

The Relational Way  
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Touch Publications, 2007

**Introduction**

While I am in no way castigating excellence in worship services or preaching, the goal of attracting people has a limited return on its investment. The church faces a crisis unique to our times. Church leaders are becoming aware of the massive transition within our culture. Accelerated change, uncertainty about the future, and instability dominate the social landscape. As such, this unprecedented cultural change is also changing the location of the church within the cultural mindset. The church finds itself in the midst of a culture that it is no longer equipped to understand or reach. It calls people to Jesus by trying to attract them to events and services, but those very people now view the church as increasingly marginalized, irrelevant, and even unattractive.

As I dialog with pastors and church leaders across North America, I hear many stories that resemble that of my own. They read a book, attend a conference, or start a 40-day small-group campaign. The conclusion usually is, we need small groups to generate community. The leaders imagine that a small-group structure will address the challenges that churches face in the midst of the fast-food culture.

However, more often than not, the groups serve as another structure for attracting people to another spiritual meeting. This spiritual meeting is forced to compete with all the other spiritual offerings on the market. Fast food spirituality doesn't die easily. One pastor has observed, "Small groups simply became a part of an individual's personal 'do-it-yourself religion' that reinforces individualized faith."

Ezekiel 37. Ezekiel spoke to the bones, "And as I was prophesying, there was a noise, a rattling sound, and the bones came together, bone to bone. I looked, and tendons and flesh appeared on them and skin covered them, but there was no breath in them." God told Ezekiel to prophesy to the breath. Ezekiel reported, "So I prophesied as he commanded me, and breath entered them; they came to life and stood up on their feet—a vast army."

**Churches require structures.** All breath and no structure results in church blobs, not church bodies. God's army requires efficient and flexible structures. Most churches stop at the search for church structure and settle for connected bones, failing to discover what God wants to do within these structures. As a result, they miss out on the way of God. The breath could be called relational kingdom living. Such would be defined as a way of living with others that fits with the coming of the kingdom of God. It is a relational paradigm for life, a mode of living that defines the nature of the relational way.

**Structural Myth #1:** Doing the right thing (a small group program) without consideration of the right way (the relational way) will produce community.

**The Relational Truth:** God's relational kingdom is a product of leaders who establish a way of living that stands in contrast to the culture.

**Small Groups Built as a Program** Two patterns are found in churches that multiply small groups consistently (Korea, Singapore, Colombia, El Salvador, South Africa). First, Prayer has become a way of life for them as a church. Second, they have a singular focus on small groups. In these churches, the groups are the priority. Yet for some reason, this prioritization of small groups has not translated well into the church of North America.

However, small groups were never the focus of the New Testament church. The New Testament never instructs the church to meet in small groups. The relationality of people in the groups is what provides the base of life from which ministry occurs. Groups are only a means to the end of a relational life.

In America, we are a people who breathe the air of the programmatic life. The programmatic drive to produce fruit (numbers) undermines the very essence that causes fruit to grow in the first place (relationships). It might produce short-term results, but the long term impact will be negative.

Small groups are flourishing in Third World countries in South and North America. They never learned to breathe the air of pragmatism. They never learned to measure their lives by what they produce (although this is changing rapidly in some places). Instead, they measure their lives by the life they live with others. American Christians must learn how to do relationships on top of learning how to do small groups. We are relational neophytes compared to most other cultures of the world.

Individuals meet as a group every week, but they still live in isolation, searching pragmatic answers to personal success. They don't become a part of a people who form an alternative society or contrasting city, one that lives differently than the culture. Instead, it only propagates the operating system of the culture because it uses the lifestyle of the culture as its measurement for success. The church in America does not need more groups that function within the cultural operating system. It needs to adopt a relational operating system that helps people develop refrigerator rights. Churches don't need another growth program with small groups at the center. They need a way to help people connect with one another in meaningful ways so that they create contrasting way of life to the environment in which society lives.

Relational love is the operating system that stands against the operating system of pragmatism and individualism. Love cannot be placed over our culture's way of living. It is either the basis of life, or we use the tactics that look like love to get stuff done or to meet "my" needs. Love as a definition cannot be usurious or self-serving. It can only be lived in experience with God and others.

#### **What does this mean... Practically?:**

In order to establish this love in the midst of the people of God, the church needs leaders who will choose to reflect the love of the Trinity by embracing God's operating system. Leadership must demonstrate the way of love represented in the Trinity or no small-group structure will ever experience any form of community that puts God's life on display in this world.

