian. For every leader in the church, the essential thing is their personal relationship to Jesus Christ. It is the key to all the other roles. Maintaining a close walk with God is like the thumb that enables all the other fingers to do their work. Notice how Paul warns the elders, "*Keep watch over yourselves,*" before he tells them to look after the flock (Ac 20:28).

It is this intimacy with God that produces what I call "spiritual parenting." Life begets life. For most of us it will include the joy of having spiritual children. "*In Christ Jesus I became your father through the gospel*" (1Co 4:15). But the parenting role extends far beyond the day when someone is born again. Spiritual parenting means being an instrument in God's hand for someone else's spiritual growth. A lot of this will happen as we simply model the life of Jesus. Or we may mentor someone in the faith, or make the Scriptures come alive, or challenge some-

one to take a new step of obedience to God.

Leaders are God's gift to his church. The challenge is to identify, train and nurture them. They will have different gifts and responsibilities, but the key to their spiritual effectiveness will always be the reality of their walk with God.

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### **For Reflection and Discussion**

1. How well does our church structure fit into the local culture? Which of the three basic models does it represent?
2. Do our forms of church life allow us to multiply churches rapidly?
3. How well does our leadership training produce the kind of leaders we need?
4. Which leadership roles need strengthening? How will we meet this need?
5. How can we best support leaders to maintain a close personal walk with God?
6. What steps can we take to ensure that every leader makes developing other leaders a major responsibility?

## Principle 8

### Membership Standards

*Believers are committed to each other as members of one Body, and are protected by the care and loving discipline of their leaders*

The basis for talking about church membership is found in the image of the church as a flock. Although ultimately there will be only one flock and one Shepherd (Jn 10:16), each local church is also described as a flock with its human shepherds. "Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care" (1Pe 5:2). Shepherds have great responsibilities, but so do the sheep. Standards are set to which both are accountable.

The shepherd both gives direction and provides protection. In other words, leaders within the church are responsible to the members for both discipling and for discipline. Discipling is formative, discipline is corrective, but they are really two sides of the same coin. Members of the church are those who accept their need for both.

The word "discipline" may seem harsh. But, rightly understood and accepted it is life-forming. Proverbs describes the man who "dies for lack of discipline" (Pr 5:23). Self-discipline is the ideal, but clearly most of us need some help in this from time to time. That is one important reason why God has brought us into the church, and why we need to think about what it means to be a member of this body of Christ.

#### *The Universality of Sin*

The need for discipline arises from the universal reality of human sinfulness. It is a reality in leaders' own lives, which is why their first task is to keep watch over themselves. It is a reality among church members, which is why they need to be brought to repentance and restoration. And it is a reality in those outside the church, which is why leaders must watch over the flock, to provide protection from those who would come in and destroy it.

### *Leaders and Members*

There are five different word pictures in the NT that give us special insight into how leaders in the church are responsible for the lives of others, for both formative and restorative discipline. Leaders are described as:

- Disciple-makers (Mt 28:19)
- Those called to bind and loose sins (Mt 18:18)
- Those who remove yeast from the dough (1Co 5:6)
- Those who protect the flock (1Pe 5:2)
- Restorers of the fallen (Gal 6:1)

Each responsibility of leadership is matched by a corresponding responsibility of the members.

<b>Leaders are to:</b>	<b>Members are to:</b>
make disciples of Jesus (Mt 28:19)	obey the teaching
declare God's standards (Mt 18:18)	accept correction
deal with sin (1Co 5:4-7)	turn away from the sin
watch over the flock (1Pe 5:2)	be accountable
restore the fallen (Gal 6:1)	bear each other's burdens

### *Reconciliation*

However, it is not just the leaders who are responsible for dealing with offences. Jesus' teaching is for every disciple. *"If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you"* (Mt 18:15). Every member has this responsibility, before taking the matter to the leaders. The steps are clearly set out (vv. 15-17):

- Go alone.
- Seek reconciliation.
- If necessary call one or two others.
- If there is no repentance, bring it to the church (leadership).
- If still no repentance, the offender is excluded from church membership.

In verses 18-19, Jesus speaks not only of binding (setting restraints on behaviour) but also of loosing (declaring forgiveness). Then he promises to answer the prayers of two who agree about anything. The context is important. When sin is there, the grace of God is also there. As we pray together, in the light of the Cross, we can have the joyful expectation of declaring forgiveness and restoration.

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## For Reflection and Discussion

1. What does membership imply in our church? How well does it reflect the NT model?
2. How well are we facing the potential for sin in the lives of leaders? And of members? How are we ensuring that the testimony of the church honours the Lord?
3. Where there is a need for discipline, what is done to seek the restoration of the person involved?
4. How well do members follow the instructions of Jesus in regard to dealing with offences? What further teaching is needed?

## Principle 9

### Biblical Ordinances

*Members of the church are baptised as believers and regularly celebrate the Lord's Supper together*

Baptism and the Lord's Supper, the two ordinances given by the Lord, are clearly meant to be part of the practical life of the church on earth (Mt 28:19; 1Co 11:24). That is why I include them here in the Household Room.

They are closely linked. Both give visible testimony to the spiritual reality of our fellowship with Christ in his death and resurrection. Both involve our physical bodies and material things, impressing upon us the all-embracing nature of redemption.

While the ordinances cannot be said to be necessary for salvation, neither should they be seen as a luxury that we can do without. Both give tangible expression to our faith in God, symbolise our unity in Christ, and act as channels for us to experience the power of the Holy Spirit.

#### **Baptism**

Believer's baptism is a symbolic act marking repentance (Mk 1:4) and identification with Christ in his death (Ro 6:3). It is also a public testimony to receiving forgiveness of sins (Ac 2:38) and being clothed with the new life of Christ (Gal 3:27), through the infilling of the Holy Spirit (Jn 3:5; Tit 3:5; Ac 19:5-6).

#### *The Form of Baptism*

The literal meaning of the term *baptizo* is either dipping or immersion. As an act of identification with Christ's death and rising again (Ro 6:3ff), baptism by immersion is a good symbol, as well as the earliest custom. However, the form is not as important as the confession being made. Surrogate baptism (1Co 15:29) appears to reflect the idea that baptism was essential for salvation so that some means had to be found to include believers who had died unbaptised.

*The Timing of Baptism*

In the NT, baptism most often immediately follows profession of faith. Repentance, faith and baptism are spoken of as one event (Ac 8:12, 36-38; 22:16). However, we must remember that the majority of the first believers would have had a background of (OT) teaching before hearing the gospel message. The sequence for them was: OT teaching, evangelism, repentance, baptism.

Today, we find two common patterns:

EITHER

1. evangelism
2. repentance and faith
3. baptism
4. church participation
5. teaching

OR

1. evangelism
2. repentance and faith
3. church participation
4. teaching
5. baptism

Those who adopt the first sequence find all too many falling away after baptism. But churches that follow the second sequence frequently end up with many unbaptised believers.

I think a more biblical sequence would be:

1. teaching
2. evangelism
3. repentance and faith
4. baptism
5. church participation

By "evangelism" I mean the basic message of the gospel followed by an invitation to believe. But faith needs to rest on a solid foundation of understanding, and that is why teaching usually needs to come first. Baptism then follows naturally as a

confirmation of, and public witness to, the faith response. Integration into the new community meets the need for continued support and teaching (Ac 2:37-41).

### ***Who Should Baptise?***

Interestingly, although the Great Commission includes the instruction to baptise, Paul maintained that Christ did not send him to baptise (1Co 1:17). Why did Paul say this? Partly, it seems, to avoid creating a "Paul party." But also clearly because he wanted to transfer leadership to the local churches from the beginning. He knew he was called to be a church planter, not a local church pastor.

### **The Lord's Supper**

Both baptism and the Lord's Supper are personal and corporate affirmations of our union with Christ in his death and resurrection, and of his Spirit's presence with us. The precise meaning of the Lord's Supper has possibly been debated more than any other Christian doctrine. The earliest account is found in 1 Corinthians 11:23-26. Other accounts occur in all three synoptic Gospels.

#### ***Remembering***

When Paul instructs the Corinthian church to break bread and take the cup "*in remembrance*" of Christ, and in order to "*proclaim the Lord's death until he comes*" (1Co 11:24-26), he is reminding them that the Supper provides a tangible means of both looking back to the Cross and forward to Christ's return.

#### ***Fellowship with Christ***

For many however, the Supper is more than simply an act of remembrance. Paul describes the Meal as "*a participation in the body and in the blood of Christ*" (1Co 10:16). The Greek word *koinonia*, translated "participation," can also mean fellowship, or sharing. The thought may be that the Meal provides the setting for a personal and corporate experience of the Lord's presence.

In Jesus' time a shared meal was the seal of a deep relationship between those who ate (as it still is today in many parts of

the world). In the Supper which the Lord instituted for his church we have a tangible means of celebrating his continued presence among us.

### ***Celebrating Unity***

The Lord's Supper is also a celebration of the unity of believers. "*Because there is one loaf, we, who are many, are one body, for we all partake of one loaf*" (1Co 10:17). The work of Christ in his death and resurrection has created a new community. "*Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God*" (1Pe 2:10). We who were once separated by history and race have become one through our faith in Christ. It is a unity to be both celebrated and nurtured.

### ***Commitment***

In the Supper the Lord is present not as a Guest but as the Host. The disciples would have remembered how the Lord had appeared to them and eaten with them after his resurrection. After his ascension, when they broke bread together, they would have recognised his presence in a similar, though unseen, way.

Every time they met to break bread and share the cup as he had instructed them, they were giving thanks for the new covenant that the Lord had sealed with his own blood (Lk 22:20). It was both a celebration of his presence and a reaffirmation of their commitment. "*[Y]ou cannot have a part in both the Lord's table and the table of demons*" (1Co 10:21). Fellowship with him meant a clear separation from all other spiritual authorities.

### ***Who Should Lead?***

In the NT no reference is made to any particular person leading the Lord's Supper. It was most likely the host of the home where the meal was being eaten. Much later, in the second century, it was decided that the best way of demonstrating the church's unity was to decree that only the bishop (by this time the term used for the leading city elder) should be allowed to celebrate the Supper. However, the NT provides no basis for a clergy/laity distinction. All believers are "*the people* (Gk. *laos*) of

*God*" (Heb 4:9), and all are called (the root idea of the word "clergy") to minister to one another.

There is, therefore, no clear biblical reason why any member of God's family should not be invited to lead the celebration. The only requirement is that we honour the Lord, conscious of the cost of our redemption. No one is to eat or drink "*in an unworthy manner*" (1Co 11:27). It is Jesus himself who is present as the real Host.

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### For Reflection and Discussion

1. In our church, where does baptism come in relation to teaching? Do we find our present practice to be working well?
2. Who baptises the new believers? Why? What is being implied?
3. When we celebrate the Lord's Supper, what emphasis is given? How can its rich meaning best be conveyed?
4. Who is invited to share in the Meal? Do we include all who profess faith? Who is excluded? Why?
5. What would be the result if the Lord's Supper were sometimes associated, as in the early church, with a fellowship meal together?

## Principle 10

### Wider Links

*The church seeks to express, in practical ways, its unity with other parts of the body of Christ*

In the NT there is no example of an independent church. Every church understood that it was part of the one new family created in Christ.

Two types of relationship existed between churches. Individual house-churches within each city were regarded as one church, and were almost certainly under one eldership (1Co 1:2). Paul is quick to condemn any divisions along party lines (1Co 1:10-13).

Churches separated by distance make up one church spiritually, but not organisationally. They are linked informally through itinerant apostles and teachers (Ac 18:1, 5, 18-19), as well as through letters, the sending of gifts, and news brought by those on the move (2Co 7:6-7).

In summary, NT churches were multi-congregational and locality-based. A high level of communication existed between them. The Jerusalem church, in creating a new group of leaders to work within the Greek-speaking community of the church, gives us a glimpse into the need to find practical solutions to the great diversity of cultures and languages that constitute the global church today.

### Foundations for Inter-church Relationships

In the NT we discover that all churches are linked together in five distinct ways which create the basis for all inter-church relationships.

#### *A Spiritual Relationship*

All have "*the same Spirit. . .the same Lord. . .the same God*" (1Co 12:4-6). The Trinity is involved. In Ephesians there is a seven-fold unity. "*There is one body and one Spirit. . .one hope. . .one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all*" (Eph 4:4-6).

### ***A Family Relationship***

All believers throughout the world address God as "our Father." Ninety eight times in his letters Paul calls believers "brothers." Jesus points to his disciples with the words, "*Here are my mother and my brothers.*" (Mt 12:49). It is worth asking ourselves, how are good family relationships maintained?

### ***An Historical Relationship***

The gospel has come to every church from somewhere else, either near or far. Through the church planter there is a link with a sending church which, before that, was begun by other pioneers. Ultimately, there is a historical link between all churches that goes right back to the events of Galilee and Judea in the first century. For two thousand years churches have been part of a "worldwide web."

In planting a church in a new area I have earlier made a strong plea that we should expect something new, created by the Spirit of God, to come into being. Now I want to plead that we never lose sight of the lessons to be learned from the past. What principles have stood the test of time? What practices have proved helpful—or the reverse? Paul makes exactly this point when he asks, "*Did the word of God originate with you? Or are you the only people it has reached?*" (1Co 14:36). Thank God for the great cloud of witnesses (Heb 12:1). Let us listen to them.

### ***A Situational Relationship***

Peter addresses his readers as "*God's elect, strangers in the world, scattered throughout. . .*" (1Pe 1:1). All God's children are in precisely the same situation. We are all God's elect. At the same time we are sojourners, or strangers. Wherever we live, our real citizenship is in heaven (Php 3:20).

But right now we are scattered. The Greek word used here is *diaspora*—a word that highlighted the Jews' longing to return to their own land. For all churches, it is a reminder that we will one day be gathered together around the Lord forever.

### ***A Functional Relationship***

According to researcher Patrick Johnstone, the worldwide church is made up of something like 1.6 million local congrega-

tions, with the number growing rapidly. Yet it is one church with one Head. How can so many groups find a practical way to demonstrate their unity? Part of the answer lies in God's provision of what Paul calls the "*ligaments and sinews*" of the church (Eph 4:16; Col 2:19).

The essential function of ligaments is to hold the body together. Leaders have this responsibility. Their function is not only to prepare the saints for service, but also to serve as linkages between the parts of the body, both locally and with all the scattered family of God.

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## For Reflection and Discussion

1. In what tangible ways do the churches we relate to express their relationship with other parts of the body of Christ?
2. Are there agencies or churches working in the region with whom we might form a closer relationship for mutual support and encouragement?
3. What opportunities are there for leaders to meet regularly for prayer with those of other groups who are facing similar challenges? How can we encourage this?
4. What options are open to us to invite speakers from other churches or agencies for ministry?
5. How might some of our leaders be helped to attend inter-church conferences or seminars?
6. What resources are available that will help the church understand its beginnings? Are there those who might produce such material?

## THE HOUSEHOLD ROOM—SUMMARY CHART

ASPECT	PRINCIPLE	NEW TESTAMENT IMAGES	TEACHING
<b>6</b> REGULAR GATHERINGS	Believers meet together regularly for worship, fellowship and the study of the Scriptures	<i>God's churches 1Th 2:14</i> <i>Those who worship by the Spirit Php 3:3</i> <i>Those who teach one another Col 3:16</i> <i>Those who love each other Heb 13:1</i> <i>Those who submit to each other Eph 5:21</i>	A God-gathered community A worshipping community A participating community A loving community A mutually accountable community
<b>7</b> LEADERSHIP & ADMINISTRATION	The church has a recognised leadership that provides both spiritual direction and the wise administration of its resources	<i>A church with its elders 1Pe 5:1-3</i> <i>A household with its head 1Ti 3:4-15</i> <i>A flock with its shepherds Ac 20:28</i> <i>Saints prepared for service Eph 4:12</i> <i>Children with their father 1Co 4:15</i>	Leaders as examples Leaders as managers Leaders as shepherds Leaders as equippers Leaders as spiritual parents
<b>8</b> MEMBERSHIP STANDARDS	Believers are committed to each other as members of one Body, and are protected by the care and loving discipline of their leaders	Leaders are to: <i>Make disciples Mt 28:19</i> <i>Declare God's standards Mt 18:18</i> <i>Deal with sin 1Co 5:6-7</i> <i>Watch over the flock 1Pe 5:2</i> <i>Restore the fallen Gal 6:2</i>	Members are to: Obey the teaching Accept correction Turn from sin Be accountable Bear one another's burdens
<b>9</b> BIBLICAL ORDINANCES	Members of the church are baptised as believers and regularly celebrate the Lord's Supper together	<i>Baptised into Christ's death Ro 6:3</i> <i>Clothed with Christ Gal 3:27</i> <i>Participants in Christ's blood 1Co 10:16</i> <i>Celebrating until he comes 1Co 11:26</i>	Identification with his death Transformation by his life Participation in his sacrifice Anticipation of his return
<b>10</b> WIDER LINKS	The church seeks to express, in practical ways, its unity with other parts of the body of Christ	<i>One faith, one baptism Eph 4:5</i> <i>The brotherhood of believers 1Pe 2:17</i> <i>Those reached with God's word 1Co 14:36</i> <i>Strangers in the world 1Pe 1:1</i> <i>A body joined by ligaments Col 2:19</i>	A spiritual relationship A family relationship An historical relationship A situational relationship A functional relationship



# 5

## THE WORSHIP ROOM

*In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord.*

*And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.*

Eph 2:21-22



**I**n the last two chapters we have looked at the two-fold nature of the church. We have seen how the church on earth is both a spiritual community and also a sociological community. Now we turn to take a closer look at the three basic functions of the church—worship, the proclamation of the Word and service.

We begin with the most wonderful truth of all, the fact that we have been created for worship. Yet vast areas of the world remain silent before the throne of God. There may be fear of the supernatural; there may be a desperate search for inward peace. But there is no worship, no surrender to the living God, no joy in his presence. That is why laying foundations for true worship is at the heart of any church planting ministry.

In a cross-cultural setting, the challenge of this task becomes clear when we consider how radically new genuine worship is likely to be. Millions seek to plead or barter with their gods through self-inflicted pain or bloody sacrifices. Some go on long pilgrimages, or offer endless prayers. Others pray in hope, but with no assurance that they have been heard. But wherever the Spirit of God brings new life, a whole new world opens up. Spirit speaks to spirit; a new relationship begins that promises access into the immediate presence of God.

For the new believer, Christian worship represents a whole new world that ultimately can be experienced, but never fully explained. Nevertheless, the Scriptures are explicit both in their call to worship and in showing the totality of response that true worship represents.

## Responding to His Glory

The focal point of worship in the OT was first the tabernacle and then the temple. This was where the ark of God was kept and where he made his presence known. "*The glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle*" (Ex 40:35, cf. 1Ki 8:11). Yet long before Jesus came, the glory had departed (1 Sam 4:22; Ez 10:18). Because of their sin, God withdrew his presence from his people; the intimacy of relationship was lost and worship became a formality.

A new temple was needed, a place where rebels could find acceptance, and where sinners could meet with God and receive forgiveness. This is the temple of Jesus' own body, destroyed on the cross and rebuilt in three days (Jn 2:19-22). He is the One in whom God's glory dwells. "*The Word became flesh, and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only*" (Jn 1:14). Christian worship is the response to the glory revealed in the Lord Jesus, the One and Only Son of God. This is the gospel, the thrilling news that a way has been opened for all humanity to come before the living God.

The greatest difference between the old and new worship is that we have been given new life by the Holy Spirit. Our spirits are joined to his Spirit, enabling us to "*worship by the Spirit*" (Php 3:3). Because of his indwelling we can now worship God "*in spirit and in truth*" (Jn 4:23). The key element in true worship is the activity of the Holy Spirit. We now have power to worship.