**Being the Right Person** - The relational way will only flow from who we are, the character we possess and our willingness to cultivate the kingdom according to patterns that do not reflect the patterns of this world. We must develop a new system of being the church, one that cultivates relationships through the practicing of spiritual disciplines, honoring the Sabbath, communing with God and developing community in which church leaders develop healthy connections. As we do this, we establish patterns worth passing on to others who will lead others into the relational way.

**Jesus' Relational Way**, If Jesus were alive today he would establish his movement the same way he did 2,000 years ago. He would work with 12 people and develop them by imparting his life into them. He would demonstrate and equip them in the way of life in his kingdom and teach them how to minister the way he ministers. He would not do this with the masses. He would concentrate his energy on a small group of future leaders, investing his life into a few with whom he would share refrigerator rights. As Paul instructed Timothy, the approach of the small-group pastor is to equip "reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others. The relationship approach of the small-group pastor is an investment approach investing in people who in turn can

invest in others. If we don't practice relational community in our leadership, then we should not expect community to result within our groups.

**Structural Myth #2:** Groups will succeed if they are built around a specific practical strategy or method.

**The Relational Truth:** Relational kingdom groups are based upon the reality of Christ's presence within those groups.

Without the presence of Christ in the midst of a small group, it ceases to function as the body of Christ because it is disconnected from the head. Too many groups talk so much about Christ or they try to do so much for Christ that they don't know how to be silent before him to allow him to speak about himself. When we talk and do, we miss the center of what it means to be the church. When he speaks, he reveals his presence, something that transcends talking about and working for him. He answers the question, "Who is Jesus?" In order for Christ to be the center of our groups, we must allow him to speak about and reveal who he is.

When we ask the Who question, Jesus' presence becomes a reality in our midst. Many Christians have become so used to not encountering Christ that they no longer ask the Who question. As a result, church leaders only have How questions at their disposal. To be the body of Christ is to function as the mutually interdependent body that expresses the same character that Christ demonstrated on the cross, "in service to God and for the benefit of others." We don't want to be living sacrifices who wait in silence before the revealing Christ. The temptation entraps church leaders to act as living contributors, providing answers to the How question: How do I make our group—or groups in the case of a pastor—into life-giving experiences of biblical community?

**What does this mean... practically?:**

So often the instruction to meet in the name of Christ is bypassed and groups meet in someone else's name.

The goal of models that encourage different types of groups is to connect people around their choices. However, meeting around volleyball, a task, or even deep accountability and Bible study, while a positive act, is quite different from a group meeting around Christ's presence. The need to control causes leaders to look for formulas that will make their groups better. They meet in the name of "being a good leader," "being part of the perfect system" and "using the right curriculum." They have good intentions. They only want to make their groups more effective, but they do not realize that their approach is counterproductive. I realized that the shortest route to making a group great is actually the indirect one. The job of the group leader is to take people to Jesus and to take Jesus to people. Jesus is the authority and only his keys matter. He is the one who causes people to share honestly. He is the one who touches lives and changes people. He is the one who moves through the group to reach out to the un-churched.

**Remember Two or Three** - Small groups work best when the leader first invites two or three people to join him or her in a vision. This team then establishes the vision of meeting in Jesus' name and invites others to participate in that vision. There are many strategies to promote the principle of two or three from having co-leader, establish a core team, ask specific members to serve as captains of specific ministries: prayer, community and outreach. The most long-standing strategy is that of raising up an intern or apprentice who works with the leader to care for the group.

**Define the Role of Small Groups** - *Ecclesia* was a word that the followers of Christ used to define themselves. It simply meant "an assembly" or "a gathering," Paul could freely envision both small groups of believers meeting in homes and periodic gatherings of Christians of one city

meeting in a larger venue as the ecclesia. One did not compete with the status of the other because both were gatherings or assemblies. If the biblical definition of church is a gathering or assembly around the presence of Jesus, then both the small group and the large group are proper expressions of church. Church leaders assume that the most important place of connection is the weekly large group service. As a result, small groups are labeled as something less than a gathering meeting around the presence of Jesus {ecclesia}. Be clear about your expectations. Don't expect people to see the value of the small group, because they will see it as less important than the Sunday worship service, and thereby they will most likely see it as optional.

If you do see a vision for groups that gather in the name of Jesus and experience his presence as being modern expressions of the church then you must not only define them accordingly, but resource them accordingly. Relational investment in the leaders of these groups must be a priority of the pastoral team. Pastor and church leaders must spend significant time in dialogue with small group leaders to help them process their understanding of church and small group. When small groups practice life together as *church*, Bible studies, fellowship groups, and task groups no longer possess the same value. Christ longs to be the center of our communities. When he is that center, the Spirit of God is released to accomplish the mission of God in this world.

**Structural Myth #3:** Meeting in small groups is the central source of biblical community.

**The Relational Truth:** Relational kingdom life requires the church to address how people do life, not just how they do small groups

**What is the Point of Small Groups?** Evangelism; Church Growth; Church Health; Interpersonal Connections; Personal Growth; Biblical Model. Most pastors like these reasons because they are very practical in nature. Each reason points to tangible results that small groups can offer. Each one pointed to the church itself; improving the church was the end game.

I was looking for a reason to do small groups that pointed to something bigger than the church. To answer this question, we must first ask, "What is the mission of the church?" Jesus came preaching the kingdom of God, calling people to align their lives with the good news of the kingdom. The kingdom comes first in the order of God, not the church or small groups. Jesus instructed us, "Seek first the kingdom of God and all these things will be added to you" (Matt. 6:33). The kingdom of God has become a private affair that has little to do with how I relate to my neighbor, much less those at church.

**The Kingdom of God in America** The church holds the job of tending to people's private beliefs and morality, while the public way of living in the family, work, and school has been established by authorities outside of the church. There is a general philosophy of public life described by Randy Frazee's book, *Making Room for Life*, he paints a picture of how life works, which seems quite neutral but in fact stands in the way of the kingdom of God. These elements of life described in the book encompass the anti-relational kingdom and create a dysfunctional lifestyle that Randy Frazee calls "crowded loneliness." Even still, this way of life forms the basis of existence for most people in North America. To attack this pattern of living is to attack the very core of how we live in America.

Churches fail to address the root issues of how the typical church member lives his life. They develop an "add-on" group system. They provide them with yet another circle to manage, asking overly busy members to add a small group to their already frenetic life. Such an approach will result in the addition of group meetings that impact the private thoughts and beliefs of individuals; it might even give people some better friends. However, it will not address the problem of the anti-relational kingdom and the crowded loneliness that dominates our society.

With the add-on approach, pastors feel compelled to cajole people into small groups, promoting the church's vision as the priority. This reality often frustrates some because they don't find small groups fulfilling while others experience guilt. The guilty are honest enough to admit that they cannot devote enough time to participate in one more program and reject small group participation.

**God's Relational Kingdom** - The kingdom of God is the reign of God, the rule of God where people operate according to the order of the King. Jesus came announcing the kingdom, inviting people to a way of life that would result in the return God's people from exile, the return of God's presence to Zion, and the defeat of Israel's enemies. His call to the kingdom did not involve the annihilation of competing kingdoms. Instead, Jesus called people to a new way of living in the midst of a world that would not recognize their validity as a people He called them to live as a chosen people, even though they had no land or officials in positions of power. He called them to a different life, a life that would establish a parallel kingdom in the midst of the kingdoms of this world. This is God's relational kingdom, one where the people of God relate to God and to one another in communion.

Therefore, when Jesus talked about the kingdom, his message had ramifications that extended far beyond individual belief in his message. It ultimately meant that Jesus was introducing a way of operating as a society that was radically different than how they lived under Roman occupation.

God's relational kingdom confronts the assumptions of the anti-relational kingdom. Small groups that understand this realize the reason for doing groups is much bigger than small group attendance. Such small groups don't accommodate the anti-relational kingdom. They confront it, challenge it, and offer a different way of living.

**What does this mean... practically?:**

Randy Frazee puts; it this way, "Howard Hendricks, my beloved professor in seminary, suggested that pastors should not focus their ministry on teaching people how to do church but on how to do life." Equipping people for ministry is not merely about preparing people to serve in the church. It is also about providing practical patterns of living that serve as alternatives. This is kingdom equipping that impacts more than the scheduled activities of the church by invading the everyday lives of the people of God.

Churches must help "Bobs" of all types "Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness" by helping them redraw their circles around the kingdom. But what does that mean in today's society?

First step by embracing small groups as a structure of ministry. The church whether through six-week small group adventures, small group Bible studies task groups, holistic small groups, or cell groups, has recognized the need to provide points of connection for people. The previous sections in this chapter may have implied that adopting small group structures in this way is counter-productive. I may be guilty of overstatement for the purpose or making a point. Challenging people to experiment with small group connections seems logical. However, we cannot stop there.