## Spirit-filled Churches

Not only is the Spirit given to help us in our worship, but by being joined to Christ we have become members of his body (Eph 5:30). Every church, and every believer, has become a temple—a house for God, a place where his glory will be seen. The presence of the living God among his people is basic to the NT understanding of the church. Every community of faith is "*a holy temple in the Lord*" (Eph 2: 21-22). When we gather, God is there in power. He does not come merely to watch, but to reveal himself in spite of our weakness and our failures, and regardless of how long we have known him. Our response to this can only be worship.

## Biblical Words for Worship

There are two Hebrew words in the OT, and two Greek words in the NT that are commonly translated "worship." Both pairs carry very similar meanings.

The words *hawah* (Hebrew), and *proskyneō* (Greek), convey the idea of prostrating oneself, or bowing down in reverence. (Jn 4:23-24; Rev 4:10).

The second pair, *'abad* (Hebrew) and *latreuō* (Greek), mean to render homage by giving service (Jn 16:2; Ro 12:1; Php 3:3; Heb 9:1, 6).

The two words are both found in Deuteronomy 6:13, a verse later quoted by Jesus: "*Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only*" (Mt 4:10). Biblical worship is, first, to surrender myself to God, and then to offer him my service.

## A Life of Worship

As God's temple, the life of the church has to be centred on worship, as the reason for all that is done. Unless God is present, whatever else may be happening, it is not church. But God has also made our individual bodies his temple. This means that worship cannot be limited to something we do when we meet together. It clearly involves far more than the weekly worship service. Looking closely at its biblical meaning we find that worship touches every dimension of our lives.

- In relation to God: I will express my praise and adoration.
- In relation to others: I will intercede.
- In relation to myself: I will grow in personal holiness.
- In relation to the church: I will use the gifts of ministry given by the Holy Spirit.
- In relation to spiritual powers: I will keep myself only for God.

We will look at each of these areas in turn.

## Principle 11

### Praise and Adoration

***Believers offer worship and praise to God, both with their voices and through the dedication of their lives***

The Christian life is about worship from beginning to end. In the NT, we find that praising God involves both our spirits and our wills, as well as our voices and our bodies. Worship begins the moment I am born again; and it will continue throughout eternity. It is my response to the revelation of the living God.

Real worship is impossible unless one is born again. We will not find it in any other religion. For new believers the natural response is to worship God, but the devil will always try to prevent it (Lk 4:5-8). This is because worship is the key issue that determines eternal destinies. It represents resistance as well as response. "*Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Come near to God and he will come near to you*" (Jas 4:7-8). When community worship seems to be a struggle, it is not changed by simply making more noise, or singing more songs. It is only changed when those taking part start worshipping God with their lives. The worship of any group of believers can only be as real as the worship of its individual members. Teaching about worship and the inspiration of worshipping together are both key components of living churches.

#### ***The Engagement of My Spirit***

The Bible shows clearly that true worship is a response to divine revelation. "*True worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshippers the Father seeks. God is spirit, and his worshippers must worship in spirit and in truth*" (Jn 4:23-24).

Worship is essentially a response of my spirit to the activity of God's Spirit within me. I engage with God at the deepest level of my being, with no reserve and no hypocrisy—in spirit and in truth.

### *The Surrender of My Will*

*"Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence" (Heb 4:16).* The only way I can come before his throne is with a total surrender of my will. God never forces us into surrender. But when we see him in his glory, we instantly want to obey him. Worship means that my whole life is one of obedience to him. *"I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship" (Ro 12:1).*

This is beautifully pictured in the biblical idea of worship as prostration, or kneeling before someone. It means being totally available to God, like Moses taking off his shoes at the burning bush (Ex 3:1-5), or Joshua before Jericho (Jos 5:14-15). Although worship will often involve emotions, the key element is the will. Because he is worthy, I gladly give myself to him; his will becomes my constant delight.

### *The Expression of My Praises*

*"Let us continually offer a sacrifice of praise—the fruit of lips that confess his name" (Heb 13:15).* Our songs represent the overflow of our hearts towards Him. *"Be filled with the Spirit. . . Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything" (Eph 5:18-19).*

Paul's vision was of all nations singing to the Lord. *"Praise the Lord, all you Gentiles, and sing praises to him, all you peoples" (Ro 15:11).* Worship is to be joyful. *"Rejoice in the Lord always" (Php 4:4).* The biblical imagery suggests that in worshipping I am bringing myself down before God, but in praising I am lifting God up.

Kopta, my 29 year-old language teacher, had just died. He was the first Birifor Christian to die, and almost the whole population of the area had gathered around his house to begin the three-day funeral. (It was abandoned within hours because the spirit powers would not respond). I sat with the twelve remaining believers on the flat mud roof of his house, wondering what they might do as they had never faced anything like this before. Suddenly Kopta's brother, Dapla, who had been a believer for just three months, began to sing,

"Come and hide me,  
Jesus, come and hide me.  
I am resting, free from danger.  
I am alone but I want to follow the Lord  
Who loved me and sent the Comforter."

It was a song straight from his heart, given at that moment, I believe, by the Spirit. When he finished the whole group took it up, singing it perfectly. For eighteen months I had been praying for God to give someone the gift of song-writing, and here was the answer—the very first Birifor song of worship, sung above the din of a pagan funeral.

### *The Offering of My Service*

Worship in the OT included all that was involved in temple worship. It included the offering of sacrifices as well as leading the corporate singing. Even though we no longer have animal sacrifices to offer, the same idea of practical involvement remains valid. We have become "*a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ*" (1Pe 2:5). These offerings include not only our songs, but also the help we give to others in his name. "*Do not forget to do good and to share with others, for with such sacrifices God is well pleased*" (Heb 13:16). Paul describes his ministry to the Gentiles as a libation offering being poured out to God (2Ti 4:6). To love the Lord with all our strength means the offering of all that we are for his service, including our bodies (Ro 12:1).

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## For Reflection and Discussion

1. Do we need to give more teaching about the biblical concept of worship?
2. To what extent do our meetings encourage genuine participation in worship?
3. How well are leaders providing a model of worship?
4. Do our songs represent a cultural expression of "the overflow of the heart"?
5. How can we encourage the development of more local song-writing?
6. What might help believers take time for a regular personal encounter with God?

## Principle 12

### Intercessory Prayer

*Regular intercession marks the lives of believers, both individually and when they meet together*

A true worshipper is someone who *prays* as well as praises. Jesus teaches us to *pray for ourselves* and our own needs, and this is usually where our prayer life begins (Mt 6:11-13). That is not wrong, but it is not yet mature. An important mark of our deepening relationship with God is that we begin to allow the Spirit to use us in praying for others—in intercession.

Intercession is a divine activity. "*[T]he Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God's will*" (Ro 8:27). "*Christ Jesus. . . is also interceding for us*" (v. 34). As we grow spiritually we discover that the Holy Spirit within us desires to make us God's fellow workers (1Co 3:9). We are to "*pray in the Spirit. . . with all kinds of prayers and requests*" (Eph 6:18). True intercession is a uniquely Christian activity, in marked contrast to prayer in all other religions.

- In Buddhism, prayer is primarily a means of seeking merit or enlightenment for oneself.
- In Islam, prayer is an affirmation of the creed, or a plea for mercy.
- In African traditional religion, prayer is seeking to control spiritual forces.
- In Hinduism, prayer is a search for a higher spiritual status, or personal protection.

When new believers begin to intercede for others we can be sure that the Spirit is at work in them. Not only will other lives be changed, but they themselves are being transformed. In the NT we find four distinctive marks of the true intercessor.

#### *The Confidence of the Child*

As God's children we can call him by the most intimate name, "*Abba, Father*" (Ro 8:15). We bring our requests to him in an atti-

tude of complete trust, knowing that he welcomes us as little children and will give us what is good. *"If you. . .know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him!"* (Mt 7:11).

This allows us to pray with confidence, even when we don't know exactly how to pray or what to pray for, since *"the Spirit helps us in our weakness. . .And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit"* (Ro 8:26-27).

### *The Persistence of the Believer*

Jesus told the story of the persistent widow specifically *"to show them that they should always pray and not give up"* (Lk 18:1).

Persistence in prayer stems from two sources, both worked in us by the Holy Spirit. The first is the conviction that God is well able to do the thing that he is prompting us to seek from him. Paul's longing for the conversion of Israel is one example (Ro 10:1). The second is the assurance that we already have the answer to our prayer, whatever may be the evidences to the contrary. *"Faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see"* (Heb 11:1). Faith receives the answer long before it is seen (Mk 11:24).

Persistence is the expression of our trust in God even when his time scale is not revealed. Some of our prayers will only be answered when Jesus comes again—that is clear from the challenge Jesus gives about finding faith on earth when he comes.

### *The Authority of the Heir*

Being *"heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ"* (Ro 8:17), we are given an authority in prayer over everything that stands against the Lord. We have been redeemed *"that we might receive the full rights of sons. . .and since you are a son, God has made you also an heir"* (Gal 4:5, 7).

The authority we have is not really ours, it is God's. But we have the privilege of claiming it because of our status as God's sons and daughters. Moses understood this. When the Amalekites attacked Israel Joshua was sent to lead the battle at ground level. But Moses went up on a hill to fight the real battle going on in the invisible world. We have no record of anything he said, only what he did. He raised his arms to heaven, with the

"staff of God" in his hands (Ex 17:8-16). After the victory, "Moses built an altar and called it *The Lord is my Banner*. He said, 'For hands were lifted up to the throne of the Lord'" (vv. 15-16). The whole scenario speaks of Moses reaching up to touch the authority (throne) of God. This was the secret of Israel's victory.

It was 1940 when Charles Benington walked alone under the stars of the African night sky. He had been sent by his Mission to pioneer a new work among two hundred thousand Lobis living in Upper Volta. But now, after two years of language learning and evangelism, he was discouraged. No one would believe. Idols stood in front of every house.

In desperation Ben (as he was known) prayed. "Lord, why did you send me here? In Nigeria I had a fruitful work, but here I am useless." Immediately it seemed as if the Lord dropped a scripture into his mind. "*No one who has left home or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields for me and the gospel will fail to receive a hundred times as much in this present age...and in the age to come, eternal life*" (Mk 10:29-30). This was God's answer. It was a promise. For every family member he had left behind in Northern Ireland, God would give him one hundred converts "in this present age." That must mean in his lifetime.

He began to count. Thirty relatives! "Thank you Lord. I believe you will bring at least three thousand Lobis into your eternal kingdom before I die."

Twenty years later, I arrived to find Ben still there, translating the New Testament into the Lobi language. "How many Lobi Christians are there now, Ben?" I asked. "Four, perhaps five." I was appalled. Ben was now well into his seventies. His wife was frail; he himself had a weak heart, and just one eye. But he still believed.

I wondered aloud, who will read this New Testament? His reply was immediate: "I believe the word of God will create the church." And so it proved. Ten years later the NT was finished, and Ben died. But not before the Lobi church had grown to at least three thousand members.

We, too, have the same privilege, when we intercede, of touching the throne of God. When we pray in the name of Jesus, we are claiming his authority. "*I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Son may bring glory to the Father. You may ask me for*

*anything in my name, and I will do it" (Jn 14:13-14).*

### ***The Intensity of the Warrior***

Even though we have authority, we should never expect that prayer will be easy. Prayer involves battle. "*I want you to know how much I am struggling for you and for those at Laodicea*" (Col 2:1). Epaphras, Paul says, "*is always wrestling in prayer for you*" (Col 4:12). The word used here is *agonizomai* from which we get our word "agony."

We are God's warriors, and urgently need to be equipped with "*the full armour of God*" (Eph 6:11). But Paul's image of the soldier remains incomplete without the final component. "*And pray in the Spirit on all occasions, with all kinds of prayers and requests. . . Be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints*" (v. 18).

Paul understood the power of prayer, and made sure that the churches saw it at work in his own life, and in those of his co-workers. This was clearly the critical factor in the rapid multiplication of the churches he planted.

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### **For Reflection and Discussion**

1. How much regular intercession is being made for the people we work among? How can we increase this?
2. What are we trusting God to do in answer to our prayers? How might our vision and faith encourage others to pray and believe?
3. How well is dependence on prayer understood by those we serve to be our major power source?
4. To what extent do we model intercessory prayer? When, and how often, do others hear us pray?

## Principle 13

### Personal Holiness

*Believers are seeking to live holy lives by the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit*

"*God's temple is sacred, and you are that temple. . .[Y]our body is a temple of the Holy Spirit*" (1Co 3:17; 6:19). The key requirement for a temple is that it be kept holy. "*Be holy, because I am holy*" (1Pe 1:16). But what does that mean?

Jesus said that the whole law is summed up in one commandment: "*Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength*" (Mk 12:30). Holiness means loving God supremely. It is the kind of relationship God wants me to have with him, where I trust him absolutely, obey him implicitly, and enjoy it!

The Christian life is nothing if not supernatural. Personal holiness is, frankly, an impossibility without the Holy Spirit. Then it becomes his gift to me, but it is a gift I must receive. As with all God's gifts holiness is both a *gift* and a *task*. It is this paradox which I want to explore next.

#### *Holiness is a Gift*

"*Be filled with the Spirit*" (Eph 5:18). Clearly God intends that every believer be filled with the Holy Spirit. This filling is not an optional extra to the Gospel; it is an essential part of it. When the church was born, "*all of them were filled with the Holy Spirit*" (Ac 2:4). Peter preaches the Good News that all who repent and are baptised "*will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is for you. . .and for all who are far off*" (Ac 2:38-39). The Holy Spirit is a gift to be received.

"*If anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ*" (Ro 8:9). Why then does Paul tell believers that they need to be filled? Probably because he knew that our sinful nature keeps trying to make a come-back, and the only way to keep pure is to seek a constant filling, moment by moment (see Ro 8:5-14). When D.L. Moody, the evangelist, was once asked why he kept asking to be filled he replied, "*Because I leak.*"

It is when our need is greatest, that we need to seek a fresh filling. When the first disciples faced imprisonment and torture, "*they prayed, the place. . .was shaken. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit*" (Ac 4:31). The secret of victory over fear, as well as over sin, is constant reliance on the indwelling Presence.

### ***Holiness is a Task***

It is clear to us all that receiving the gift of God's Spirit does not automatically turn us into saints. As Gordon Fee puts it: "Life in the Spirit is not just a stroll in the park" (*Paul, The Spirit, and the People of God*. 1996:133). There are choices to be made. The Holy Spirit is a Person to be obeyed. "*Live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature*" (Gal 5:16).

The Corinthians prided themselves on being Spirit-filled but Paul tells them, "*I could not address you as spiritual but as worldly—mere infants in Christ*" (1Co 3:1). Their problem was evidently not that they did not have the Holy Spirit but that they were not living according to the power available to them. There was no moral transformation.

The gospel is Good News that must be obeyed. And it is the gift of the Holy Spirit that makes obedience a real possibility. It is no longer a question of human will power. The *power* is now God's. But the *will* remains mine. He challenges me to repent of some sin, and immediately I obey I find release from bondage to that particular sin. I can choose to obey, or I can choose not to obey. With the Holy Spirit within, personal transformation becomes gloriously possible.

### ***Holiness is Derived***

How does transformation take place in my life? As soon as I receive the Holy Spirit, the potential for change is instantly there. But the transformation of my life has only just begun. It may be quick or it may be delayed. My growth is less a matter of time than of obedience. It involves the putting off of my old life, and the putting on of the new life that is the life of Jesus (Eph 4:22-23). Are there spiritual disciplines that will bring this about?

One NT passage gives us an important clue. "*We, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into*

*his likeness with ever-increasing glory" (2Co 3:18).* Our lives have the potential to reflect God's likeness. But clearly this is a process. And it depends upon where we are looking, and on whom we are depending.

As we place ourselves before the Lord without trying to hide ourselves from his gaze, we begin to reflect his glory. The imprint, as it were, of his likeness is being formed in us. There is ultimately no holiness but God's.

One of the clearest NT images of this is seen in Jesus' picture of the vine. "*I am the vine; you are the branches. If a person remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit*" (Jn 15:5). "*The essential nature of the fruit is the reproduction of the life of Christ in the believer*" (Fee, 1996:114). Our holiness is totally derived.

### ***Holiness is an Offering***

Writing to the church in Corinth Paul says, "*I promised you to one husband, to Christ, so that I might present you as a pure virgin to him*" (2Co 11:2). He is telling them exactly what he is trusting for; that they will offer themselves exclusively to God, just as he has already promised them to Christ to be his pure virgin bride.

For any woman waiting to be married, her greatest joy is to keep herself pure for the day when she will appear clothed in white, ready for her husband. So it is with the church. "*I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband*" (Rev 21:2). As part of the bride of Christ, every believer becomes responsible for guarding his or her own purity in the light of that day. "*Since we have these promises. . .let us purify ourselves from everything that contaminates body and spirit, perfecting holiness out of reverence for God*" (2Co 7:1). The redeemed are those who have "*kept themselves pure*" (Rev 14:4).

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## For Reflection and Discussion

1. What response do we give when someone asks how to be filled with the Holy Spirit?
2. When a believer is convicted by God of some sin, how do they deal with it?
3. To what extent is holiness seen as a matter of conforming to rules or earning merit?
4. How well is the life of Christ in us understood to be the true source of holy living?
5. How are believers being encouraged to obey the inner promptings of the Holy Spirit?

## Principle 14

### Gifts of Ministry

*Believers are seeking to develop and use their spiritual gifts for the good of the church*

Since the Holy Spirit lives in every believer, we ought to anticipate some signs of his presence when we meet together. Should we not expect something special? The NT picture of church meetings is one of participation. Every member is equipped to make a contribution. *"To each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good" (1Co 12:7).*

Such involvement needs to be seen as a vital part of our worship. When we meet together in his name, we are to serve the Lord by allowing the Holy Spirit to work through us, using whatever gift he has given us for the blessing of others. *"Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms" (1Pe 4:10).*

This is what makes church meetings unique. It is also how they become both effective and exciting. Not only does every member have a contribution to make, but equally every church member receives something from others.

We need to specifically ask God to give the spiritual gifts necessary for the building up of the church, including gifts of song-writing, and music or other art forms, as well as leading and preaching. Teaching and workshops can help new Christians discover what contributions they can make. Those who have a particular gift should be looking for others with a similar gift whom they can encourage and train just as Priscilla and Aquilla helped Apollos (Ac 18:26). God wants his church to be continually at the reproducing stage.

How then can we evaluate these "spiritual gifts"? We certainly want to receive all that is from God, but we also are aware that spiritual powers of evil often try to deceive with counterfeit gifts and various miracles. We need discernment. Specifically we need to consider the source of the gifts, their diversity, their effectiveness, and how they are to be validated.

### *The Source of Gifts*

We often refer to "the gifts of the Holy Spirit." In one sense they are, since they represent his working through us. But they also come to us as the gifts of Christ. "*To each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it. This is why it says. . . 'he gave gifts to men'*" (Eph 4: 7-8). God's gifts are part of his redemptive work in which the whole Trinity is involved. The Holy Spirit comes from both the Father and the Son (cf. Jn 14:26 and 15:26).

Why is this significant? Because spiritual powers of evil are also active in virtually every sphere of life. They are feared, and yet their powers are sought. On the other hand, the presence of the Holy Spirit is marked not merely by power; but also by holiness. Any genuine manifestation of the Holy Spirit will reveal the character of Jesus. The Holy Spirit always brings glory to him.

### *The Diversity of Gifts*

*"There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit"* (1Co 12:4). We find nearly thirty different gifts mentioned in the NT, but no limit is set on the ways God chooses to work through us. Certainly the range of gifts is wide.

The lists in Romans 12 and 1 Corinthians 12 include teaching, serving, contributing, leading, and administration. They also include some more dramatic gifts such as tongues-speaking and prophecy. The important thing is their common purpose: that through their use the church should grow and be strengthened.

How then are we to understand these gifts? Let me summarise the conclusions reached by Robert Banks (*Paul's Idea*. pp. 94-98).