Jesus modeled a way of living with others in the kingdom that starkly contrasts with the pattern of Bob. Jesus did not manage a series of relationships. Rather, he connected himself intimately with a small group of people. He surrounded himself with three intimate confidantes and nine other close friends. Jesus then related to a large group of up to 70 people who followed him in his ministry. Then he related to the crowds of people who did not know him personally. Those around Jesus formed a web of connections where he demonstrated God's relational kingdom. Those closest to him saw it in a way that those who were further away did not. Jesus lived the kingdom for us, and it was a relational kingdom. The kingdom is not something that we

need to produce or achieve. It is something we enter as we learn to relate to one another, and thereby create an alternative lifestyle. At the same time, we must also be realistic. Jesus was single. Jesus did not have kids. He did not have a job, a commute, or a mortgage. He lived and ministered primarily in rural Galilee, not urban or suburban North America. So we must redraw the circles to fit the realities of our world, while at the same time resisting the trap of our world. Groups are training platoons where Bobs, like me, learn to live the truth and leave behind the lie of the American dream. When we seek first small groups for the sake of making the church better or bigger, we fail to see the church from God's kingdom perspective, making life far more complex for people. If we seek first God's relational kingdom, then small groups will line up as an agent of the kingdom, and he will add the growth and all the other things that we long to see in the church.

**Structural Myth #4:** Building a new small group ministry structure on top of old stories of church will transform a church and build community.

**The Relational Truth:** Relational kingdom life through small groups is founded upon a missional base which compels a church to write a new story of being the people of God.

The stories that shape our definition of church are inherited from the church culture a have experienced.

**The Old Story of Competing Visions** With a spiritual goods and services mentality, small groups become one good among many others, the addition of small groups might add some benefit to the church for those who want to be connected. However, the reality is the church fails to enter into its mission. It remains in the land of competition; providing a spiritual good to meet the demands of the people.

#### **The Story as a Pastor Reads it**

One common trait found in all of the best small group churches around the world is the fact that the senior pastor carries the vision for groups. The story as this pastor reads it is a linear story. He has a vision of what the church can become, and he strategically seeks to move the church from point A to point B to point C. He preaches this vision, he even lives the vision, but he never sees the results he wants to see.

#### **The Story As The Church Reads It**

To lead the sheep into biblical community, a pastor must understand the story of church as the people read it. These stories are those unseen, unspoken ways of being the church that shape the ways people operate. They are the patterns or traditions of doing church that must be kept in equilibrium for it to operate according to the rules. If the people of a church live according to a story of church that competes with the missional story of the relational way, it does not matter how strongly the pastor holds the vision for small groups.

**The Story of Mission** The mission is much greater than a church's effort for growth and evangelism. To be the sent people of God on mission is to be a missionary people, not just a group of people who gather for worship and attend small group. To be the sent people of God is to manifest the character and compassion of God's heart in tangible ways in a particular time and a specific location. With this understanding of the church on mission, the vocation of church changes from simply attracting and feeding spiritual consumers. Its goal is not to get as many of these consumers into small groups as possible. Instead, the mission of the church is to allow the Spirit of God to redeem spiritual consumers and transform them into a kingdom people who live as an alternative society. The church is the local manifestation of God's kingdom.

The kind of leadership required to lead the church into this missional life is different than the leadership patterns practiced in the church when the future of the church was more

predictable. When church plays the role of attracting people from the culture to receive “spiritual goods and services,” then the leaders clearly understand the goal and strategy for providing those goods and services. But now society has shifted. The place of church has changed. Therefore, leadership of the church must also change. How God is reshaping the church is not yet clear. We do not know what church will look like in the future.

Sailing is unpredictable. Leading people into the relational kingdom is like sailing a ship. Pastors want to find a refined model for doing church that they can copy. Finding a model to copy might work when things are predictable within Christendom, but on the other side of Christendom, it is impossible to know exactly how to set a course for a destination. Today, many church leaders are getting in the boat and learning how to sail, experimenting with new leadership patterns that they did not learn in their pastoral training nor have seen in their pastoral heroes. They are following the patterns of New Testament apostles, setting new models, and laying new foundations for the church. They have to give up strategic planning because they realize that they cannot set a clear future. Instead, they “cultivate a way of life among a people through which God’s future is elicited among the people.” They are learning to listen to God and listen to what the Spirit is saying through his people. They are writing a new story.

### **Missional Leadership**

Missional leadership requires leaders to extend beyond the predetermined boundaries of the leadership models we have inherited. To move into the zone of a missional leader, one must dispense with the search for leadership methods. Instead, missional leadership is founded upon the character and identity of the leader not his or her methods.

### **From Normal to Fundamental Leadership**

*Robert Quinn-* He labels the normal state—the kind of leadership in which most people operate—as self-focused, internally closed, externally directed, and comfort-centered. In the state of fundamental leadership, a leader becomes purpose-centered, internally driven, other-focused, and externally open. Living within this state is to put the common good ahead of personal welfare, seek feed back from others and adapt it, deal honestly with personal hypocrisy and personal values, and clarify the results.