1. The lists of gifts seem to be open-ended in character. They include both spoken and practical ministries. They may be exercised within big or smaller groups, on a one-to-one basis, or in a wider, itinerant ministry.
2. Gifts are given to all, but are not distributed evenly. Some believers are given more gifts than others. The ministry of an individual may change over time, and according to the need of a new situation.

3. Churches are encouraged to pray for gifts they do not have (1Co 12:31; 14:1). Not that individuals should pray for the greater gifts for themselves, but that the church as a whole should pray and believe for all the gifts it needs to build it up.
4. The gifts are ranked according to the degree of benefit they bring to the church. Extraordinary manifestations are not necessarily more important (this was the Corinthians' error). Particular importance is given to the gift of teaching.
5. Individuals may use a gift regularly or only occasionally. All may bring a word from the Lord, or "prophesy," occasionally. But others may exercise the gift frequently and become recognised as "a prophet" (1Co 12:29).
6. Only when believers meet can the full benefit of their gifts be realised. Smaller gatherings will not have as broad a range of gifts, but may well permit more individuals to contribute. Having both small and larger gatherings allows for the maximum spiritual development of a church.

### *The Effect of Gifts*

One of the key reasons for encouraging believers to use their gifts is that it is by this means that God has chosen to make himself known. "*To each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good*" (1Co 12:7).

God's presence among us is not only manifested through inspirational music or miraculous healings, but equally through gifts such as intercession, practical service or offering leadership. Any involvement undertaken in dependence on God becomes a manifestation of the Holy Spirit at work "for the common good."

Naturally, this kind of interactive meeting requires some planning. Some may be asked to prepare a contribution. Others may be encouraged to take part spontaneously—by praying aloud, by giving a testimony, or by reading a scripture. This is the kind of worship that allows God to manifest his presence.

### *The Validation of Gifts*

In encouraging the participation of all, how are we to judge

what is genuinely from God? Paul's answer is that everything is to be in accordance with "the word of Christ." "*Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God*" (Col 3:16).

The Holy Spirit and the written word of God always say the same thing. The Spirit brings life to the written Word, showing us its relevance for our situation and then enabling us to put it into practice. The only way we can "*fulfil the law of Christ*" (Gal 6:2; cf. Jn 13:34) is to have both his Word and his Spirit dwelling in us.

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## For Reflection and Discussion

1. What do believers perceive the role of the Holy Spirit to be? How is this different from traditional beliefs about spirits?
2. How well do church gatherings allow for God to speak through those present?
3. What teaching is being given about spiritual gifts—their diversity, or their distribution in the body?
4. What can be done to help believers to identify and develop their gifts?
5. How will false gifts be recognised? How will they be dealt with?
6. Are there some gifts that are still needed, and for which we might pray?

## Principle 15

### Whole-hearted Allegiance

*Believers have renounced all occult practices and rejected all spiritual powers, acknowledging Jesus alone as Lord and Saviour*

The first commandment given to Israel still stands: "*I am the Lord your God. . .You shall have no other gods before me*" (Ex 20:2-3). The Scriptures warn us that this exclusiveness of worship will become one of the most contested issues in the coming days. "*All the inhabitants of the earth will worship the beast—all whose names have not been written in the book of life*" (Rev 13:8).

#### *An Exclusive Allegiance*

To be the temple of God means choosing to say no to all other spiritual powers. "*What harmony is there between Christ and Belial? . .What agreement is there between the temple of God and idols? For we are the temple of the living God*" (2Co 6:15-16).

Spiritual powers no longer have authority over us. Christ "*disarmed the powers and authorities. . .triumphing over them by the cross*" (Col 2:15). By his death he has "*rescued us from the dominion of darkness*" (Col 1:13). Every believer in Christ can now live without fear of spirits. But with the privilege comes the obligation—to worship him alone.

#### *A Transforming Allegiance*

To belong exclusively to Christ is the essential foundation for all personal and social transformation. Exclusive worship is the pathway to personal victory over sin, and to spiritual authority in ministry. "*If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come*" (2Co 5:17).

The expression "in Christ" is one of Paul's favourite ways of describing a believer—he uses it about one hundred and seventy times. Being in him we have "*everything we need for life and godliness*" (2Pe 1:3), and are "*being transformed into his likeness*" (2Co 3:18).

### ***A Costly Allegiance***

Unless Jesus is truly Lord, the Christian life is an impossibility. "*Anyone who does not carry his cross and follow me cannot be my disciple. . . Any of you who does not give up everything he has cannot be my disciple*" (Lk 14: 27, 33). It is true that not all who name the name of Christ are willing for such a total allegiance, but this is the cost of true discipleship.

The call to exclusive worship is the central message of the book of Revelation. The struggle of the first century church against pagan worship, particularly the cult of the Roman emperor, is portrayed in symbolic form against the background of warfare in the heavenly realms. Earthly events reflect the battle in the heavens to determine whether worship will be given to Satan, or to God and to the Lamb.

For some, to follow Christ will mean suffering, imprisonment or even death. Their physical suffering can lead them to deny Christ, unless they have already heard the note of final victory.

*Now have come the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God, and the authority of his Christ. For the accuser of our brothers. . . has been hurled down. They overcame him [Satan] by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony; they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death* (Rev 12:10-11).

These are the ones of whom it is written, "*The world was not worthy of them*" (Heb 11:38). Discipleship will never be an easy option.

### ***An Overcoming Allegiance***

As followers of Christ we are inevitably engaged in the "*struggle. . . against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms*" (Eph 6:12). There is, therefore, the urgent need to "*put on the full armour of God*" (v. 13).

In the NT, we find spiritual conflict frequently occurring as part of the spread of the gospel. When individuals are enslaved by evil powers there is often the need for a "power encounter," in which these spirits are driven out (Ac 16:18). We are given

authority "to overcome all the power of the enemy" (Lk 10:19), but only as we ourselves come under the authority of God. Our security is in our submission. "Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you" (Jas 4:7).

Where there is spiritual blindness, the need is for a "truth encounter," by which minds are opened to understand the message of the Gospel (Ac 26:18). The Gospel itself is a powerful weapon against the devil's lies. But evangelism alone may not produce results since we are confronted not only by ignorance, but also by blindness. "*The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel*" (2Co 4:4). Spiritual eyes must be opened before the gospel can be received and understood.

The primary battle is in the spiritual realm, through intercession, when scripture promises can become weapons of praise and of proclamation. For example, we might praise God for his promise that "*all peoples on earth will be blessed*" (Ac 3:25). Or we might intercede on the basis of Christ's claim: "*All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me*" (Mt 28:18). Acts 4:23-31 is a wonderful example of this kind of praying.

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## For Reflection and Discussion

1. How seriously do believers take the first commandment? How is any compromise dealt with?
2. How do believers deal with objects of spiritual power from their old life? Would the public destruction of such objects help confirm the break with the past?
3. What is being done to prepare believers to endure suffering because they are Christians?
4. To what extent are the principles of spiritual warfare being taught and put into practice?

## THE WORSHIP ROOM—SUMMARY CHART

ASPECT	PRINCIPLE	NEW TESTAMENT IMAGES	TEACHING
<b>11</b> In relation to God: PRAISE & ADORATION	Believers offer worship and praise to God, both with their voices and through the dedication of their lives	<i>True worshippers Jn 4:23</i> <i>Coming before the throne Heb 4:16</i> <i>Singing and making music Eph 5:19</i> <i>Offering spiritual sacrifices 1Pe 2:5</i>	The engagement of my spirit The surrender of my will The expression of my praises The offering of my service
<b>12</b> In relation to others: INTERCESSORY PRAYER	Regular intercession marks the lives of believers, both individually and when they meet together	<i>Children with their Father Ro 8:15</i> <i>Believing and receiving Mk 11:24</i> <i>Praying in Jesus' name Jn 14:14</i> <i>Wrestling in prayer Col 4:12</i>	The confidence of the child The persistence of the believer The authority of the heir The intensity of the warrior
<b>13</b> In relation to myself: PERSONAL HOLINESS	Believers are seeking to live holy lives by the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit	<i>Filled with the Spirit Eph 5:18</i> <i>Living by the Spirit Gal 5:16</i> <i>Reflecting the Lord's glory 2Co 3:18</i> <i>A pure virgin 2Co 11:2</i>	Holiness is a gift Holiness is a task Holiness is derived Holiness is an offering
<b>14</b> In relation to the church: GIFTS OF MINISTRY	Believers are seeking to develop and use their spiritual gifts for the good of the church	<i>Gifts apportioned by Christ Eph 4:7-8</i> <i>One body with many members Ro 12:4</i> <i>The manifestation of the Spirit 1Co 12:7</i> <i>The indwelling word of Christ Col 3:16</i>	The source of gifts The diversity of gifts The effect of gifts The validation of gifts
<b>15</b> In relation to spiritual powers: WHOLE-HEARTED ALLEGIANCE	Believers have renounced all occult practices and rejected all spiritual powers acknowledging Jesus alone as Lord and Saviour	<i>The temple of the living God 2Co 6:16</i> <i>A new creation in Christ 2Co 5:17</i> <i>Cross-carrying disciples Lk 14: 27</i> <i>Able to stand Eph 6:13</i>	An exclusive allegiance A transforming allegiance A costly allegiance An overcoming allegiance



# 6

## THE MESSAGE ROOM

*And of this gospel I was appointed a herald  
and an apostle and a teacher.*

2 Ti 1:11



We now come to the second great responsibility of the church—the proclamation of the word of God. The NT church is a witnessing community. Every church is entrusted with the awesome responsibility of announcing God's word both to believers and before the world.

### No Short Cuts

For a pioneer church planter this realisation has some obvious implications for the way he goes about his work. To adequately communicate God's truth in another language often first means the arduous work of mastering the heart language of the people to whom he sends us.

It also means being deeply committed to the exposition of the Scriptures. Only what has become life to him is likely to become living bread to others. Here are the twin peaks that the pioneer church planter must attempt to scale: he must gain an in-depth knowledge of the word of God, and also become skilled in communicating its message to those of another culture. There are no short cuts to cross-cultural church planting.

### The Authority of Scripture

Many reasons can be given for accepting the Bible as the inspired word of God, but perhaps none is greater than the fact that Jesus himself accepted the (OT) Scriptures as God's word concerning himself. *"He said to them, 'How foolish you are, and*

*how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken!'. . . And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in the Scriptures concerning himself" (Lk 24:25-27).*

We find that the NT writers also understood the OT to be the authoritative word of God. In the book of Hebrews, OT quotations are cited as the words of God himself: "So, as the Holy Spirit says, . . ." (Heb 3:7), "But about the Son he says, . . ." (Heb 1:8).

Evangelical believers have often been called The People of the Book. Even though the first complete listing of our NT books did not appear until AD 397, the church has, from the beginning, recognised both the OT and the writings of the apostles as the inspired word of God.

Evangelical churches are those that continue to accept the Bible as the decisive standard for their faith and practice. They know themselves to be "*God's household, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and foundation of the truth*" (1Ti 3:15). That is, each believing community recognises its responsibility to become a bastion of the truth, both by coming under its authority and by proclaiming it with authority. Only as a church lives in submission to Scripture does it have authority to convey the message of Scripture.

Just as the Jews were "*entrusted with the very words of God*" (Ro 3:2), so the church has been "*entrusted with the gospel*" (1Th 2:4). It is not simply a matter of evangelism. The good news of Scripture includes the full revelation of God's will for those who believe. "*[Y]ou have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness*" (2Ti 3:15-16).

## Only One Message

Although it is helpful to deal separately with evangelism and Bible teaching, no hard and fast line should be drawn between the two. It is a distinction that is hard to find in Scripture. True, there is "*the message of the gospel*" (Ac 15:7) and "*a message of wisdom*" (1Co 2:6). Some are believers and some are not. There are some Christians who are spiritual and some who are worldly (1Co 3:1), and we need to use different language if we are to

address their different needs. But ultimately the church only has one message—Jesus is Lord!

There are five NT principles associated with the church's responsibility to be a herald of God's word.

- Evangelism: proclaiming the message
- Signs and wonders: confirming the message
- Christ-like living: revealing the message
- Bible teaching: explaining the message
- Mission: crossing barriers with the message

We will look at each of these in turn.

## Principle 16

### Evangelism

*Believers take every opportunity to share the gospel with those around them*

Since the idea of evangelism is so central to our understanding of the church's mission, it is surprising to discover how little the NT has to say about strategies for evangelism. Reasons for sharing the faith are more often implied than specifically stated. We do not find the apostles urging the churches to evangelise. Rather, they express their thankfulness that it is already happening.

Who were the evangelists? We read that God "gave. . .some to be evangelists" (Eph 4:11), and we think of Philip (Ac 21:8), and Timothy (2Ti 4:5). But it is clear that the spreading of the gospel was not so much due to these specially gifted people as to the multitude of those whose faith could not be hidden. "*The Lord's message rang out from you not only in Macedonia and Achaia—your faith in God has become known everywhere*" (1Th 1:8). To the Philippians Paul writes, "[Y]ou shine like stars in the universe as you hold out the word of life" (Php 2:15-16).

So what does evangelism mean in practice? What is involved in making known the good news of Jesus? We will look at four ways in which the NT speaks about this task.

- proclaiming the gospel
- confronting the powers of darkness
- sharing in Christ's compassion
- reaping the Lord's harvest

These four aspects are not mutually exclusive activities, but important characteristics of the one task. Together they show us the nature of the responsibility set before us, and provide a basis for developing strategies that will fit the opportunities around us.

### *Proclaiming the Gospel*

Even though the words "evangelism" and "evangelise" are no longer found in modern versions such as the NIV, the idea is correctly conveyed by phrases such as "preaching gospel" or "bringing good news." The purpose of evangelism is to present the good news of Jesus in such a way that people will turn to God in repentance and faith.

Our task is to proclaim the gospel. "*Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation*" (Mk 16:15). Without a messenger there can be no good news. "*[H]ow can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them?*" (Ro 10:14). News only becomes news when there is someone to share it.

But what exactly is this good news? What are the key truths that must be presented? In Luke's Gospel we have Jesus' own summary of what is to be preached. "*Christ will suffer and rise from the dead. . . and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations*" (Lk 24:46-47).

Paul's outline of his message to the Corinthians is very similar. "*I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you. . . By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. . . that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised the third day*" (1Co 15:1-4).

Our task is to pass on the good news of what Christ has done and what this means for all humanity. Our goal is conversion, but only God can lead people to repentance and faith.

### *Confronting the Powers of Darkness*

To share the gospel is to engage in spiritual warfare. Evangelism proclaims that Jesus has come to "*destroy him who holds the power of death. . . and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death*" (Heb 2:14-15). Inevitably this means that those who bring such a message become involved in a struggle "*against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms*" (Eph 6:12).

Even when we bring the light of the gospel, often there is no response. We find that those who most need to hear the gospel are the very ones who most resist it. This is because there are

two kinds of darkness. There is the darkness of not having any light. But there is also the darkness of not having any sight. "*The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel*" (2Co 4:4).

If the gospel is to be understood, the Holy Spirit must first open the blind eyes. "*The Spirit of the Lord is on me. . . He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind*" (Lk 4:18). It might seem as if this could only be written of the ministry of Jesus. And yet we find an almost identical commission given to the apostle Paul. "*I am sending you to them to open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God*" (Ac 26:17-18).

The command to preach carries the promise that God will accompany the words with the convicting power of his Spirit, and with the miracle of new sight for the spiritually blind. "*Our gospel came to you not simply with words, but also with power, with the Holy Spirit and with deep conviction*" (1Th 1:5). In evangelism we have the awesome privilege of being "*God's fellow workers*" (1Co 3:9).

### ***Sharing Christ's Compassion***

When Jesus "*saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd*" (Mt 9:36). He saw the nation of Israel as God's flock, left without the protection of spiritual leaders, wandering and vulnerable, facing a lost eternity.

His response was not only to reach out with a ministry that combined both preaching and healing, but also to involve his disciples in the same ministry, and with the same authority. "*He called his twelve disciples to him and gave them authority to drive out evil spirits and to heal every disease and sickness* (Mt 10:1). The sending out of the apostles was the direct result of Jesus' compassion for the lostness of humanity. This was why he came, and why he died. "*God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish*" (Jn 3:16).

All the warnings about hell come from the Lord Jesus himself. "*I will show you whom you should fear: Fear him who, after the killing of the body, has power to throw you into hell*" (Lk 12:5). Were it not for this clear teaching, it would be a prospect too awful to

contemplate. He came to seek those who are perishing. "*For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost*" (Lk 19:10).

This is also why Paul proclaimed the gospel. "*If our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing*" (2Co 4:3). He had caught something of Christ's own compassion for the lost. "*Christ's love compels us. . . We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God*" (2Co 5:14, 20). People matter to God more than we can ever comprehend.

One Sunday morning a shaman priest, ten days old in the faith, came to me with a proposal. "After the meeting is over, let's go and tell others in the village about Jesus." "Great idea!" I replied, thinking he wanted to come and hear me explain the gospel to his neighbours.

But he had other ideas. When we reached the first house, while the rest of us sat down, he remained standing. Still dressed as a shaman, vigorously spitting out streams of red tobacco juice, he began by describing the rituals he had performed for his hearers. Every eye was fixed on him as he revealed hidden secrets about their gods known only to the priests.

He began to explain how God had created the earth and the first two people and how, when they disobeyed God, he had driven them from his presence. Then, he said, Satan (he had only just learned that name) came and offered to take care of them. All they needed to do was to offer him sacrifices—the very offerings these people had made all their lives. But what he had really brought them was slavery and fear. Now Jesus has come and defeated Satan, and offered them freedom from fear and a life that would never end. His hearers hung on every word.

Only later did I discover that the tribal myths, taught only to priests, reflected much of the Genesis story. But in the myth there is no way to escape from the power of demons, and death is the problem for which no answer can be found. That day the gospel was understood more powerfully than I had ever preached it.

### *Reaping the Lord's Harvest*

Jesus saw the unsaved as a harvest to be reaped. "*Open your eyes*

*and look at the fields! They are ripe for harvest. Even now the reaper draws his wages, even now he harvests the crop for eternal life" (Jn 4:35-36).* The real reason for evangelism is found in God's passion that lost people should be saved. *"The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field" (Mt 9:37-38).* The fields belong to God. The harvest is his. Our privilege is to bring in that harvest for eternal life.

The call to reap is not based on calculation of ripeness. Jesus tells his disciples to pray, even though he knows that the people will be resistant to the gospel. Even where the harvest does not appear to be ripe, if there is no attempt to reap, there will never be a harvest.

In Jesus' teaching, the image of the harvest merges with that of the heavenly banquet. In both, the Lord's servants are made responsible for bringing in that which remains ungathered. In Jesus' story of the banquet, the master commands his servants: *"Go out to the roads and country lanes and make them come in, so that my house will be full" (Lk 14:23).* We are part of God's rescue mission. Tomorrow may be too late. Many will cry out, *"The harvest is past, the summer has ended, and we are not saved" (Jer 8:20).* The harvest is either reaped or lost.

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## For Reflection and Discussion

1. What do believers understand to be the essential points of the gospel?
2. How clearly are they able explain the good news to others?
3. To what extent is the urgency of evangelism being taught and demonstrated?
4. In what ways do we make the spiritual struggle against the powers of darkness part of our evangelism?
5. What faith do we have for a harvest? Do we need to ask God to increase our faith?
6. What other means might we use to spread the gospel? Use a brainstorming session!

## Principle 17

### Signs and Wonders

***The power of God confirms the truth of the gospel with signs and wonders***

The birth of the church at Pentecost was marked by the coming of the Holy Spirit in power. In order to explain what the events meant, Peter quoted from the OT prophecy of Joel.