**From Strategic Planning to Facilitating Dialogue** Dialogue is a discipline that is as old as thinking itself. It is the art of reflecting and reasoning together. Through dialogue, the missional leader listens to what the Spirit is saying through the people of God. He asks guiding questions to stir the imagination. Through the use of the biblical stories, he calls people to dialogue around how the text might inform the reshaping of God’s people. Dialogue takes a much more humble approach. It requires a team of people to think together and listen to God together about the destination. This destination will not be defined by the model church down the road, but by listening to the dreams and visions that God has laid out in the Bible for the church.

As we relate to God and each other through the power and inspiration of the Holy Spirit, an organic mission will arise that will foster a new future for the church. Mission and the relational way cannot work without one another. Mission without relationships results in an army. Relational Christianity without mission will only produce a country club. When mission and relationality join forces, God’s plans for the church generate hope, just as Jeremiah foretold.

**Structural Myth #5:** Small group community is best fostered in a context whereby the group members focus solely on ministering to the needs of one another.

**The Relational Truth:** Relational kingdom groups follow Jesus’ mission, to the world and develop deep, contagious fellowship.

**The Mission of Jesus** The presence of Christ creates groups that have in contagious community that are on mission with him. This concept means that the mission of groups is not limited to the experience of community by believers. Bruno Bettelheim makes the point by stating, “I am convinced communal life can flourish only if it exists for an aim outside itself. Community is viable if it is the outgrowth of a deep involvement in a purpose which is other than, or above, that of being a community.” Groups must have a mission that look outside of the group in order to propagate life in Christ. (Luke 4:18-19)

**On Mission with Christ** Small group pastor and consultant, Jim Egli, summarizes the mission of groups with four words: *Upward*, *Inward*, *Outward*, and *Forward*. Groups enter the *Upward* movement as Jesus leads people into worship, prayer and intercession. The *Inward* movement is the call to love others in the group, to create an atmosphere of true love, acceptance, and forgiveness, to sacrifice for one another, to risk telling the truth to one another, to embrace one another in weakness, and to receive the gifts others have to offer. The *Inward* movement is often called building community. Jesus is moving *Outward* on his mission. If groups are going to experience the presence of Christ, they must go with him and open their doors to those who do not know his presence. The *Forward* mission contains two specific elements. First, there is the process for growing up young Christians into mature believers. Second, the *Forward* movement results in the development of new leaders and the birthing of new groups.

Following Jesus into these four missional movements creates small groups that experience contagious relationships, connectedness that infects outsiders with the life of Jesus. Christ’s life leads each group to discover its unique way of manifesting God’s love to the world. Such groups are so good that they don’t need to be advertised. They create word of mouth and a lifestyle that outsiders see and desire.

**How Infected Is the Community?** The way Christians relate to one another determines the level of infection that can be spread to those outside the community. The need in today’s small groups is for a serious infection, one that changes the way a person must live because of it. And it must be caught by many people who will choose to share this state of infection within biblical community.

If we are to have the same mind of Christ who did not consider “equality with God as something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made into human likeness ... humbled himself and became obedient to death” (Phil 2:6-8), it only makes sense that our fellowship with one another would embody a life that chooses to move out from its boundaries towards communion with those who are not a part of the kingdom of humanity. Groups that journey to the far country of those outside the group reflect the life of God.

#### **What does this mean... practically?:**

**Creating Contagious Relationships.** The *Outward* mission is a way of sharing life as people carry the infection of the Gospel to others. It is important not to think “evangelism program” or “outreach ministry”.

If we are going to see incarnational evangelism where people carry the gospel in a “go and show” manner, the church must clearly cast a new vision for such an approach. One way to empower carriers is to ask the question, “What is your calling?” With this question, you are seeking to discover what God is doing within individuals and to help them put practical feet to the passions that the Spirit of God has placed within their hearts. This question is great for small group leaders to ask of individual members on a regular basis, not just once or during special meetings. One activity is to write a mission statement that defines the unique gifts the group has to offer and the unique situations that comprise their mission fields. Many times, groups do not

reach anyone because they don't realize the specific nature of God's mission for each specific group.

**Sharing Hospitality** The love of the stranger is not a love which seeks to convert or change. Instead, it is one which receives people where they are. Non-Christians are not an object to be won. They are people loved by God. The art of hospitality allows others to enter our hearts without expectation. The only way hospitality works as an approach to creating contagious bridging relationships is if the group members change; opening their hearts to receive strangers as they are.