*In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams. . I will show wonders in the heaven above and signs on the earth below (Ac 2:17, 19).*

Joel's prophecy is clearer for us to understand at some points than at others. But this is to be expected since, by their very nature, God's wonders will surprise us. With the coming of Christ, filled with the Holy Spirit, God's glory began to be revealed in new and dramatic ways. *"This, the first of his miraculous signs, Jesus performed in Cana of Galilee. He thus revealed his glory, and his disciples put their faith in him" (Jn 2:11).*

From the day of Pentecost, signs and wonders also marked the early days of the church, but not all the details are given. *"Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles" (Ac 2:43).*

### The Need for Discernment

Clearly, not all supernatural occurrences are from God. *"Simon had practiced sorcery in the city and amazed all the people" (Ac 8:9).* In Scripture, magic, spells, and sorcery are always recognised as having evil origins. Before the return of Christ many will be deceived by false signs coming from Satan. *"The coming of the lawless one will be in accordance with the work of Satan displayed in all kinds of counterfeit miracles, signs and wonders" (2Th 2:9).*

Nor are signs necessarily contrary to the laws of nature. In

the Scriptures there is no such thing as a natural law independent of the Creator. He is the omnipresent God, actively present in everyday events.

Those serving on the front lines of the church almost always find that remarkable signs accompany the spread of the gospel. They include miracles of protection, and of healing, the casting out of demons, and remarkable instances of God providing for some need. Wherever the gospel is preached in the power of the Holy Spirit we can be sure that God will confirm the message to those who hear in many different ways, some outwardly more dramatic than others.

## Why Signs?

But should we be asking for special signs? Much depends on our motive, of course. We find the early church praying for both boldness and miracles. *"Now, Lord, consider their threats and enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness. Stretch out your hand to heal and perform miraculous signs and wonders through the name of your holy servant Jesus"* (Ac 4:29- 30).

Why is it that in Scripture we find signs and wonders mentioned more in connection with some periods than with others? I do not have a complete answer, but some help comes from looking at the reasons why such signs are given by God. They all point to the possibility that God gives special signs at those times and in those places where the church is facing serious opposition or spiritual conflict. In the earliest days of the church, persecution and miraculous events are seen side by side.

The NT shows that miraculous signs are given for at least four reasons:

- To further the gospel
- To confirm the message
- To strengthen the faith of believers
- To authenticate the messengers

### *To Further the Gospel*

The coming of the Spirit at Pentecost, which introduced the new

era of signs and wonders, also marked the beginning of the spread of the gospel. God's power was dramatically seen in events such as the death of Ananias and Sapphira (Ac 5:1-10), and the miraculous escape of Peter from prison (Ac 12:6-10).

Paul attributes the success of his wide-ranging ministry entirely to the power of the Holy Spirit, seen both in his own labours, and in miracles of all kinds. "*I will not venture to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me in leading the Gentiles to obey God by what I have said and done—by the power of signs and miracles, through the power of the Holy Spirit*" (Ro 15:18-19). The earthquake at Philippi (Ac 16:25-26), the survival of those shipwrecked off Malta (27:13-44), and Paul's subsequent deliverance from snake bite (28:3-6), might all be seen as miracles that furthered the gospel.

### ***To Confirm the Message***

In the early church, preaching and miraculous signs went together. "*This salvation, which was first announced by the Lord, was confirmed to us by those who heard him. God also testified to it by signs, wonders and various miracles*" (Heb 2:3-4).

In Cyprus, the proconsul wanted to hear the word of God, but Elymas the sorcerer tried to stop him believing. So Paul, full of the Holy Spirit, called on the Lord to strike him with blindness. "*When the proconsul saw what had happened, he believed, for he was amazed at the teaching about the Lord*" (Ac 13:12).

Again, in Iconium, we read that Paul and Barnabas "spent considerable time. . . speaking boldly for the Lord, who confirmed the message of his grace by enabling them to do miraculous signs and wonders" (Ac 14:3). There is clearly an important link between proclamation (truth encounter) and signs (power encounter).

### ***To Strengthen the Faith of Believers***

Although Paul's ministry was characterised by much weakness and suffering, there were also clear signs of God's power which greatly strengthened the new-found faith of those who responded to the message. "*My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power, so that your faith might not rest on men's wisdom, but on God's power?*" (1Co 2:4-5).

Similarly in Galatia, the faith of the church was confirmed as a result of the miracles they saw. *"Does God give you his Spirit and work miracles among you because you observe the law, or because you believe what you heard"* (Gal 3:5).

### ***To Authenticate the Messengers***

Jesus' authority was clearly revealed through his miracles. *"Men of Israel, listen to this: Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders and signs which God did among you through him"* (Ac 2:22). After the resurrection, the authority of Peter and John to preach in the name of Jesus was confirmed to all by the healing of the lame man outside the temple (Ac 3:1-16).

The apostle Paul also pointed to the presence of miraculous signs as proof of his apostolic calling. *"The things that mark an apostle—signs, wonders and miracles—were done among you with great perseverance"* (2Co 12:12). Such signs validated both his preaching and also his letters, which the church came to recognise as being inspired by the Holy Spirit.

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### **For Reflection and Discussion**

1. What events can we look back on that reveal the hand of God at work in our lives?
2. How has the Lord given confirmation of his word to those who heard it?
3. How far should we follow the apostles' example in praying for both boldness and miracles?
4. To what extent does the faith of believers rest on evidences of God's power?
5. What authority do we believe we have to engage in both truth encounters and power encounters?

## Principle 18

### Christ-like Living

*Believers' lives are a living testimony  
to the truth of the gospel*

The NT reveals a surprising lack of direct appeals for believers to share the gospel. And yet that first century witnessed an amazingly rapid increase in the number of believers. This was evidently not so much due to the work of the "full-time" apostles, as to the fact that the early Christians understood that their testimony had at least as much to do with how they lived as with what they said. The lives of ordinary believers became a powerful instrument for the spread of the gospel.

### The Price of Witness

On the one hand, as we have just seen, God regularly confirms the message of the gospel with special signs of his presence. "*[T]he Lord worked with them and confirmed his word by the signs that accompanied it*" (Mk 16:20). But equally important to the spread of the gospel is the Christ-like living of believers. And very often, in stark contrast to the excitement of miracles, it is by suffering that the truth of the message is most powerfully confirmed.

The testimonies of those whom God has greatly used almost invariably point to the positive blessings that accompanied or followed times of severe testing. I do not personally know of a single Bible translation, or of any significant church planting movement, that has not involved a high personal cost, usually to those most closely involved with the project.

But we should not forget that it is the first believers in a people group who are likely to pay the highest price. This is a humbling reminder that the grace and power of God is more often seen in them than in us. I shall not forget the woman who came to the church meeting so badly beaten she could not sit down, but as she told the story of her faith, and of the cruelty of her husband, her face shone, and the truth of the Gospel came

across more clearly than I had ever seen before.

The church planter therefore needs to prepare the emerging church for suffering. Where such teaching has been given, we find believers standing firm under persecution, and the church growing stronger in both faith and numbers as a result. In other cases, where no such teaching has been given, the persecuted believers have been unable to withstand the pressure.

## Naming the Community

How does the NT describe the lifestyle of ordinary church members? Several different words and images are used to describe them, and these doubtless all became well known to the early believers, helping to shape their lifestyle. While these images do not give us all the details of what a Christian lifestyle looks like, they highlight in different ways the power of that life, and the kind of commitment that so effectively supported the preaching of the gospel.

### *Disciples – Learning to Obey*

The Great Commission is to "*make disciples*" (Mt 28:19). The word "disciple" is the most common name for believers in the Gospels and Acts, occurring over two hundred times, although it is not used in any of the subsequent NT books. The word conveys both a commitment to follow Jesus and membership of the community of believers. Soon after Paul's conversion, "*he tried to join the disciples, but they were all afraid of him, not believing that he really was a disciple*" (Ac 9:26). In their eyes he had yet to prove himself.

In Jesus' day it was common for young men to seek out a rabbi and ask to become his disciple. But Jesus' disciples were different. They were not the ones who took the initiative; he called them. "*You did not choose me, but I chose you*" (Jn 15:16).

Discipleship means not only following, but also obeying. However, this is not slavery. The Lord never insists on having authority. He leaves us free to choose. "*If you love me, you will obey what I command*" (Jn 14:15). Disciples are those who have discovered who Jesus is—that he alone is worthy to be both Lord and Master. This is why the term "disciple" is used exclusively

of the followers of Jesus. None of the apostles claimed to have disciples. In the NT, disciples make disciples, but they do not have disciples.

Discipleship calls for the most radical kind of commitment. "*[A]ny of you who does not give up everything he has cannot be my disciple*" (Lk 14:33). This does not mean that disciples never falter. In fact, a major part of the learning process is learning to obey. And probably no command has more impact on the world, when it is obeyed, than the law of love. "*By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another*" (Jn 13:35).

### ***Followers of the Way—Refusing to Turn Back***

The Christian faith appears to have been initially referred to as "the Way." Saul went as far as Damascus looking for "*any there who belonged to the Way*" (Ac 9:2). Later, having been arrested because of Jewish allegations, he uses the same term to describe his own faith. "*I admit that I worship the God of our fathers as a follower of the Way, which they call a sect*" (Ac 24:14).

Soon after the church first formed in Ephesus, we are told that "*[T]here arose a great disturbance about the Way*" (Ac 19:23). The Way is referred to six times in the Book of Acts, each time in the context of opposition—being accused of creating a disturbance, or being maligned or harassed. Whatever the cost, as followers of the One who was himself the Way, they refused to turn back.

### ***Christians—Suffering Scorn for the Name***

"*The disciples were called Christians first at Antioch*" (Ac 11:26). Antioch was the cosmopolitan city where, for the first time, large numbers of Gentiles heard "*the good news about the Lord Jesus. . . and a great number of people believed and turned to the Lord*" (vv. 20-21). This evidently caught the attention of the public, who adopted the word "Christian" as a form of ridicule, as if to say, "How stupid of these people to follow a Jewish Messiah—who's been crucified!"

Later, after Paul has given his dramatic testimony before King Agrippa, Agrippa uses the word to pour scorn on all that Paul stands for. "*Do you think that in such a short time you can persuade me to be a Christian?*" (Ac 26:28).

To be called a Christian was to be despised. For the believers it was initially a term to be endured. But gradually it became accepted as a kind of badge of honour, since it so clearly identified those who bore it with Christ himself. "*[I]f you suffer as a Christian, do not be ashamed, but praise God that you bear that name*" (1Pe 4:16).

### *Living Letters—Commending the Gospel*

Paul claimed that the proof of his ministry lay in the transformation that had taken place in the lives of the believers in Corinth. "*You show that you are a letter from Christ, the result of our ministry, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God*" (2Co 3:3).

Through the believers, the gospel was not so much heard, as seen and read. The radical change in their lives, "*known and read by everybody*," was not the result of self-effort, but because of what the Holy Spirit had "*written. . .on tablets of human hearts*" (vv. 2-3). Christ-like living is always the outcome of responsive and obedient hearts.

Through these changed lives Paul's ministry was both validated and extended. The believers themselves became a multitude of letters from Christ to those whom Paul had never met. As letters written by the Spirit, they were also sent by the Spirit to those whom they met day by day in their ordinary activities.

Eliki and Lavinia heard God's call to leave their beautiful island of Fiji to take the gospel to the people of the Sahara. As soon as they got off the plane and saw dry, barren landscape they wished they could get right back on, and return to their green homeland.

For weeks they were spat on, stoned, and cursed. "Lord, please let us go home!" they prayed. But God's word came through clearly. "If I cannot love them through you, who will love them?"

So they decided to stay. They built a play area next to their house for the children who threw rocks through their windows. When they ate they kept their doors wide open, inviting passers-by to join them.

Eliki made friends with men in the market place and invited them to come to his home for Bible studies. Seven came, late at night, one by one. Eliki struggled to find time to sleep.

Eventually, all seven received Christ as Saviour and Lord, and were introduced to each other for the first time at a Christmas party—and the first church in that whole region was born. Out of love.

### ***Children of God—Bearing his Likeness***

In the NT there is a close link between being a disciple and becoming a child of God. The call to discipleship is the call to become like Jesus. "*It is enough for the student (Gk. disciple) to be like his teacher*" (Mt 10:25). Similarly, being a child implies not only family membership, but also family likeness.

However, this character transformation is neither instant nor automatic. The possibility begins as soon as we are born again. "*[T]o those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God*" (Jn 1:12). From this point on we are called to put off the old self "*and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness*" (Eph 4:24). Only when we see the Lord will the process be completed. "*Now we are children of God, and. . .we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is*" (1Jn 3:2-3).

Even though our transformation is not yet complete, it is nevertheless a powerful witness. Inner purity, more than anything else, attests to the truth of the gospel in morally corrupt places. "*Do everything without complaining. . .so that you may become blameless and pure, children of God without fault in a crooked and depraved generation, in which you shine like stars in the universe as you hold out the word of life*" (Php 2:14-16).

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## For Reflection and Discussion

1. How clearly do we present the cost of being a follower of Jesus?
2. How do we encourage and support those have to pay a high price for their discipleship?
3. What message is being read by outsiders from the lives of believers?
4. What might help believers to develop hearts that are sensitive and obedient to the Holy Spirit?
5. How are believers being encouraged to put off the old self and put on the new, God-created, self?

## Principle 19

### Bible Teaching

*Believers are being spiritually fed through systematic Bible teaching and are being shown how to apply its teaching to their everyday lives*

The Scriptures are not only the bedrock for the church's faith but, as living words, they provide the daily spiritual nourishment needed by every believer. So we are not surprised to find in the NT a strong emphasis on learning and understanding its truth.

Right from the start the apostles knew that their primary task was "*prayer and the ministry of the word*" (Ac 6:4). And at the end of his life, Paul's final instruction to Timothy is still, "*Preach the Word. . .with great patience and careful instruction*" (2Ti 4:2).

Without a firm grasp of biblical truth a church will always remain weak and ineffectual. Priority tasks for any church planter must therefore be, first to provide the Scriptures in a form that can be readily understood, and second to ensure that believers are being taught the word systematically.

However, since it is a living word that transforms those who receive it, the hearers too can become bearers of the message. If the church is to multiply, the witnesses must also multiply. So the goal must be not only to teach, but also to equip believers to effectively share God's word with others.

If we are to plan our teaching well, first we must know our objectives. The NT reveals four clear purposes behind Bible teaching, all of which need to be met if a church is to grow strong and become a light to the world around it.

#### *Teaching Presents the Truth*

Truth is at the heart of our faith because, ultimately, truth is not a doctrine; it is a Person—God himself. As Son of God, Jesus declares, "*I am the. . .truth*" (Jn 14:6). The devil, on the other hand, is "*the father of lies. . .there is no truth in him*" (Jn 8:44). Those that follow him "*perish because they [have] refused to love the*

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*truth and so be saved" (2Th 2:10).*

Today, many have rejected even the very concept of truth, since without God, truth has no real meaning. Like Pilate they say, "*What is truth?*" (Jn 18:38).

When we teach the word of God we are declaring both what is true and the One who is true. It is by this truth that all will be judged. "*The word of God is living and active. . . it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart*" (Heb 4:12).

We find an emphasis on truth in nearly all Paul's letters. He reminds believers that they "*were taught. . . in accordance with the truth that is in Jesus*" (Eph 4:21). But truth must not only be taught; error must also be refuted. Paul warned the elders in Ephesus: "*Even from your own number men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them. So be on your guard!*" (Ac 20:30-31).

### ***Teaching Lays Foundations***

Among seekers, and new believers, the purpose of teaching is that they might become "*living stones*" (1Pe 2:5), firmly resting on right foundations. "*No one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ*" (1Co 3:11). They need an understanding of who Jesus is, what he has done, and what this means for their salvation. By teaching the Scriptures we ensure that the church is "*built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone*" (Eph 2:20).

Foundation-laying is a methodical task. It must be both well-planned and well-executed if the structure is to last. The same is true of Bible teaching. Every context, like every building site, is different and needs to be surveyed to discover those places where traditional beliefs are likely to undermine biblical truth. These are the places where the foundations need to be strongest.

One such list of "*elementary teaching*" is mentioned in the letter to the Hebrews. For them the foundations included, "*repentance. . . , faith in God, instructions about baptisms, the laying on of hands, the resurrection from the dead, and eternal judgment*" (Heb 6:1-2). Our list may be a bit different, but the important thing is to plan ahead and include all that will be needed if new believers are to stand firm in Christ.

### **Teaching Builds Faith**

For Paul, teaching was the key to Christian maturity. *"We proclaim him, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone perfect in Christ"* (Col 1:28). He longed that new Christians should *"abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight"* (Php 1:9). God raised up leaders for the church, significantly including teachers, *"so that the body of Christ may be built up. . . in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature"* (Eph 4:12-13).

In choosing the best format for teaching we should remember that the early Christians most often met in homes. Numbers would have been small. As well as the OT Scriptures that were available, letters from Paul and other apostles no doubt provided the basis for much of the teaching. Apart from occasional visits from travelling teachers and apostles, most teaching would have been the responsibility of an elder or overseer, someone *"able to teach"* (1Ti 3:2), and able to *"encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it"* (Tit 1:9).

We are not told exactly how these teachers were trained, but we can gather that, once their potential was recognised, they were prepared by some form of mentoring or apprenticeship involving learning by doing. *"Barnabas took Mark and sailed for Cyprus, but Paul chose Silas and left"* (Ac 15:39-40). The apostles saw it as a vital part of their ministry to train and develop other leaders for the multiplying churches. *"The things you have heard me say. . . entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others"* (2Ti 2:2).

### **Teaching Shows How to Live**

Paul's letters often move directly from doctrine to teaching about the Christian lifestyle. This reflects the fact that, throughout the NT, ethical teaching is always based on the facts of the gospel.

Believers, Paul says, *"must no longer live as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their thinking"* (Eph 4:17). They had already been taught, perhaps verbally, what he now puts in writing. *"You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self. . . and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness"* (vv. 22-24).

The new self is imparted to believers when they are born again, but to live it out demands that we both put off the old, and put on the new. This is the focus of a great deal of NT teaching. Its passion is not merely to inform, but to change lives. Paul said that, for him, the task was so intense that it felt like being a woman in labour. "*I am again in the pains of childbirth until Christ is formed in you*" (Gal 4:19).

In the NT there is teaching about meat offered to idols, about the attitude of slaves to their masters, and even about hairstyles. We may not be dealing with exactly these issues, but each culture, and each generation of believers, will face its own particular challenges. Does God have anything to say to those who are being sexually exploited? Or to those living in fear for their lives, or who are stricken with AIDS? What about ancestor cults, or female circumcision, or the exploitation of children?

Believers need to hear what God has to say to them. As in the NT period, the task for every church is to examine its own social and cultural traditions, and then use the principles of Christian living given in Scripture to develop clear teaching that shows what needs to be "put off" and what needs to be "put on."

### **Needed—Bible Teachers**

The Scriptures are clearly given to play a central role in the life of every church. They are to be read, studied, learned and obeyed. Consistent, foundational teaching is the key to the emergence of a living theology that will be owned by the new church. Although the church planter will doubtless lay biblical foundations in the early stages of church planting, the major responsibility must be in the hands of the church itself from the earliest possible moment.

New believers must discover God's mind for themselves concerning the multitude of cultural questions that they will need to confront. Without such a living, practical theology the church will either die, or remain marked as a foreign institution with little, if any, transforming impact on the surrounding culture.

It is not enough simply to train evangelists if we want to establish a strong church. The need for good local Bible teachers

has to be recognised from the beginning, and set before the church from the earliest possible moment.

Of course, any training project can only be tackled in stages, and the details will vary enormously. Four basic truths, however, need to be borne in mind.

The first is that learning is a progressive activity which depends upon good foundations. This means that we have to begin at the beginning, with basic Bible teaching that is both broad and yet suited to the pace of the learners.

The second thing we need to keep in mind is that learning is achieved best through regular repetition, whether of facts or activities. This means that our training plan will likely include many short-term sessions rather than one long period or training which is likely to isolate the student from his or her environment. Short training courses or workshops also make it possible for the student to begin, almost immediately, to pass on to others what he or she has learned.

Third, effective training in spiritual development will almost always involve close personal contact with the trainer. We sometimes use the word discipling for this kind of mentoring, probably because it reminds us of how Jesus spent three years in daily close contact with the Twelve. The reality is that spiritual truth is more often "caught" than "taught." As we have noted in an earlier chapter, the first responsibility of leadership is to model where we want others to follow.

The fourth thing to remember is that there is a special gift of teaching not given to all. But we can have faith that it will be given to some. Part of our responsibility as church planters is to seek out those whom God may be calling to such a teaching/training role, and then to do everything possible to help them get the training they need. This may well mean a serious financial investment over a long period, and which is likely to stretch our faith. The question we need to ask is: Do I really believe God plans to establish his church in this place? If your answer is "Yes," then you can trust him to raise up both leaders and teachers.

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## For Reflection and Discussion

1. What foundational topics are being taught to new believers?
2. How do we ensure that all the major Christian truths and all sections of the Bible are covered in the teaching received?
3. What forms of communication are used by these people that might also be used effectively for Bible teaching? (Songs, repetition, drama, proverbs, discussions...)
4. How can we develop a "culture of obedience" in relation to the word of God?
5. How are local Bible teachers being developed?
6. What common concerns are found in this culture which we have not yet addressed in the light of Scripture?

## Principle 20

### Mission

*Believers are eager to share in the task of taking the gospel beyond their borders to those who have not heard*

The planting of a church should never be seen as the final goal of our ministry. God's plan is that every community of believers should become a centre from which the gospel will radiate. Paul says of the Thessalonians: "*The Lord's message rang out from you*" (1Th 1:8).

A church's first responsibility is to those who share their language and culture, but we can also expect God to call some to take the gospel beyond those borders. This is one reason why the Holy Spirit was sent. "*You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem. . .and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth*" (Ac 1:8). Who is to say that a church is inadequate for the task? The essential equipping is not human skill or financial resources, it is the Holy Spirit.

When we thought about evangelism earlier in the chapter, our focus was on local witness. Now we are looking at the responsibility of local churches to become involved in the task of planting churches beyond their own cultural borders, where the gospel is not yet known. These people might be far away, but they may also be in the next *barrio*. In many parts of the world, immigration has brought the "ends of the earth" right onto our doorsteps.

What are the foundations for this missionary task? We will look at four perspectives that provided the basis for missions in the NT: the authority of mission, the certainty of mission, the distinctive nature of mission, and the cost of mission. (I use "mission" of the task in general, and "missions" when thinking about specific outreach programmes).

#### *The Authority of Mission*

There can be no greater authority than that of the risen Lord

Jesus. "*All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations*" (Mt 28:18-19). This commission is given, not simply to the apostles gathered around Jesus there in Galilee, but to the whole church of which they were the representatives. What we call the Great Commission is a mandate for all churches until Jesus comes again.

But obviously, not everyone is called to leave their home country. The mandate is implemented through the ministry of the Holy Spirit within the local church as he directs as to who should go. "*While they were worshipping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, 'Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them'*" (Ac 13:2).

Anyone who plans to take the gospel to spiritually dark places must know that they go with the authority of God behind them, because the authority that commissions also equips. "*As the Father has sent me, I am sending you. And with that he breathed on them and said, 'Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven.'*" (Jn 20: 21-23).

The Holy Spirit gives authority to announce the gospel of forgiveness, and also the warning of judgment for those who refuse it. "*To the one we are the smell of death; to the other, the fragrance of life*" (2Co 2:16). The message we bring has life and death consequences. The gospel makes plain to all people that there is no forgiveness of sins apart from the atoning blood of the One who sends us.

### *The Certainty of Mission*

When Peter in Jerusalem witnessed the conversion of three thousand people from "*every nation under heaven*" (Ac 2:5), he knew he was seeing a fulfilment of God's promise to Abraham: "*Through your offspring all peoples on earth will be blessed*" (Ac 3:25).

Paul saw his own ministry in the same light. "*[T]hose who believe are children of Abraham. The Scripture. . .announced the gospel in advance to Abraham: 'All nations will be blessed through you'*" (Gal 3:7-8).

To whatever people God sends his servants, they go knowing that he has already promised to bless them. Their confidence is not only in the promises given to Abraham but equally in the

prophetic visions given to John. He hears the worshippers in heaven singing a new song to the Lamb: "*You are worthy. . . because with your blood you purchased men for God from every tribe and language and people and nation*" (Rev 5:9-10).

The soil may seem hard and unresponsive, but wherever the seed is sown, God promises a harvest. Some of God's servants, like Abraham, may see it only by faith. But even though harvest may be delayed, the promise will certainly be fulfilled.

*Those who sow in tears will reap with songs of joy.  
He who goes out weeping, carrying seed to sow,  
will return with songs of joy, carrying sheaves with him*  
(Ps 126:5-6).

This is the certainty of mission.

### *The Distinctive Nature of Mission*

The task of cross-cultural missions is a special task. In contrast to the nurturing and maturing responsibilities of the local church towards its own members, the focus of the missionary team in the NT is strictly others-oriented—preaching the gospel and establishing churches.

The body metaphor, applied so often by Paul to the church, is never used of the missionary band. Mission in the NT is consistently referred to as the "work" and has the primary purpose of extending the frontiers of the church. The prompting that came to the church in Antioch may not have been very welcome, but it was clear. "*Set apart Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them*" (Ac 13:2). Later, Mark was left behind by Paul because he "*had not continued with them in the work*" (Ac 15:38). The language clearly underlines both the distinctive nature of the church planting team as well as the responsibility of churches to set apart those whom God calls.

From the beginning, the missionary band functioned as a team, with their own leadership and regularly adding new members from other local churches. The result was an amazing extension of the church's frontiers. Their guidance came both from the Holy Spirit and from mutual consultation. "*After Paul*

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*had seen the vision, we got ready at once to leave for Macedonia, concluding that God had called us" (Ac 16:10).*

In spite of their autonomy the team clearly remained a vital part of the church, even though they did not function as a local church. As "church in mission" they became the key to the spread of the gospel. We might even say that mission teams are like the legs of the body of Christ. Without the body the legs cannot exist, but without legs the body will not go very far. The church needs feet to carry the faith. *"How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news" (Ro 10:15).*

### *The Cost of Mission*

Paul knew that his authority came directly from Christ. *"[H]e has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors" (2Co 5:19-20).* For this privilege, he was prepared to become *"an ambassador in chains" (Eph 6:20).*

Paul knew that, in representing the One who was crucified, his life too must become an offering for the sake of others. *"We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body. . . So then, death is at work in us, but life is at work in you" (2Co 4:10, 12).* He understood the principle of the harvest. *"Unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds" (Jn 12:24).*

Yet throughout his ministry, Paul found himself being constantly renewed by keeping his eyes on eternity and the glory that awaited him. *"Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen" (2Co 4:16-18).*

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## For Reflection and Discussion

1. To what extent have believers caught the vision of bringing the gospel to those beyond their borders?
2. How could we communicate such a vision?
3. To whom might a team of believers go with the gospel?
4. What preparation would be needed? Who might mentor them?
5. How will they support themselves?

## THE MESSAGE ROOM—SUMMARY CHART

ASPECT	PRINCIPLE	NEW TESTAMENT IMAGES	TEACHING
<b>16</b> EVANGELISM Proclaiming the Message	Believers take every opportunity to share the gospel with those around them	<i>Preaching the good news to all Mk 16:15</i> <i>Compelled by Christ's love 2Co 5:14</i> <i>Turned from darkness to light Ac 26:18</i> <i>Harvesting the crop for eternal life Jn 4:36</i>	Evangelism means: Proclaiming the gospel Sharing in Christ's compassion Confronting the powers of darkness Reaping the Lord's harvest
<b>17</b> SIGNS & WONDERS Confirming the Message	The power of God confirms the truth of the gospel with signs and wonders	<i>The power of signs and miracles Ro 15:19</i> <i>The Lord confirming the message Ac 14:3</i> <i>Faith resting on God's power 1Co 2:5</i> <i>Things that mark an apostle 2Co 12:12</i>	Signs are given: To further the gospel To confirm the message To strengthen the faith of believers To authenticate the messengers
<b>18</b> CHRIST-LIKE LIVING Revealing the Message	Believers' lives are a living testimony to the truth of the gospel	<i>Disciples Jn 15:16</i> <i>Followers of the Way Ac 24:14</i> <i>Christians Ac 11:26</i> <i>Living Letters 2Co 3:3</i> <i>Children of God Jn 1:12</i>	Learning to obey Refusing to turn back Suffering scorn for the Name Commending the gospel Bearing his likeness
<b>19</b> BIBLE TEACHING Explaining the Message	Believers are being spiritually fed through systematic Bible teaching and are being shown how to apply its teaching to their everyday lives	<i>The truth that is in Jesus Eph 4:21</i> <i>The foundation which is Jesus 1Co 3:11</i> <i>Built up in the faith Eph 4:12-13</i> <i>Taught to put on the new self Eph 4:24</i>	Teaching: Presents the truth Lays foundations Builds faith Shows how to live
<b>20</b> MISSION Crossing Barriers with the Message	Believers are eager to share in the task of taking the gospel beyond their borders to those who have not heard	<i>"Make disciples of all nations" Mt 28:19</i> <i>All peoples will be blessed Ac 3:25</i> <i>The feet that bring good news Ro 10:15</i> <i>An ambassador in chains Eph 6:20</i>	The authority of mission The certainty of mission The distinctive nature of mission The cost of mission



# 7

## THE SERVICE ROOM

*You have heard that it was said,  
'Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.'*

*But I tell you: Love your enemies and  
pray for those who persecute you,  
that you may be sons of your Father in heaven.*

Mt 5:43-45



**W**e come now to the last of the three great tasks of the church, that of being God's servant in the world. In the two previous chapters we have looked at what it means for the church to be both a worshipping community and a message-bearer to the world. Now we turn to consider how the church must also fulfil Jesus' command to love our neighbours as ourselves.

The responsibility of being God's servant in the world has, until recent years, often been neglected by evangelicals. Yet the Scriptures make it very clear that the church is not only called to proclaim the Good News, but also to be God's servant in the world—to express his love and to display his righteousness, in the midst of a suffering, fallen world.

Scripture leaves us in no doubt that we are to be *in* the world, serving its needs, and yet not *of* the world by adopting its values. The question that every church has to wrestle with is—How?

- How does God intend the church to respond to those who oppose her?
- How can we begin to bring relief to the millions who cry out in their suffering?
- How is the church to act when surrounded by poverty or family breakdown?
- How can the people of God honour those in authority but avoid the corruption that they so often represent?

- How are we to show forth the radical nature of the kingdom of God in our lives?

## A Question for the Church

The question facing us is not whether we, as foreign workers, ought to get involved in social issues. Rather, we are thinking about the foundation plans for the *church*. Although the church planter may well need to take a lead in raising such issues and in teaching the principles found in Scripture, it must be the local believers, rooted in the local situation, who take the lead in whatever decisions are made. This is because they are the ones who will primarily bear the consequences, either good or bad.

Even here a distinction may need to be made. For example, many churches decide *as churches* not to become politically involved. But this may not mean that individual members are barred from taking part in politics, or being involved in social issues, as citizens of their country. The important thing is that questions about social responsibility be raised and examined in the light of Scripture. Local believers should be asking themselves—how can we express our faith in a way that will bring healing and wholeness to this community?

## A Positive View of Things

Perhaps we will be surprised to find that, from a biblical viewpoint, the church's involvement in the world is almost totally positive. The church is to be a beacon, shining light into the darkness. It is not only to be a herald of the kingdom in its proclamation, but also to be a demonstration of the power of that kingdom by ministering to those in need, and by upholding justice.

Of course, there is also the negative side. The gospel message includes a "no" as well as a "yes." We are to be separated from evil. We are involved in a cosmic struggle against the powers of darkness that can have very real, earth-shaking manifestations. But the biblical approach is not to withdraw into some kind of exclusive club but, just like salt and light, the church is to be an agent of transformation.

## Powers of Evil

Loving our neighbours will certainly mean telling them about the Lord who died for them. But we cannot stop there and—more often than not—we cannot *begin* there either, for we live in a broken, suffering world. Around three-quarters of the world's population are seeking to survive without adequate food, clothing or shelter. Whole nations are being decimated by AIDS. Millions of children live on danger-filled streets. Terrorism seems unstoppable. . .and so we could go on.

The reality is that "*the whole world is under the control of the evil one*" (1Jn 5:19). What we are seeing is increasing evidence of the satanic forces of evil that hold the world in their grip. Those who carry the gospel to the dark places of the earth quickly discover that the forces that oppose them have power to enslave humanity in a way that makes human efforts seem futile. This is how two inner-city workers describe their reaction:

It will not take long to become aware of a depth of evil we, perhaps, have not encountered before. . .Eventually there comes a time of confrontation with evil, of something so menacing, horrifying and bone-chilling that we dare speak of it only under the protection of the cross of Jesus. . .There exists a dimension [of evil] in the city far greater than human sin can explain (Van Engen & Tiersma, 1994:20-21).

The simple truth is that we are powerless to change anything by ourselves. The problems are too vast, and too deeply rooted. Our strength and our resources are too small. Only when we are convinced of this are we ready to begin: when we know that the battle is really not ours at all, but God's.

The forces that degrade the human spirit are set not only against us, but against the Creator of all life. As redeemed children of God we find ourselves caught up in the spiritual conflict that has raged since the Garden of Eden, and which will end only when Jesus comes again to judge the living and the dead, and when Satan will be finally destroyed.

## Prophets, Priests and Kings

How then are we to take part in this battle? What does it mean

to have "*weapons of righteousness in the right hand and in the left*" (2Co 6:7)? How are we to love those who, for the most part, are in rebellion against God?

To understand our present task it will be helpful to take a careful look at how God has already worked to bring redemption to the world. In the OT, we see God using the three offices of prophet, priest, and king to fashion Israel into a servant nation. When Jesus came, it was as Prophet, Priest, and King that he brought salvation to the world.

I believe that the ministry of the church in the world today is best understood as a continuation of this same three-fold ministry of Jesus. Not only is it reflected in the biblical record, but understanding our ministry in these terms reinforces the truth that wherever we see healing or redemption, we are seeing God at work. In addition, such a framework provides the basis for a comprehensive outline of our servant role in the world.

We will look at each of these ministries in turn, before adding a fourth responsibility that is not included in the other three—that of stewardship.

## Principle 21

### A Prophetic Role

*As representatives of the kingdom, believers serve as a restraint of evil and, by their lives and witness, declare God's judgment on all sin*

I am not here dealing with the gift of prophecy within the church. Scripture certainly shows this to be an important means by which God, at times, speaks to us in a very contextual way. Here, however, we are thinking about the prophetic role of the church in relation to the world. We want to understand how God is speaking to the world about sin and righteousness and coming judgment. Yes, we are to proclaim the gospel, but in addition to our verbal testimony, God is also using the church to confront the world with the reality of his coming kingdom.

In acknowledging Jesus as Lord, the church provides the world with a preview of his reign. The role of believers is to be a public demonstration of righteousness, and a witness to the reality of his presence. Most often this witness is shown by the integrity of our lives, and by our concern for the needs of those around us. But this does not mean that we are to remain silent and without influence in society.

Christianity is not just a matter of private belief. If it had been simply a matter of personal, inward faith, the early church would never have faced the opposition of the Roman Empire. Believers were forced underground into the catacombs precisely because they refused to follow the cult of emperor-worship, and came to be seen as a threat to the stability of the empire.

When Jesus tells his disciples that they are like salt and light in the world he is describing the kind of influence that is totally transforming. In relation to the world, the Scriptures show that the church is to be both a restraint of evil, and a positive witness to the present reality of the kingdom. It is this impact that I am calling the prophetic role of the church.

The NT describes four key ways in which this ministry is fulfilled by the church.

- By our submission to authorities
- By our prayers
- By our testimony
- By our righteous living

### ***We Uphold Justice by Our Submission to Authorities***

Paul called on believers to obey the civil law even in Rome, which was hardly a model of social justice. "*Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities. . . The authorities that exist have been established by God*" (Ro 13:1). Paul spells out the very practical implications of this rule. "*This is also why you pay taxes*" (v. 6).

Nevertheless, where believers are called to deny the truth of the gospel or not to speak of it, the NT believers responded with what we now call "civil disobedience." "*Judge for yourselves whether it is right in God's sight to obey you rather than God. For we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard*" (Ac 4:19-20). If we decide to disobey the authority over us, we must accept whatever penalties are imposed on us. It may mean that we suffer, but Peter sees this in itself as a powerful form of testimony. "*If you are insulted because of the name of Christ, you are blessed, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you*" (1Pe 4:14).

Jesus once used a fascinating combination of animal images to teach some important principles about how we are to behave in hostile environments. Before sending out his disciples to preach, he told them, "*I am sending you out like sheep among wolves. Therefore be as shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves*" (Mt 10:16). He is describing here the three characteristics he expects of us when we face opposition or rejection. He knows that he is sending us out like sheep among wolves, but we are not to retaliate. Instead, we are to be shrewd like snakes; we are to keep a low profile. And in character we are to be innocent as doves; the purity of our lives must be seen by all.

- Sheep don't fight
- Snakes keep out of sight
- Doves wear white

### ***We Restrain Injustice by Our Prayers***

The church is called to both proclaim God's righteousness and act as a restraint of the evil that is in the world. The primary way in which we are to struggle against injustice, and every other kind of evil, is by our prayers. Paul urges that "*requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made. . . for kings and all those in authority*" (1Ti 2:1-2). We can pray for integrity in our leaders; that they will work to uphold justice, and provide help to the needy. We can ask for just laws to be enacted, and unjust laws to be removed. We can pray that the gospel may be freely proclaimed.

But behind the evil we see in the world, we recognise another authority at work. Paul describes Satan as "*the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient*" (Eph 2:2). Therefore, while we pray for earthly leaders, we must also stand against the invisible rulers in the heavenly realms. "*[T]ake your stand against the devil's schemes. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the powers of this dark world*" (Eph 6:12). The real battle we fight is not political but spiritual.

This battle is not ours but God's. If we are to be involved we must "*be strong in the Lord and. . . put on the full armour of God*" (vv. 10-11). Instead of the lies, wickedness and violence that characterise our world, our lives will be marked by truth, righteousness and peace (vv. 14-15). The character of our lives, as well as our faith, become the weapons God uses to break down the strongholds of darkness. "*The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds*" (2Co 10:4).

### ***We Challenge Injustice by Our Testimony***

Before Jesus left his disciples he told them that, when the Counsellor comes, "*he will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin*" (Jn 16:8). This work of the Holy Spirit was to be the direct result of his coming into their lives. The conviction of guilt was to come through the lives and testimony of the disciples. People would become guilty of sin because of their refusal to believe in Jesus; in other words, because they rejected the testimony of the disciples.

As the sword of the Spirit, our preaching of the gospel has two edges. It is both God's "Yes" to all who come to Christ in repentance and faith, and God's "No" to all who refuse to believe. As well as bringing the Good News of salvation, we are also to announce the awful consequences of persisting in sin. The church is God's instrument to bring conviction to the world "*in regard to judgment, because the prince of this world now stands condemned*" (Jn 16:11). In the message of the cross we are declaring God's judgment on sin, a judgment that has already begun with the defeat of Satan in the resurrection.

On one occasion, during a period of military rule, my vehicle was commandeered by the army and I found myself sitting next to a senior military officer for several hours as we ferried supplies back and forth.

I had heard that "enemies of the State" were to be brought to the local football stadium for trial. The plan was to hold the public hearings in the mornings, followed by summary executions in the afternoons. The practice had already begun in the nation's capital, and thousands were being drawn to the spectacle. I realised that here was a God-given opportunity to try to say something.