**Sharing with New Groups** Because people connect more easily when new groups are started, churches I that have a birthing mentality are much more likely to see people receive Christ than churches that don't emphasize starting new groups. New churches are birthed because God has raised up a leader to start a new church. Likewise, new groups are birthed because God has raised up a new leader to start a new group. Therefore, the birthing vision must always be communicated to reflect the reality of why a new group is started. Therefore, the vision might be communicated "God is raising up new leaders within this group. As you are trained and prepared. You will be empowered and released to birth a new group."

Many churches have frustrated the birthing of new groups because they have only used one way to multiply groups. The reality is that there are many different ways to start new groups:

- *Traditional Multiplication* to two groups with the apprentice taking one of the groups, and the existing leader taking the others
- *Leader Birth*: The leader of the group would invite two or three members of the group to join his or her vision to start a new group.
- *Intern Birth*: The apprentice would share and invite two or three members of the group to join his or her vision to start a new group.
- *Member Plant*: This method, developed by Groups of 12 churches, sees every member of the group as a potential leader. The small group leader encourages all members to prepare themselves to gather people and start a group.
- *Joint Venture*: Two groups send out people to form a third group
- *Group Strengthening*: Sometimes a group filled with very strong people will send out a few of its members to help a weaker group that has too few.
- *Sub-Group*: Create an additional sub group, led by committed members specifically designed to reach the lost. When people come to know Christ, they can be added to the sending small group or the sub-group can be transformed into a "regular small group".

**Sharing through Redundancy** To follow Jesus into bridging relationships with others, we must consider redundancy of contact. We cannot express the love of Christ to the unchurched without repeated contact with them. Common spaces for commonplace encounters are prerequisites for common conversations and common debate (the third space). Practically speaking, this requires exposure to more than one Christian. When group members contribute two names to the prayer list and then get to know the unbelieving friends of other group members, the potential for contact redundancy increases.

**Sharing through Interest Group** Those who are not ready to attend a small group might be willing to participate in a short-term (no more than 13 weeks) interest group. Such interest groups would be used to awaken people to the reality of God and to the gospel through relationships. They might be formed around any common interest from mountain biking to reading novels, from a discussion on evolution to a weekly game of volleyball. Their primary goal is to gather people around an interest, not the presence of Christ. Therefore, the holistic small group is a

Christian community in which the interest group leader would be a member. The interest group would be an extension of that community.

**Sharing through Servanthood** This evangelism method is a low-risk way of sharing Christ with people that any believer can do. It is also a high-grace way of sharing Christ that most anyone will gladly receive because it meets people at their point of need through active kindness.

Community without mission results in in-grown selfishness. Community with mission expresses the God-life and displays the kingdom of God in this world. The presence of Christ draws people into community and then creates an infectious wonder that draws people to God's life. Jesus always moves and leads beyond the boundaries of the small groups. Whether through reaching out to friends, service projects, hosting a neighborhood cook-out or just praying for specific people who need Jesus, ordinary people can participate in God's mission as they follow Christ and his life as it manifest in the midst of groups.

**Structural Myth #6:** Small groups can develop biblical community without on overt dependence upon the Holy Spirit.

**The Relational Truth:** Relational kingdom groups are a product of the dynamic life of the Holy Spirit.

Early church theologians often described the Trinity by using the image of *perichoresis*, or a holy dance. *Perichoresis* is a metaphor that “suggests moving around, making room, relating to one another without losing identity.” In this dance, the one God—who is tri-personal—is a life of self giving love, as the Father, Son and Holy Spirit dance together in perfect love and unity. Our participation in the Holy Spirit is the invitation to dance with God in his life of love and unity. True fellowship occurs when beings who are different share something in common, when they dance the dance of life together.

Most of the books of the Bible are not written to individuals. These are written to groups of people, the people of Judah or Israel in the case of the Old Testament, and to specific churches in the case of the New Testament. Paul wrote his letters to be read publicly in the churches. He was writing to a people who were relationally intertwined.

The *Koinonia* of the Holy Spirit cannot be fully experienced alone because *Koinonia* implies sharing. It is something that we do together in the church. The Spirit does not come to the individual first. His primary activity is for and in the community. We participate as individuals in this community, not as independent persons, but as members of the body of Christ. Jesus is the head of the church. He sets the pattern for life. The Holy Spirit is the nervous system of the church who connects us to the head and to one another, making us a body. Through the *Koinonia* of the Holy Spirit, we are drawn into a life together that is more than the sum of the individual parts. We are dancing together in the life of God through the Holy Spirit.

**What does this mean... practically?:**

To say that there is a night and day difference between groups that are drawn into the dance of the Holy Spirit and those that don't would be an understatement. When the Spirit of God is quenched in a group, life is absent. But when a group seeks the Holy Spirit, freedom, joy and peace takes residence in the midst of the group and then empowers the members to participate in God's mission in this world.