Respectfully I asked whether, as a foreign guest in the country, I might be allowed to express my opinion. Permission was given and I was able to share my concern over the possible disastrous consequences of creating a public lust for blood such as had happened elsewhere in Africa. I spoke about the people's love for peace and hoped it would not be lost. The officer thanked me and said that he would pass on my comments to the chiefs of staff that afternoon. Soon after I was free to go.

I don't know what took place in those discussions but, in the event, the plans were dropped and no public executions took place in our city. How thankful I am to this day for that opportunity to speak up for justice.

### ***We Rebuke Injustice by Our Righteous Lives***

Not only has the Spirit been sent to reveal the world's sin of unbelief, but also to convict the world in regard to righteousness. "*[H]e will convict the world. . .in regard to righteousness, because I am going to the Father, where you can see me no longer*" (Jn

16:8, 10). While he was on earth, Jesus provided a living demonstration of God's righteousness, but he was to leave, and the world would see him no longer. However, by the sending of the Spirit this ministry would continue. Although the world no longer sees Jesus, they see his disciples. It is through them that the world is convicted of righteousness.

The greatest challenge to darkness is the presence of light. As God's children, living in a dark world, we are to "*live as children of light*" (Eph 5:8). Our lives must be able to stand up to the closest scrutiny if they are to be a rebuke to sin. "*Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather expose them. . . everything exposed by the light becomes visible, for it is light that makes everything visible*" (vv. 11-14). This kind of living is only possible when we are filled with the Spirit (v. 18), and remain sensitive and obedient to his promptings.

Being prophetic people means being under God's rule in a world that rejects him. It is to be God's voice speaking to those who are "*dead in. . . transgressions and sins*" (Eph 2:1). It means being a living demonstration of God's glorious plan of redemption, not only to those on earth, but to every created being. "*His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms*" (Eph 3:10).

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## For Reflection and Discussion

1. How do the three word pictures that Jesus used in Matthew 10:16 help us in knowing how to act in relation to those who are hostile?
2. How well are we fulfilling Paul's instruction to pray for those in authority over us? How might church members be helped to pray more specifically?
3. To what extent are believers aware that they are involved in a spiritual battle? How familiar are they with the armour we need to put on, and the weapons we must use?
4. In what ways do we see God using our lives to convict the world of sin or righteousness? How might our witness become more powerful?

## Principle 22

### A Priestly Role

*As instruments of the kingdom, believers offer loving service to those in need*

Peter describes the church as "*a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ*" (1Pe 2:5). Jesus, as Priest and King, has chosen his church to share in both his priesthood and his kingdom. The worship team in heaven praises the Lamb for this dual ministry being exercised by the whole church throughout the world. "*[Y]ou purchased men for God from every tribe and language and people and nation. You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God and they will reign on the earth*" (Rev 5:9-10). As God's children we are to both reign and serve.

The role of the priest is to offer sacrifices. First, we are to offer ourselves as "*living sacrifices*" (Ro 12:1). Then we are to offer our praises and our prayers. "*The smoke of the incense, together with the prayers of all the saints, went up before God*" (Rev 8:4). But in addition to these offerings, our priestly role includes our ministry to those in need. "*Do not forget to do good and to share with others, for with such sacrifices God is pleased*" (Heb 13:16). It is this last responsibility that we want to consider here.

The NT helps us understand the nature of this priestly ministry by describing the church in four different ways:

- As keepers of the royal law
- As good Samaritans
- As members of God's flock
- As God's workmanship

#### *Keepers of the Royal Law*

To care for the needs of those who are hurting is a matter of obedience. When Jesus was asked which was the greatest commandment he mentioned two. "*'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind' . . . And the*

*second is like it: 'Love your neighbour as yourself'" (Mt 22:37-39).* The value of our obedience to the second commandment is always in proportion to our obedience of the first. The spiritual impact of our service to others will be determined by the measure in which we first love God.

Jesus was quoting from Leviticus 19:18, a verse that is quoted no fewer than seven times in the NT. James refers to it as "*the royal law found in Scripture*" (Jas 2:8). It is the royal law because it is the law of the kingdom, coming from the King himself.

To reach out in God's name to those who suffer may appear, in the eyes of the world, to be a fruitless task. But for us it is a question of obedience. "*Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. . . Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world*" (Jas 1:22, 27).

### ***The Good Samaritan***

Jesus told this well-known story (found in Luke 10:25-37) as an illustration of what loving our neighbour really means. It was prompted by someone whose chief concern was to figure out the smallest details of the law. What exactly did God demand? But in Jesus' story, it was not a question of obedience, but of compassion: "*when he saw him he took pity on him*" (v. 33). In rescuing a dying man the Samaritan revealed the very heart of God, the One who is "*full of compassion and mercy*" (Jas 5:11). And the story ends with that uncomfortable challenge: "*Go and do likewise*" (Lk 10:37).

Naturally, we wonder if this is realistic in today's world? The needs are just too great. However, we need to see how the actions of the Samaritan, although costly, were both specific and limited. He did what he could, and then moved on. He was not trying to meet the needs of every sufferer, but only the one that circumstances brought before him. Perhaps this is an indication that we should expect God to show us those specific needs that he wants to meet through us.

Whatever the case, the main point of the story is clear. Jesus is shifting the attention of the Jewish scholar away from the

minutiae of religious duties to the central issue of his relationship with God. God calls us first to love him with our whole being. Then, as we give ourselves fully to him, we discover that "*God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us*" (Ro 5:5). Our love for God enables God's love to flow through us to others. This is the love that never fails, is never exhausted. It is the love that always carries with it a ministry of life.

Kungpara was an evangelist. I could see that the first time I met him, preaching in the crowded, noisy market, with his little book held upside down, and his message a strange mix of stories that I scarcely recognised as coming from the Bible. I was intrigued. When he had finished, I began talking with him and discovered he was just six weeks old as a Christian. He told me how he had been led to the Lord by an African pastor while on a visit to Ghana. The pastor took him to his home and taught him how to pray. Neither of them could read. After several weeks, God spoke to him, telling him to come back to his own people and preach the good news about Jesus. I was awed by the thought that God had sent me a co-worker from the very people to whom I had been called. For the next seven years he preached, but never won a convert. Then one day he came on his bike, his face shining with excitement. He had won his first convert! Of course I wanted to meet him.

I found a sick man so weak he could hardly stand, blind and with saliva dripping from his mouth. His wife had refused to wash his sores because they smelt so bad. And yet Kungpara had come every day to wash his sores with water and bind them up with leaves, while he told him of the love of God. "If that is God's love," he said, "I want to know him too."

(For the rest of this convert's story and what happened when he died, see page 69).

### *Members of God's Flock*

Jesus' story of the sheep and goats in Matthew 25 is easily misunderstood. "*Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance. . . For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink. . .*" (Mt 25:34-35). At first reading it seems to be about getting into heaven by

doing good deeds.

However, this is actually a story about how to recognise sheep. The identity of God's own is revealed by their actions. Jesus was addressing those who saw themselves as God's chosen people, to the exclusion of everyone else. God was their Shepherd and King because they were Jews.

Jesus changes the whole picture. "*All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats*" (v. 32). In every nation, some will show themselves to be sheep and others to be goats. The sheep will inherit the eternal kingdom; the goats go into eternal fire.

But how are sheep to be recognised? By their compassion for those in need. Practical service does not make goats into sheep; it shows who are already sheep. Those who ignore the needs of others are probably goats. Paul preached the same message. "*I preached that they should repent and turn to God and prove their repentance by their deeds*" (Ac 26:20). Salvation is proved by our actions.

Our service does not make us priests. We serve because he who "*freed us from our sins by his blood. . . has made us to be a kingdom and priests*" (Rev 1:5-6). The priestly ministry of caring is a revelation of our identity.

### ***God's Workmanship***

The priestly ministry of caring service is not only a demonstration of obedience, of compassion, and of our identity; it is also a means by which God displays his gracious character to the world. God has made known his deity and power through everything he has created. "*For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made*" (Ro 1:20).

But now, in the church, the world sees a "*new creation*" (2Co 5:17) through which God's character may be more clearly understood. "*For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do*" (Eph 2:10). It is not that our good works earn salvation; they are the display of God's work in us, the fruit of our salvation.

In contrast to Israel, whom the OT prophets saw as a vine producing bad fruit (see for example Isaiah 5:1-7), Jesus came as the true Vine whose branches would bear good fruit. *"I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing"* (Jn 15:5). The true nature of the vine is recognised by the fruit it bears. In ministering to the needs of others we reveal the One who *"loved us and gave himself up for us"* (Eph 5:2).

Note that God has already prepared in advance the particular work he has for us to do. The one task of the branches is to remain in the vine, revealing God's grace by *"bearing fruit in every good work"* (Col 1:10). By doing good works we begin to fulfil the purpose for which we have been born again.

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### **For Reflection and Discussion**

1. How well is the link between loving God and loving our neighbour understood? How can we help believers to develop their love for others?
2. What opportunities are there for us to demonstrate the love of God to those in need?
3. If God's children are to be known only by the fact that they care for the needy how many of us would qualify?
4. How accurately do our actions reflect God's character to those around us? What lessons from the Vine do we need to learn (or re-learn)?

## Principle 23

### A Kingly Role

*As heirs of the kingdom, believers share in Christ's victory over every form of evil*

The NT declares of the redeemed: "You have made them to be a kingdom. . .and they will reign on the earth" (Rev 5:10). Paul also affirms that we are to "reign in life" (Ro 5:17). Some take such statements to mean that, as Christians, we ought to live as kings; that we should experience material prosperity, and exercise authority over people and events. But this is not the teaching of the NT. Nor was it the experience of the early church.

Paul does, indeed, say that God has "raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus" (Eph 2:6). But this clearly does not mean that we are already in heaven; rather that, because Christ is glorified and we are incorporated into him, we have been rescued from the powers of darkness, and heaven has now become our true home.

In what sense, then, are we to reign on earth? Who, or what, are we to reign over? Jesus' statement that, "My kingdom is not of this world" (Jn 18:36) makes it clear that his kingdom is not based on this world's values. Our rule is not to be over other people, as if Christ has somehow called us to be in charge of the world. The NT teaching is that, in being united to Christ, we are to share in his victory over every form of evil—over the world, the flesh and the devil. To reign in life means living victoriously.

We will look at the four qualities the NT identifies as belonging to those who share in Christ's reign.

- Goodness
- Faith
- Courage
- Spiritual authority

We find that these are the very characteristics that mark the lives of all those most used by God to extend his kingdom on

earth. Jesus described them as "the sons of the kingdom" that God is sowing throughout the world, and through whom will come the harvest at the end of the age. *"The field is the world, and the good seed stands for the sons of the kingdom. . . The harvest is the end of the age. . . The Son of man will send out his angels, and they will weed out of his kingdom everything that causes sin and all who do evil. . . Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father"* (Mt 13:38-43).

### **Goodness**

"Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good" (Ro 12:21). To be good when surrounded by goodness is fairly straightforward. The challenge, of course, is to be good in the face of evil, especially when that evil is specifically aimed in our direction. But whenever we do return good for evil, the evil loses its power.

The essential thing about God's goodness is that it is active, not passive. *"God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us"* (Ro 5:8). Goodness is the way love works out in practical reality. It seeks the good of others, even those who do us wrong. *"Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous"* (Mt 5:44-45).

In the mid-nineties, an angry mob of followers of the majority faith in one Asian country began to systematically torch and destroy church buildings, and were threatening the lives of hundreds of believers. They came from a people group that had resisted the Gospel over many years. Christians were being forced to flee for their lives as mob violence took over. How were the believers to respond?

Christians around the world heard of what was happening, and began to pray for their protection. But what happened amazed even those of us who prayed for them. Instead of reacting with violence, or retreating in fear, the local churches got together and launched a "Love the M." initiative. Instead of fleeing, they stood before their attackers with large banners that proclaimed God's love for them. The result was that a large number of that people group turned to Christ, includ-

ing some of the very ones who had burned down the church buildings.

### *Faith*

*"This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith. Who is it that overcomes the world? Only he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God"* (1Jn 5:4). John's confidence is based on two great truths. The first is his conviction that Christ has already gained the victory on our behalf. He could never forget the words Jesus spoke just before he went to the cross: *"In the world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world"* (Jn 16:33).

In addition, John knows that the Spirit of Jesus lives within every believer. *"You, dear children, are from God and have overcome them, because the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world"* (1Jn 4:4). The world that is in view here is not the natural world, or simply the world of human beings. It is the world that is dominated by godless values and behaviour—the world system that is under the control of Satan. It is this world that we are to overcome.

By the power of the new birth we *"escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires"* (2Pe 1:4). We have received the gift of righteousness so that we might *"reign in life through. . . Jesus Christ"* (Ro 5:17). Our service to the world is to provide a living demonstration of the power of this life. We are to *"say 'No' to ungodliness and worldly passions, and live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age"* (Tit 2:12). This is the life of faith to which we are called.

### *Courage*

The NT presents us with the concept of victory on two levels. On the one hand there is the prospect of the final victory at the end of the age when even death itself will be destroyed. *"[T]hen the saying that is written will come true: 'Death has been swallowed up in victory'"* (1Co 15:54).

But much more attention is given in the NT to God's children being victorious in the midst of conflict. Reigning with Christ in eternity is seen as a result of overcoming now in the face of suffering. In every one of Jesus' seven letters to the churches in Asia, heavenly blessings are promised *"to him who*

*overcomes" (see Rev 3:21).*

Overcoming demands courage. After Pentecost, when persecution arose, the response of the believers was not to pray for protection, but for boldness. *"Now, Lord, consider their threats and enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness"* (Ac 4:29). The common response, when faced by this kind of courage is hardly surprising. *"No one else dared join them"* (Ac 5:13).

After a long list of the sufferings he had faced, Paul could still say, *"in all these things we are more than conquerors"* (Ro 8:37). Such courage, that is willing to risk life itself, comes from his awareness of the victory already won on the cross, which guarantees the final outcome. *"But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ"* (1Co 15:57).

Courage is a mark of all the redeemed who face the power of Satan and overcome. *"They overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony; they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death"* (Rev 12:11).

### ***Spiritual Authority***

In going into the world to offer service in Christ's name we will inevitably come face to face with *"the powers of this dark world"* (Eph 6:12). Confronted by cruelty and injustice, by suffering and despair, we quickly recognise that invisible powers are at work controlling not only individual lives but even the structures of society. We are witnessing the work of Satan, the thief, who *"comes only to steal and kill and destroy"* (Jn 10:10).

Our presence, therefore, represents a real threat to these spiritual powers, and we become vulnerable to their attacks unless we know our authority in Christ. When Paul says that *"God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms"* (Eph 2:6), he is not merely using a past tense to describe our future state; he is describing the authority that has now been given to us in Christ.

Serving in his name, we carry his authority. In his name we have both spiritual protection and the promise of victory over every power that opposes his kingdom. *"The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds"* (2Co 10:4).

The authority and power do not reside in us. "*[A]part from me you can do nothing*" (Jn 15:5). Spiritual authority is found only in those who have come under divine authority. This was true even for Jesus throughout his earthly ministry. "*By myself I can do nothing*" (Jn 5:30). He derived all his authority from his submission to the Father.

It was the perception of this truth by a Roman centurion that so astonished Jesus. In pleading for Jesus to heal his servant he knew that all it would take was one word from Jesus. "*For I myself (Gk. I also) am a man under authority, with soldiers under me . . . I say to my servant 'Do this,' and he does it*" (Mt 8:9). He had authority only because he was under authority, and he recognised the same principle at work in the ministry of Jesus.

Spiritual authority, being totally derived, is authority without arrogance. It is through the meekness of such spiritual authority that the kingdom of God is spreading like yeast throughout the world, transforming the lives of those who receive it.

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## For Reflection and Discussion

1. What forms of evil are directed against us that we need to overcome with goodness? What practical shape might this goodness take?
2. In what sense is the life of righteousness a life of faith? What specific aspects of teaching might help this truth to become better understood?
3. What forces threaten to overcome believers? What will help them become overcomers? How clearly is the need for courage understood?
4. To whom is spiritual authority given? How well is its true source understood? In what ways do believers see it in action?

## Principle 24

### A Stewardship Role

*As partners in the kingdom, believers are ready to use their resources for the extension of God's kingdom in the world*

When we study the teaching of Jesus we are struck by how often he refers to material possessions. Teaching about the kingdom of God, Jesus warns us not to store up treasures on earth, but to lay up for ourselves treasures in heaven (Mt 6:19). The value of one's life on earth is not to be judged in terms of material possessions (Lk 12:15). Evidently a person's attitude to money or this world's goods is a measure of the depth of their discipleship.

Of course, material goods in some form or another are basic to life in this world. God has promised to provide the material needs of those who "seek first his kingdom and his righteousness" (Mt 6:33). God cares for all. "He. . .sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous" (Mt 5:45). Yet one of the greatest challenges of our world today is the ever-widening gulf between the "haves" and the "have-nots." Sin has brought inequality to such a disastrous and dangerous level that it threatens the entire world. There is, therefore, an urgent need for every one of us to check on our own attitude to possessions in the light of Scripture.

The importance of this becomes clear when we consider the impact of biblical stewardship on both our own lives and on the work of the kingdom in the world. In the NT, we find that giving is linked to several very specific outcomes.

- Giving dethrones money
- Giving reveals character
- Giving advances the work of the Lord
- Giving reaps an eternal reward

#### *Giving Dethrones Money*

From a NT perspective, holding possessions lightly is one of the

distinguishing marks of genuine faith. "No one can serve two masters. . . You cannot serve both God and Money" (Mt 6:24). Here, in personifying money, Jesus reveals that it has the potential to become a controlling force in human life.

"No. . . greedy person—such a man is an idolator—has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ" (Eph 5:5). Strong words! When money becomes our god we become slaves of our own greed, and the quickest way to dethrone the power of Money is to become a generous giver.

The same principle applies whether we have much or little. Those who have "very little" can be as much in bondage as those who have much (Lk 16:10). Similarly, the pennies of the poor are worth more in God's sight than the much bigger offerings of the rich (Mk 12:41-44). Generosity is a sign of true discipleship and needs to be taught in every church, regardless of its economic strength.

### *Giving Reveals Character*

"Whoever can be trusted with very little can also be trusted with much. . . if you have not been trustworthy in handling worldly wealth, who will trust you with true riches?" (Lk 16:10-11). How we handle worldly goods is a test of our character.

We not only have the privilege of giving but God expects it of us. Everything we think we own is really only given to us on trust. "Now it is required that those who have been given a trust must prove faithful" (1Co 4:2). In providing for our needs God is also testing our faithfulness as stewards. We can choose to serve either our own interests, or the interests of the King.

When we give out of love for him, our giving becomes an expression of his love flowing through us, a reflection of the grace of the Lord Jesus who, "though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich" (2Co 8:9).

This kind of giving includes not only our money, or even our ministry, but our whole being. "We loved you so much that we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God but our lives as well, because you had become so dear to us" (1Th 2:8). In this way we become a part of the ministry of those to whom we give, and so will share in their reward. "Anyone who receives a

*prophet because he is a prophet will receive a prophet's reward, and anyone who receives a righteous man because he is a righteous man will receive a righteous man's reward" (Mt 10:41).*

### *Giving Advances the Work of the Lord*

Paul's letters reveal a close link between giving and the advance of the Gospel. Writing to the Philippians he thanks them for their "*partnership in the gospel*" (Php 1:5). The Greek word *koinonia* used here (often translated "fellowship") makes it clear that giving is a basic part of what it means to belong to the family of God. We might almost say that sharing is a proof of membership.

Some take the view that our material possessions are so much part of the world that the less we talk about them the better. But this is not the biblical view. In the NT, to send out workers to new areas meant assisting them with their material needs. Paul shares with those in Rome his plans to go on from there to Spain. "*I hope to visit you. . . and to have you assist me on my journey there*" (Ro 15:24). Churches are encouraged both to contribute to the needs of those who travel and to provide hospitality for those who come to minister (See 3 John 6-8).

### *Giving Reaps an Eternal Reward*

*"Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth. . . But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven" (Mt 6:19-20).* The lives of kingdom-seekers are doubly marked. On the one hand they are freed from worry about their material needs, and on the other hand, by investing in the work of God, they are storing up treasure in heaven.

The law of the harvest in the natural world is a powerful illustration of a spiritual principle. "*Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously*" (2Co 9:6). The grace of giving is the pathway to multiplying blessing, both in this world and the next.

Giving does not result in poverty, but rather in an increased supply of resources. "*He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will also supply and increase your store of seed*" (2Co 9:10). God blesses those who give with greater ability to give. In addition, those who receive the gifts are also blessed and give thanks

to God.

But even that is not the end of the harvest that will come, since faithfulness in using the resources we have will reap for us an eternal reward. *"You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness"* (Mt 25:21).

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## For Reflection and Discussion

1. How clearly do we teach the responsibility of giving? How well is the need for faithful stewardship understood?
2. What special preparation is given to those responsible for handling the money or the financial affairs of the churches?
3. In what practical ways can we help believers become partners in the extension of the kingdom by their giving?
4. What opportunities are there for believers to share and hear testimonies of God's faithfulness in meeting their needs after they have given to others?

## THE SERVICE ROOM—SUMMARY CHART

ASPECT	PRINCIPLE	NEW TESTAMENT IMAGES	TEACHING
<b>21</b> A PROPHETIC ROLE	As representatives of the kingdom, believers serve as a restraint of evil and, by their lives and witness, declare God's judgment on all sin	<i>Submitting to authorities Ro 13:1</i> <i>Struggling against the powers Eph 6:12</i> <i>Convicting the world of guilt Jn 16:8</i> <i>Living as children of light Eph 5:8</i>	Upholding justice by our submission Restraining injustice by our prayers Challenging injustice by our testimony Rebuking injustice by our righteous lives
<b>22</b> A PRIESTLY ROLE	As instruments of the kingdom, believers offer loving service to those in need	<i>Keepers of the royal law Jas 2:8</i> <i>The Good Samaritan Lk 10:33</i> <i>Members of God's flock Mt 25:34</i> <i>God's workmanship Eph 2:10</i>	A manifestation of obedience A demonstration of compassion A confirmation of identity A mediation of God's grace
<b>23</b> A KINGLY ROLE	As heirs of the kingdom, believers share in Christ's victory over every form of evil	<i>Overcoming evil with good Ro 12:21</i> <i>Overcoming the world by faith 1Jn 5:4</i> <i>More than conquerors Ro 8:37</i> <i>Seated with Christ in heavenly realms Eph 2:6</i>	The kingdom is seen in our goodness The kingdom is seen in our faith The kingdom is seen in our courage The kingdom is seen in our spiritual authority
<b>24</b> A STEWARDSHIP ROLE	As partners in the kingdom, believers are ready to use their resources for the extension of God's kingdom in the world	<i>Serving God not Money Mt 6:24</i> <i>Trustworthy stewards Lk 16:10</i> <i>Partnership in the gospel Php 1:5</i> <i>Storing up treasures in heaven Mt 6:20</i>	Giving dethrones money Giving reveals character Giving advances the work of the Lord Giving reaps an eternal reward



# 8

## TURNING VISION INTO REALITY

*I will not venture to speak of anything  
except what Christ has accomplished through me  
in leading the Gentiles to obey God  
by what I have said and done  
—by the power of signs and miracles,  
through the power of the Spirit.  
So from Jerusalem all the way around to Illyricum,  
I have fully proclaimed the gospel of Christ.*

Ro 15:18-19



My main purpose in writing this book has not been to present a particular church planting strategy, but to provide a clear view of the foundations for every church in terms of NT principles—a high level view applicable to any cultural setting.

However, I want to deal with one further important aspect of church planting, and that is the role of the foreign church planter. As foreign workers we need to have a clear picture in our minds of what kind of church we trust to see established. But we also need to know what part we need to play in reaching that goal. What should be our priority tasks and when will our contribution no longer be needed?

How soon is it wise for church planters to leave the work they have initiated? We do not have a broad consensus on this yet. Some want to leave a new church plant after only a matter of weeks, while for others the time never arrives. The reality is that neither alternative seems to work well. In this final chapter we want to consider more precisely the particular tasks entrusted to the initial church planter.

It is an awesome privilege to be entrusted by God with the task of planting the church among those who have never heard the gospel. Many books and articles explain how to go about it. In the bibliography I have indicated some of the books I think you will find particularly helpful. One example is Hesselgrave's *Planting Churches Cross-Culturally* (1980, with a later revision) which suggests a ten-step approach.

1. Missionaries Commissioned
2. Audience Contacted
3. Gospel Communicated
4. Hearers Converted
5. Believers Congregated
6. Faith Confirmed
7. Leadership Consecrated
8. Believers Commended
9. Relationships Continued
10. Sending Churches Convened

These activities can all be found in Paul's ministry and the sequence presents a good comprehensive outline of what cross-cultural church planting involves. However, most church planters find that the process is not nearly as neat as this outline suggests. In practice there always seems to be a lot going on at the same time. And where the Spirit of God is at work, it seems we must be ready for the unexpected. The experience of those involved in church planting movements is that any attempt to work sequentially, delaying any step until earlier steps have been completed, actually *hinders* the movement.

## WHEN IS A CHURCH PLANTED?

How are we to know when a church is securely planted—or established? My dictionary gives the following definitions of the word "establish."

1. To cause to grow in a new place.
2. To make secure.
3. To set up an organisation.
4. To give the status of a national institution.

This seems to be a fair description of what we are after—growth, stability, structure and identity. The Five-Room Model provides a high level view of the kind of fully functioning church we all long to see. But is it the church planters' role to see it all happening? Is there a stage in the development of the church when it is "safe" to leave, confident that growth will con-

tinue without our help? Are there guidelines we can use that will help us avoid either staying too long or leaving too soon?

One way to assess the strength of a church would be to use the twenty four principles as a kind of check-list. However, the danger with this *for the church planter* is that it may give the impression that he or she cannot leave until the church matches our ideal. This is not the place to examine in detail the complex issue of mission-church relationships but we need to be clear in our minds that foundation-laying (the primary job of the church planter) means being involved in the initial stages of the work, not in giving the final coat of paint!

Our tendency is probably to stay too long, rather than to leave too soon. Our task is to lead people to depend on the Lord, not on us. We should not miss the significance of the many instances where missionaries were forced to leave an emerging church only to return, sometimes years later, to find that it had grown beyond all recognition.

If you want to know whether the church you are working with is ready to fly without outside support, you might find it helpful to ask yourself questions like:

- Have believers faced opposition and remained faithful?
- Are believers eager to share their faith?
- Are the churches (gatherings of believers) giving birth to other churches?
- Are the churches able to provide adequate nurture for new believers?
- Are the Scriptures being comprehensively taught?
- Are believers developing a variety of gifts needed in the church?
- Are there leaders able to carry the responsibility of the church?
- Have relationships begun to develop with other church fellowships?

I have found four elements that appear vital for the continued healthy growth of a church.

1. The word of God is available in the heart language of

the people.

2. Leaders are appointed to lead.
3. The church has a form of organisation suited to the local context.
4. The churches are beginning to multiply without outside help.

These requirements do not imply that the church has to be fully mature, or even that the leaders must be highly trained, before the international worker leaves. Our goal is to leave behind a church that has begun to multiply. For rapid growth this will mean a number of local churches (congregations, cells or house churches) each of which has caught a vision to reproduce itself with the shortest possible delay.

## CHURCH PLANTING MOVEMENTS

An increasing number of church planters are taking note of reports describing Church Planting Movements (CPMs) that are occurring in many parts of the world (see in particular, *Church Planting Movements*, Garrison, 2004). A CPM refers to the rapid increase of indigenous *churches planting churches* within a given people group. A study of these movements highlights the significance of all four of the elements already noted:

- the central role of the Scriptures available in the heart language
- the appointment of indigenous leadership
- a structure that is easily understood
- rapid multiplication

The organisation of these multiplying churches is not complicated, nor are the leaders highly trained. One of the keys is the rapid incorporation of new converts into the life and ministry of the church. Another is that on-the-job training is made available for church leaders. The churches themselves are, more often than not, what we would call house churches, or cells meeting in homes.

Although the term Church Planting Movement is fairly

recent, the underlying principles are not new. Roland Allen, writing in 1927, gives an incredibly similar description of church planting movements (see *The Spontaneous Expansion of the Church*). Even earlier, John Nevius, a Presbyterian missionary in China, published a booklet entitled *Planting and Development of Missionary Churches* (1885). In 1890 he was invited to teach this material to seven new missionaries who had just arrived in Korea. At the time there were only about one hundred baptised Korean believers. His principles were adopted and became the key to the amazing growth of the Korean church, to perhaps more than ten million believers today.

A significant discovery has been that churches planted by a missionary rarely multiply, while churches planted by local believers often do. The key to the rapid growth is that once churches start planting other churches the growth becomes exponential. Furthermore, this growth has often been found to include not only an increase in the number of churches, but also a deepening in the spiritual lives of believers.

For further details of what God is doing in a growing number of such movements around the world, check out the website [www.churchplantingmovements.com](http://www.churchplantingmovements.com)

## TEN KEYS TO MULTIPLYING CHURCHES

Although it is not my intention to set out a detailed strategy for church planting, the experience of those involved in CPMs has highlighted a limited number of key phases in which the expatriate church planter needs to be involved if his aim is to see a church planting movement develop.

It is important to note that while these represent typical stages in the development of the work, they should not be taken in a strictly sequential sense as, "Do step one, and only then proceed to step two." They are more cumulative than sequential, i.e. you will not give up doing something in order to begin something else, but will find you need to keep adding new tasks. For example, in church planting it is never time to drop grasping the vision God has given. We must never cease to pray and get others to pray. It may seem impossible to do everything, but

you are likely to find that as more tasks need to be done, God will be adding co-workers to share the load. This is, of course, an essential part of the process.

### ***1. Grasping the Vision***

By "vision" I mean having a clear mental a picture of what God wants to do. One of the clearest biblical examples of this is found in Acts 26:15-18. Paul's whole ministry was founded on the commission the Lord gave him on the Damascus road. Church planting was a question of obeying the vision God had given him.

Your vision may not come in quite the same way, but it is likely to include a picture of what God wants to do among the people to whom he is calling you. Unless that becomes clear, you are going to flounder in the midst of the many "good causes" that will cry out for your attention.

Ask yourself this question: "If God poured out his blessing on my life and ministry, what would the result look like in this people group fifteen years from now?"

To help you clarify your vision, gather as a team and try to answer the following questions:

- How large is the scope of the harvest field God is entrusting to us? Is it a city? Or a whole people group? Or a region?
- What do we envisage as a result of our church planting efforts? One local church? A network of churches? Or a movement of multiplying churches that will grow beyond our control?
- What type of churches will they be when first planted? Will they be churches with a building and a pastor? Or churches with lay-leadership meeting in homes? Or in a rented building? How big will they be? Who will be leading them? Will they be able to reproduce themselves without the help of the foreigner? How will they be organised?

### ***2. Gathering a Team***

What qualities are you looking for in fellow team members? Remember that heart attitudes are more important than skills,

which can often be developed on the job. Does this person share the vision? Do they have a passion for the lost? Do they have faith? Do they make a habit of prayer? Are they bold? Do others recognise in them at least one spiritual gift that can contribute to the church planting task?

### *3. Establishing a Prayer Network*

Who could you ask to start praying with you? Churches? Groups? Individuals?

Are there existing prayer networks or prayer groups that you could send prayer requests to? What printed and other materials about your vision will be most helpful in (a) stimulating prayer interest? (b) providing prayer fuel?

What are the priority topics you want people to pray about? Do you yet have a strategy for evangelism and church planting? Is there yet an indication of the responsiveness of your people group? Do you have a church planting team available? Where will you begin? How will you identify the "man of peace"?

Your Mission probably has national, and possibly global, prayer group coordinators. Find out how to make the best use of them. WEC has prayer advocacy and people partnership pamphlets available at [www.ideateam.org](http://www.ideateam.org)

### *4. Getting to Know your People Group*

The most powerful way of getting to know your people is to meet them. Nothing beats living among a people group long enough to learn their language well. Talk to all kinds of people. Put yourself in the position of learner. In particular you will want to discover:

- What are the important elements of their culture, religion and worldview?
- What are their felt needs?
- Where do they live? (Do a demographic survey)
- How many Christians are there? What churches are there?
- What resources are available to reach them with the Gospel?—radio, literacy, cassette players, TV, local evangelists, people from other places who already speak their language, etc.

- What other organisations are trying to reach them? How might we co-operate with them?

### *5. Sharing the Gospel*

Extensive and intensive evangelism is the key to church planting. If we believe God wants everyone to hear the Gospel then we need to sow abundantly, and in such a way that the whole population is covered with Gospel seed.

What methods can be used? Try to use as many as you can. Consider radio, TV, videos, cassettes, tracts, broadsheets, Bible correspondence courses, street evangelism, house to house evangelism, concerts, drama, story telling, songs, proverbs, poster-pictures, sketch board drawing.

A number of websites can be explored:

- For those working among Muslims go to <http://rmuller.com/cccpr.html>
- For the storying scarf with twenty one key Bible pictures and stories go to [www.chronologicalbiblestorying.com](http://www.chronologicalbiblestorying.com)
- For a storying training CD go to [www.siutraining.org](http://www.siutraining.org)
- For pictures to use go to [www.languagerecordings.com/products.html](http://www.languagerecordings.com/products.html)
- For tracts in many languages go to [www.tractlist.com](http://www.tractlist.com)
- To check whether the Jesus film is available in your language go to [www.jesusfilm.org/languages](http://www.jesusfilm.org/languages)
- For Gospel cassettes go to [www.globalrecordings.net](http://www.globalrecordings.net). They have over 5,000 languages!

### *6. Gathering the Interested*

The purpose of the initial gathering is not to "be the church" but to identify those interested in hearing more of the word of God. In any population there will be some hostile, others mildly interested, some not interested but not hostile, and probably a few with a spiritual hunger to know God better. Initial gatherings need to be attractive enough to make almost any but the really hostile want to come.

Research will need to show the best venue, the best time, and the best format. Who will lead? You or others? What type of programme is likely to be attractive?

What kind of filtering (follow-up) will be used? What will you offer to those who want to know more? A series of bible studies? A meal and a movie with a Christian message? A meeting to explain about the meaning of Christmas, or about Christianity in your home country?

How will you identify interested people? Hand out a booklet or tract along with a printed invitation? Invite them to stay behind and register?

Once you identify those warm towards the gospel, seek to discover if they might take on the role of "man of peace" and offer to host you and others for further instruction.

See *Church Planting Manual* by Dick Scoggins chapters 7-9 on the "man of peace." It is available at [www.dickscoggins.com/books/networks.php](http://www.dickscoggins.com/books/networks.php)

See *Indigenous Church Planting: A Practical Journey* by Charles Brock. A step-by-step guide on how to run an evangelistic gathering which leads to a church. Order from [www.churchgrowthinternational.com](http://www.churchgrowthinternational.com)

## *7. Baptising, Discipling and Empowering Believers*

Rapid church growth requires that baptism is not normally delayed once someone has made a clear declaration of faith based on several hours of clear Bible teaching about what it means to be a Christian. Exceptions to this may occur, especially where it is felt wiser to wait until a number of family members can be baptised together.

Baptism is a declaration of faith and intent to follow Jesus, and should be done as publicly as the context allows. Intensive discipling should immediately follow in order to equip the new Christians to begin sharing their faith and learning how to deal with temptation.

If your aim is to see a movement of multiplying churches it is important to involve the new believers in the church formation process from the day of their conversion. You will want to show them how to lead their own gatherings/meetings in a way that fits their own context. Where possible it is good to meet as

families, then others who live close by may be added. As soon as there are believers from another family, or who live some distance away, new cells or churches should be encouraged.

What are the best ways of teaching in your context so that new believers can pass on that teaching to others? (cf. 2 Tim 2:2). It must be simple, reproducible and contextualised.

How can you hand over the responsibility for sharing the Gospel and for teaching and discipling to new believers from the beginning? What are the best ways of equipping believers to lead their own gatherings?

### ***8. Reproducing Leaders***

As soon there is a group of believers, choose two or three from the group and disciple them in more depth. Spend intensive times with them so that they can catch your heart attitude. Pray with them. Discuss with them. Learn what a disciple will look like within their culture. Discover what major temptations or sources of opposition believers in this culture are likely to face.

Ask God to show you and the group those who should be asked to lead. It is wisest to have at least two leaders. One may be the main leader and the other his helper, or they may be more or less of equal strength but with different gifts. Work with them using the MAWL method described by CPM writers: Model-Assist-Watch-Leave. Leaving is your aim and must not be omitted or long delayed if spontaneous reproduction is to begin.

### ***9. Encouraging the Multiplication of Churches***

The new church(es) should be encouraged to start another church made up of new converts they have won to the Lord. The aim must be that each church plants at least one other church early in their life as a group. In the beginning stages of multiplication you will need to work with the emerging leaders to help them make the transition from one group to two. This will include the training of leaders, who may either be part of the original church or be already part of the new group. Leadership development is the key to church multiplication. What training resources can you provide for those who will lead new groups, and for those who will train new leaders?

See Patterson and Scoggins, *Church Multiplication Guide* on this.

### **10. Providing On-going Leadership Training**

Find out the best way of gathering leaders together regularly for worship, fellowship, sharing of problems, learning from each other and for teaching and prayer. Decide how often and for how long. Decide on the practical issues of venue and transport and who will cover the costs. Outside funding is often a good investment as long as some responsibility remains with the participants.

What ways can be found to ensure on-the-job mentoring with more experienced leaders for each leader? Think ahead to the kind of further training that may be needed for some leaders in your context. How can this best be provided?

See *The Indigenous Church* by Melvin Hodges available from [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com) and from [www.wclbooks.com](http://www.wclbooks.com)

## **THE NEED FOR ROLE CHANGES**

One of the biggest challenges for many church planters is the series of role changes that are required in relation to the local people. It is a need that is easy to overlook.

Tom Steffan in his book, *Passing the Baton: Church Planting that Empowers*, stresses the need not only for the church planter to plan for his eventual departure from the work, but also to prepare for specific role changes from the very beginning of the work. Steffan's model is not likely to fit perfectly in every situation, but it does help us see the kind of changes that will be needed.

### **Six Roles for the Church Planter**

Let me summarise the sequence of roles that Steffan suggests a church planter may typically need to adopt.

#### **1. Learner**

This is the essential beginning point for anyone entering a soci-

ety with which he or she is not familiar. It means serious language learning (not just study), cultural adaptation, and beyond that, a real attempt to understand the deeper levels of the culture such as values and worldview. Without this, effective communication will prove almost impossible.

## *2. Evangelist*

This clearly overlaps with the first and with subsequent roles. Without abundant sowing there will never be an abundant harvest. And as church planters we have to show the way. This requires an understanding of Scripture and culture at a level which enables you to interpret the familiar text in a culturally meaningful way, with a real appreciation of the mental and spiritual world of your hearers. Only constant feedback will show whether the Good News is being understood as you (and God) intend.

## *3. Teacher*

While the role of evangelist must never be surrendered, when the first converts come there is a need to introduce a new role in relation to them—that of teacher. Clearly, if churches are to multiply we ourselves will not be able to lead or teach them all. So it is vital that the new believers are shown how to share from the word of God.