**Structural Myth #7:** The small group/large group structure is all that is needed to develop community in a church.

**The Relational Truth:** God's relational kingdom connects people on four levels.

In the book *The Search to Belong*, Joseph Myers applies these four levels, or spaces, to the church and to small groups. He bases his findings on the work of Edward Hall, who developed the science of *proxemics*, which is the study of the use of space or territory. Hall found that there are four spaces or distances that determine how a person relates to others. Hall labeled these spaces the intimate, the personal, the social, and the public.

First, there is public belonging. People connect on the public level when they identify with a broad movement. Everyone needs to connect at this level. If the church were to ignore public belonging, people would lose a sense of being a part of something big. The public space is where people connect with the kingdom vision that carries the church forward, a vision that calls the group out of focusing on themselves and their lives to see how they can impact the world.

The second level of belonging is called the social level. Connecting on this level occurs in smaller groupings than those of the public level, usually in groups of 70-120 people. These are neighbor relationships. Myers states, “A neighbor is someone you know well enough to ask for (or provide) small favors.

Human beings are created to be known by others. On the third level, people connect in the personal space. This is where people share private thoughts personal dreams, and feelings to a smaller group of ten or twelve. Here people experience a degree of transparency, but not naked transparency. Such groups become close friends, but there is no pressure applied to open up absolutely everything to the group. I also have a concern about Myers’ observation. He seems to endorse self-sorting into groups around whether or not people like one another. If this is the primary criteria for joining a group, the potential for creating cliques is quite high.

The final level is called the intimate space. This realm of life is usually only shared with two or three other people. Here the walls come down and we become “known” at a much deeper level than what occurs at the personal level. “In intimate belonging, we share ‘naked’ experience, feelings, and thoughts. In chapter one, I discussed the importance of “refrigerator rights” in depth. In a nutshell, this term describes the rights given to a few intimate friends who enter one’s home and go directly to the refrigerator without asking. People who live in this intimate space have absolute permission to be family. To have two- three people who have these rights in one another’s lives is normal, to expect a group of ten to get to this level is unrealistic.

Much like the New Testament church, we must look beneath the most obvious structures for the organic ways that people connect within these churches. Beneath the surface of the overt large group and small group structures are covert ways to provide social and intimate connections. They don’t place all the pressure on the small groups to do everything that the large group cannot do. They hold mid-sized gatherings, and they facilitate sub-groups within the small groups for accountability and intimate sharing (more or this later). At the same time, these model churches do not allow anything to compete with the primary emphasis of community through small groups. These other levels of community are designed to serve the small groups, not to serve as an alternative to them.

#### **What does this mean... practically?:**

**Connecting People in Kingdom Community** When small groups are expected to carry the entire load of building community and belonging, it places too much pressure upon these groups. Small group leaders feel that they must attain an ideal level of intimacy with the entire group, while many individuals may have reservations about such openness in a group of 10-15 people. In addition, small group members need to connect with a wider group on a social level. They need “neighbors” outside of their small group. And of course, they need to see that what they do in the small group is a part of a much larger church vision.

Jesus invited people to follow him in his kingdom community. (Luke 9:23) He never watered down his vision for life in his kingdom so that he could get more people involved. As church

leaders, we are inviting people to take steps. We cannot force them, nor can we orchestrate connections. However, we can facilitate the move from the broader, safer places into community with small groups that possess greater levels of risk.

**Connecting People in the Public Space** Some small group writers have criticized the large group worship experience to the point that they question its validity. Some see no need for it because the house church experience should be enough. I don't find such reactionary conclusions helpful. Small groups work best when they fit into the flow of a larger movement. Small groups are great for facilitating relationships and developing family, but they are prone to go astray without the vision, teaching and presence of God that flows from the public space into the life of the groups.

An alternative approach would be to use the large group experience to serve the small groups. The weekly worship service, then, would not be the end game. It would be a means for the mission of the church. Mobilizing people to connect with one another and participate in relational ministry would be the focus. The weekly large group gathering would act as a time of empowering people through worship, equipping them through teaching and casting a vision for being relational on the mission field.

**Connecting People in the Social Space** Social relationships provide associations whereby people can connect on the level of small talk. Connecting socially can also occur at the level of the mid-sized group. Congregational or mid-sized group meetings are most essential in churches of more than 200 because people in small churches connect on a social level every week. The problem is that most small churches stop at this level. They don't go any deeper than "small-talk" relationships. They don't open up about their personal and intimate lives, sharing their hidden struggles or covered fears. These churches feel good because no one pries into anyone's business. In addition, people step up and support one another during times of celebration (marriage and birth) and crisis (sickness and death). But they don't get involved with one another in the mundane daily stuff of life. Social relationships are important but they are not nearly enough.