Perhaps the most effective way of multiplying teachers is for the church planter to become a "shadow pastor." He will meet weekly with one or more of local leaders in order to study the Scripture to be taught the following Sunday. They will be the teachers, the foreigner simply providing support. We need not only to teach the text of Scripture but also how to interpret it, and how to apply it to everyday life. In this way new believers will grow not only in their knowledge of what the Bible teaches, but also in their ability to interpret the Scriptures for themselves.

We often find church planters becoming the resident teachers, or even pastors, preaching Sunday by Sunday, with no real intention of moving on. In such a case a church planting movement is blocked from the start. The church is seen to depend on

the foreign worker. Local leadership is prevented, and church multiplication will be considered impossible.

#### ***4. Resident Advisor***

Here the church planter's policy is to lead from behind—working with emerging leaders and teachers but not in an up-front capacity. In many CAN situations this role is likely to be the most significant. The foreign worker remains out of sight. He will not be present at church meetings but is available to those who seek him out. He may invite the emerging leaders to frequent meetings for instruction and pastoral care, adopting a teaching role in relation to them, rather than before the larger group.

While the differing roles will often overlap, we might say that the shift to becoming a resident advisor takes place when the initiative for instruction or counsel comes from the local leadership rather than from the international worker. This may well make it possible for the worker to have input into more than one church.

#### ***5. Itinerant Advisor***

When the church planter is no longer needed by the church on a day to day basis, another ministry may be found in the area so that he or she can continue to be available to the maturing church on a part-time or occasional basis. There may be the opportunity to become a kind of itinerant regional advisor, serving a larger number of church groups.

Church Planting Movements have adopted the term Strategy Co-ordinator (SC) for a role equivalent to either the resident or itinerant adviser. The SC accepts responsibility for strategy, the finding of resources and the mobilisation of both workers and prayer, but recognises that he himself cannot accomplish the task of multiple church planting. He sees what needs to be achieved in order for every person in that people group to hear the Gospel. He envisions, plans, co-ordinates, and mobilises, but many others, often mainly local people, carry out the work. As a result the potential for growth is simply unlimited.

## ***6. Absent Advisor***

Ideally, this stage will not be the result of a sudden withdrawal but rather a gradual weaning of the church away from dependence on outside support. The relationship is not broken, but maintained even though there is a geographical distance. Any church will derive enormous strength from knowing there are those who understand their situation, who regularly pray for them, and remain available to give counsel or support in times of special need.

In practice, however, church planters sometimes have to leave suddenly due to a whole range of different circumstances. Often there is real fear that the work will be seriously hindered, or fold altogether. And yet, again and again, they later discover that the growth continued, even exceeding all their expectations—surely a healthy reminder that the work is God's not ours. And that we can trust him even in the darkest days.

## **COACHING – THE KEY**

One of the biggest challenges is knowing when it is time to begin the shift from one role to another. A strategy that many are finding helpful is to work through a series of steps within each role so that the changes become the result of a natural progression in the relationship.

In passing on almost any complex skill the learner first needs to watch someone else doing the task, then to do it themselves with whatever help is needed. Once some ability and confidence are gained the trainer needs to stand back and simply watch (and pray!). Finally, comes the need to withdraw. This, in itself, builds further confidence in the trainee by the trust that is demonstrated.

There are obviously some key functions that we will want to multiply. From the beginning we need to model how to share the Gospel, how to lead people to Christ, how to gather believers together, how to lead a participatory Bible study, how to pray, and how to praise and worship God. In doing these things we are modelling church planting.

This is not to say that we will insist on doing things "our way." I have stressed the need for the local believers to also

guide us in the way any of these activities should be carried out within their cultural context. It is vital for learning to be a two-way process right from the beginning.

The next stage is for new believers to do these things themselves, while we stand ready to encourage and support them. We will probably be surprised at how quickly such tasks can be done by even quite new believers. Of course, unforeseen difficulties may still arise, and we will want to be there, providing the encouragement and offering support when needed. But we never take back the task.

The aim is to lead the new churches to rely completely on the Lord while, at the same time, knowing that they are not alone but part of the worldwide body of Christ. Even when the time comes for the church planter to leave the region, fellowship links will continue in spite of the geographical separation.

## ROLE-CHANGE CHALLENGE

Role changes are not easy. Either side may resist change. Often, the need for change may not be understood. Or one party may want change but the other does not. Unless the two sides agree, about both the need for change *and* the nature and extent of the change needed, a relationship problem will arise. It is not unusual in a church planting situation to find that the hoped-for "Timothy" will not easily agree to take the level of responsibility you were looking for. In this case it may be necessary to take the decision to withdraw from your previous role anyway, in order to show your commitment to the gradual transfer of leadership.

Of course, it is wrong to think that conflict is necessarily bad. Conflict is a normal part of development. But it can, and should, be resolved. If we ignore conflicts, hoping they will go away, they are likely to develop further and eventually get out of hand. On the other hand, it is often the very pain of a conflict situation that creates in both parties the readiness to make the changes needed for a relationship to move forward.

How long will the whole process take? Many factors make it impossible to predict the time frame. The important thing is to know where you are in the process, and where you want to go next.

## HEALTHY MISSION-CHURCH RELATIONSHIPS

Hesselgrave's "Pauline Cycle," the Ten Keys, and Steffan's list of role changes all emphasise the fluid nature of the church planting task. While it may be fairly simple to identify the processes we need to work through, in reality church planting is always "messy."

Our goal is that churches should multiply. Until such a spontaneous expansion of the church becomes a reality, many will inevitably live and die without ever hearing the Good News. It is only through a multitude of churches that the world can be evangelised, never just through the work of foreign missionaries. As a church planter, your task is not to stay there forever. In fact, it is to leave as soon as possible! What makes the task of church planting so challenging is the need to constantly adapt to a changing situation.

The relationship between the international workers and the local church is one that, all too often, ends up with tensions on both sides. Why does this happen? Let me suggest a number of possible reasons.

1. At the beginning the church planter is very much the leader. Even though the aim is that, eventually, church leadership should pass into the hands of local believers, exactly *how* and *when* this is to happen, and *who decides*, are often far less clear.
2. Very often the church planter and the new church represent very different cultural, linguistic and economic backgrounds. All of these factors increase the difficulty of effective communication. Sometimes, even though both parties are totally sincere, *neither side* really understands the other.
3. The church planter frequently lacks any objective means of assessing when it is "safe" to hand over leadership. In recognising that difficulties may arise if he or she leaves too soon, the church planter often *stays too long*. But it also happens that the church planters may be so swayed by the current emphasis on "phase out" that they leave before the national leaders have the maturity and experience to cope, especially where much pioneering work remains to be done.

4. Sometimes a newly planted church will appeal to the church planters to stay on, long after their original role is fulfilled. When this happens it is vital that the national church come to understand the changed relationship that exists now that the church has been established. There must be openness on both sides if misunderstandings are to be avoided. One way that such changes in relationship can be expressed is by having official hand-over ceremonies to express the changing patterns of authority and pastoral care.

## Planning for Partnership

We have seen how Paul and his team formed a distinct unit of ministry moving somewhat independently of any one local church. Paul's calling as an apostle was to engage in the work (Gk. *ergon*) of God. His task was to see new local churches brought into being which would, in turn, become centres of spiritual light influencing the surrounding regions. He related to many churches, but evidently felt a special responsibility towards those which he had planted. His gift as an apostle made him a key member of the body of Christ, but with a mobility that went far beyond any local congregation.

A key question that faces the church planter is this: What continuing relationship ought he to have with the churches which have been established through his ministry? The biblical answer seems to be that he has become their father (1Co 4:14-15; 1Th 2:11).

Is this an invitation to paternalism? Not at all! Even though, among the Romans of that period, to be a father meant having authority over even grown children, Paul refuses to "lord it" over the churches (2Co 1:24). It is simply a matter of *paternity*. These churches are his spiritual children for whom he has an undying love. But they do not remain infants. They quickly become mature, grown children. For this reason he limits his authority, preferring simply to appeal to them (Ro 12:1; 15:30; 16:17).

Equally he can call them "brothers," a word he uses no less than thirty four times in his three letters to Rome and Corinth.

This is because Paul sees all believers as fellow-pilgrims, each with the gift of the Spirit, and responsible for making their own decisions. They are fully equipped by God to *be the church*.

## **The Need for Mutual Respect**

How are we to apply these biblical insights to the complexity of today's international church planting contexts? Are we to expect a continuing partnership between the newer churches and the organisations through which they came into being? Mission-church relationships have often brought tension and heartache; careful thought and much prayer are needed if they are to prove a mutual blessing. There is a need for genuine openness on both sides, each side seeing the other as fellow heirs in Christ, as fully equal before him.

As a church grows to maturity and becomes established it should have the freedom to make all decisions concerning its life and ministry. If the international worker remains, he or she should be there only as an invited guest of the church. This may involve an official secondment agreement but, in any case, the responsibilities of each side, church and mission, need to be thought through together and mutually agreed upon, so that misunderstandings are avoided.

## **The Need to Discover God's Plan**

Should the church planting organisation continue to have an independent existence in the region where the church has been established? I don't think it is possible to make hard and fast rules. Each situation will be different. Does the church have a vision to reach surrounding peoples with the Gospel? Are there some people groups that they are unwilling to reach out to? If so, is there some way outsiders can work with them in this?

If they have no vision for other groups, how open are they to our taking the lead in this, with whatever support they can give us? What we need to do is to find God's will and pattern in each particular situation. When we discover *his* plan, it will undoubtedly mean blessing for all concerned.

Whatever decisions are taken about the continuing role of

the original pioneers (decisions that ought to be made mutually by both church and mission), it is important to remember that the church planter's role is *not* a permanent one. We must be ready for change, however costly. The church must be free to "fly" without the weight of foreign supervision. And in any case, who is to say that you will not have the opportunity of using your hard-won experience to plant a church somewhere else? I can think of no greater privilege than that.



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Hiebert, Paul G. and Eloise Hiebert Meneses

1995 *Incarnational Ministry: Planting Churches in Band,  
Tribal, Peasant, and Urban Societies*. Grand Rapids,  
MI: Baker Book House.

Highlights the importance of taking culture seriously, showing how social structures and worldview affect the way people hear and respond to the message. A useful book for any church planter. 400 pages.

Hybels, Bill and Mark Mittelberg

1994 *Becoming a Contagious Christian*. Grand Rapids, MI:  
Zondervan.

Written by leaders of Willow Creek Community Church in Chicago. Full of practical suggestions on developing your own natural evangelism style and presenting the gospel in a non-threatening way. While the original setting is the USA, the principles are readily adaptable to many other contexts.

Jones, Gordon and Rosemary

1995 *Teamwork*. London, UK: Scripture Union.

A very practical and helpful book for teams. It covers aspects of both interpersonal relationships and leadership issues and includes exercises that allow each person to discover his or her role in relation to the team.

Livingstone, Greg

1993 *Planting Churches in Muslim Cities: A Team Approach*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House.

Written by a former director of Frontiers, this book reflects the extensive field experience of the author. It suggests a long-term team approach, and recognises the difficulties and setbacks that are likely to occur. Stresses the need for churches of MBBs to be established "from within" rather than by expatriates.

Love, Rick

2000 *Muslims, Magic and the Kingdom of God: Church Planting Among Folk Muslims*. Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library.

Written by an experienced field worker this is a must-have book for anyone working among Muslims. It provides a valuable insight into both biblical and animistic worldviews, and offers valuable suggestions for a contextualised approach. The appendices outline a helpful church planting model and a list of activity phases.

Maxwell, John C.

1995 *Developing the Leaders Around You: How to Help Others Reach Their Full Potential*. Milton Keynes, UK: Thomas Nelson/Word Communications Ltd.

One of my favourite books on the nurture and support of emerging leaders. The principles are readily applicable in most cross-cultural situations.

McGavran, Donald A.

1980 *Understanding Church Growth*, (rev. ed.). Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans.

This classic spells out the theses of the Church Growth approach. It proved a serious wake-up call to a previous generation of missionaries content to run institutions without seeing spiritual results. The cross-cultural roots of Church Growth thinking are less in focus in this book which was written to increase the impact of the ideas among American churches.

McIlwain, Trevor

1991      *Firm Foundations: Creation to Christ*. Sanford, FL:  
New Tribes Mission.

A big book (580 pages) that gives 50 study outlines covering the whole Bible. The purpose is to lay a foundation for an in-depth understanding of the Good News. Designed primarily for teaching those who have never heard, it is also useful as a resource for adaptation.

Muller, Roland

2000      *Tools for Muslim Evangelism*. Belleville, Ontario,  
Canada: Essence Publishing.

Muller is a pseudonym for a colleague who has worked extensively in the Middle East. The emphasis is on teacher-based evangelism. A series of six Discovery Lessons, a chapter on useful proverbs and parables, and an extensive list of helpful resources for those in Muslim areas makes this a very practical tool. Highly recommended.

2006      *The Messenger, the Message and the Community: Three Critical Issues for the Cross-cultural Church Planter*.  
Langley, BC, Canada: CanBooks.

How are we perceived by those to whom we go? Does our message speak to their thought world? Does the community of believers offer a viable alternative to what they already enjoy? Most of the examples come from years of working in a Middle Eastern context, but the issues raised have immediate application for any cross-cultural church planter. Includes large parts of the author's early books, *Honor and Shame* and *Tools for Muslim Evangelism*, but introduces much new material. Highly recommended. Nearly 400 pages.

Neighbour, Ralph W. Jr

1990      *Where Do We Go From Here? A Guidebook for the Cell Group Church*. Houston, TX: Touch Publications.

The "Bible" of the Cell church model. Neighbour's ministry has resulted in some exciting large churches in some of the major urban centres around the globe. His emphasis is on making the cell (max. 15 members) the heart of church life. The model depends heavily on the

commitment of members to a "full-on" lifestyle of Christian activity. It appears to be more workable in middle-class urban settings.

Nevius, John L.

1958 *Planting and Development of Missionary Churches*. Philadelphia, PA: The Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company. (First published by the Presbyterian Press, Shanghai, 1886).

This little book sets out the teaching given by Nevius to the first seven missionaries to Korea in 1889. Nevius explains the methods that, in ten years, enabled him to establish 150 churches in China. The principles described foreshadow those emphasised in the current literature on Church Planting Movements.

Newbigin, Lesslie

1995 *The Open Secret: An Introduction to the Theology of Mission*, (rev. ed.). Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans.

Newbigin insists that mission belongs to the very essence of the church but that it needs to take on tangible shape to speak clearly in our modern, complex world. He argues that the church's job is to penetrate the world and address the whole of human life as people experience it, rather than attempting to present the gospel "in a vacuum."

Nicholls, Bruce J. (ed.)

1985 *In Word and Deed: Evangelism and Social Responsibility*. Grand Rapids, MI: Paternoster Press/Eerdmans.

Key evangelical leaders from six continents present their insights into how the task of evangelism relates to the biblical call for love in action. Sponsored jointly by the Lausanne Committee for World Evangelisation and the World Evangelical Fellowship.

Patterson, George and Richard Scoggins

1993 *Church Multiplication Guide*. Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library.

Here is a practical guide to church planting and reproduction. The emphasis is on obedience to biblical commands as the key to both personal growth and the multiplication of churches. Highly praised by both YWAM and Frontiers leaders.

Peterson, David

1993 *Engaging With God: A Biblical Theology of Worship*.

Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans.

Examines what the Bible means by "worship" in both Old and New Testaments and how this relates to other aspects of Christian living. The most complete coverage of the subject I have come across, yet also one of the most readable.

Sherman, Dean

1990      *Spiritual Warfare for Every Christian*. Seattle, WA:  
YWAM Publishing.

A very balanced handling of a sensitive subject. Sherman provides biblical insights that help us as individuals to live free from oppression, and also shows how to apply the same principles in ministry.

Simson, Wolfgang

2001      *Houses that Change the World: The Return of the House Church*. Carlisle, Cumbria, UK: OM Publishing/  
Paternoster Publishing.

Emphasises the significance of house churches, showing how these are the key to healthy church life having the potential to impact a whole nation. Simson describes the major differences between house and cell churches, the former consisting of a much more informal network.

Steffan, Tom

1997      *Passing the Baton: Church Planting that Empowers*,  
(2nd ed.). La Habra, CA: Center for Organisational  
& Ministry Development.

An important book that has made us all more aware of the need for long-range preparation for the transfer of full pastoral and administrative authority to the churches we plant. Shows the steps that are typically involved in this process and the need to plan with the ultimate goal in view.

Van Engen, Charles

1991      *God's Missionary People: Rethinking the Purpose of the Local Church*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House.

An inspiring book showing how mission is right at the heart of what it means to be the church. Van Engen is an MK and an experienced church planter, as well as one of the most popular and skilled professors at Fuller School of Intercultural Studies.

Van Engen, Charles and Jude Tiersma (eds.)

1994      *God So Loves the City*. Monrovia, CA: MARC.

Gets to grips with the challenge of inner city work. The authors

explain how love shown in community is more important than good deeds. Reflects a deep spirituality.

Van Rheenen, Gailyn

1991      *Communicating Christ in Animistic Contexts*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House.

A book of great value to all who are seeking to bring the gospel to those whose world is dominated by fear of the supernatural. Animism is not limited to tribal peoples, but is, says the author, part of every culture. Hence this book has a very wide significance for all international church planters who want to become effective communicators of truth.

Volz, Carl A.

1990      *Pastoral Life and Practice in the Early Church*. Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Press.

If you want to know what church life was like in its first 500 years this is the book to read. From the writings of the Early Church fathers we discover how the church was led, how it worshipped, what they preached about, and what they thought it meant to live a holy life. The final chapter looks at the place of women in ministry.

Walls, Andrew F.

1996      *The Missionary Movement in Christian History*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books.

Scottish missions professor Walls reveals how Christianity (and church life) has taken on an almost incredible variety of forms. Requires diligent reading but, for those who persevere, history becomes both fascinating and instructive.

Warren, Rick

1995      *The Purpose Driven Church*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

Warren identifies five key purposes of the church: fellowship, discipleship, worship, service and evangelism. The emphasis is on building up every member as a means to healthy growth. A widely used resource.

Watson, David

1978      *I Believe in the Church*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans. Although dated, this is still valuable reading. Two main sections cover "The nature of the church" and "Life in the church." The whole book reflects David Watson's gift for making sound teaching both interesting and readable.

Wright, Eric

1994 *Church—No Spectator Sport: In Search of Spiritual Gifts.* Darlington, County Durham, UK: Evangelical Press.

A useful and detailed coverage of the full range of spiritual gifts given to the church. Wright includes less controversial gifts such as faith and mercy, encouragement and hospitality. His emphasis is on discovery, development and implementation of the gifts for the blessing of the local church.





## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Brian Woodford has served for over forty years with WEC International. A pioneer church planter among the Birifor people of Burkina Faso in West Africa, he later worked with local believers to translate the New Testament, and is currently assisting with the translation of the Old Testament. He has been involved in missions education since 1975, serving on the faculty of training institutions in both Ghana and New Zealand.

Appointed International Director for Training for WEC in 1989, Brian undertook extensive research among emerging churches in many countries, and was awarded a D.Miss from Fuller Theological Seminary in 1997.

Brian and his wife Lyn are both faculty members of East-west College of Intercultural Studies in New Zealand, while continuing to visit and encourage those working at the growing edges of the church worldwide. They have one daughter Hannah.

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*Master Plan* has been written to provide a comprehensive working agenda for anyone seeking to lay biblical foundations for the church. Using over 100 New Testament images, the author describes the nature and functions of the church in terms of 24 universal principles.

Although written primarily as a resource for cross-cultural church planters, the biblical teaching also provides the curriculum needed to bring believers in any culture to spiritual maturity.



Brian Woodford brings to his task both academic qualifications and wide field experience as church planter, Bible translator, and mission educator. He has undertaken extensive research into the development of newly planted churches in all parts of the world, receiving a doctorate in missiology from Fuller Theological Seminary in 1997. Brian currently teaches church planting at Eastwest College of Intercultural Studies in New Zealand.

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