**Connecting People in the Personal Space** For a group to move from the social space to the personal space, the group members must move through the stages of group development. No group will immediately jump into the personal space of community. At first, it will need to form as a group. It will go through a process where the group members get to know one another. During the forming stage, people assume that they like each other because they have not spent enough time together to reveal any faults. Transparency that is found in community feels good, but it does not come naturally. Therefore, the group leader must model the kind of transparency that he or she wants the group to experience. Group members will rarely become more transparent than the leader.

**Connecting People in the Intimate Space** Many churches facilitate intimate connections through the use of accountability partners. Some churches provide mentors for new or immature Christians where they can share intimate struggles. Ralph Neighbour has addressed this issue in his book, *Mentoring Another Christian*. Another common pattern is to help group members form prayer triads. Neil Cole calls these Life Transformation Groups in his book, *Search and Rescue*. One church has adopted this prayer triad pattern labeling them mini-groups. However a church might facilitate intimate connections, it must be recognized that intimacy like this cannot be forced or contrived. It must occur naturally.

**How Webs Are Constructed** The center of the web—personal and intimate relationships—are the spaces of life where we receive the greatest support and spiritual nutrition. At these levels, we are able to deal with specific issues in our lives, whereas at the public and social levels, the issues are more general. At the same time, the center is dependent upon the building of strong outer

limits and support lines. Effective personal and intimate relationships in the church depend upon the relationships established at the public and social level.

Entering community in a culture defined by individualism can be quite risky for people. And telling these individualists that community only comes in the form of small groups can actually drive them away from the journey into community. However, when we see how we connect on four different levels, churches can then facilitate the journey so that individuals can take gradual steps that will allow them to redefine how they view church and rethink what participating in church looks like.

**Structural Myth #8:** Small group leaders will flourish when they are managed properly by coaches and pastors.

**The Relational Truth:** In God's relational kingdom, small group leaders need someone who invests in them to empower them for mission.

**Searching for the Right System** Many have touted their small group model as the church's proverbial fountain of youth. They make claims that they have found the New Testament model, promising everything from transformation of one's church to unlimited exponential growth. The multitudes of Abraham will be yours! Sadly, many fall for such a sales pitch because they want to see the kingdom come. But there is no fountain of youth, no silver bullet. The "perfect" small group model is nothing but a myth.

**Beyond Management – Relational Investment** Why is such relational investment so crucial? Small group leaders will care for their people in the same way that they are being cared for. If the pastor trains and appoints leaders and only talks with them when they see a problem, how do you think those leaders will care for their groups. Barring exceptions they will lead their groups every week, perform their minimal duties and only address issues of concern as they arise. They won't be actively involved in the lives of their group members, because no one in leadership is actively involved in their lives.

Relational investment is a broad term that includes many different aspects. At times, the one investing might serve as a mentor, providing very practical instructions on how to do ministry. At other times, he or she might play the role of spiritual advisor, giving godly counsel about personal situations. Sometimes, this kind of investment calls for life coaching, which comes in the form of practical life guidance. Primarily the role is that of listening to what God is doing in the leader's life, trying to facilitate what God is already doing and helping the leader listen to God.

**Point to Christ** When Paul said, "Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ," he was not seeking to connect his spiritual children to himself. They were to imitate him only as he imitated Christ. They were not to become like Paul; they were to be like Christ as Paul had set the example. The job of a spiritual father or mother is to point children to Christ. Not to connect the leader to the mentor, rather equip the leader to hear from Christ.

Small group leaders need someone who will invest in their lives with the pure desire to see that leader succeed in both life and ministry. The excellent mentor will show them the ways of living and leading in Christ, not just give them advice or share how it has worked in the past.

**Missional Investment** The purpose of relational investment is to release people into a missional partnership with God. When leaders join God in his mission, they get in on the God life in entirely new ways. They discover what God is doing this world and how it does not always fit into the confines of the rules and rituals established by the church.

**What does this mean... practically?:**

When pastors and coaches practice relational investment with their small group leaders, their role is to lead that leader and his or her group down paths that they would not necessarily go on their own. Traveling these paths can be done through “power-over”, but the long-term impact will be limited. Instead, leaders are called to operate in a “power-before” approach. Leaders go before those they lead, demonstrating the way into the kingdom of God. Yes, they support others the way Jesus did through power-under, but they also call people into a new life by setting the standard and proposing new ways to enter into that life. They don’t wait for people to suddenly discover that they want to embrace a new vision. They invite small group leaders and small groups into this new life and show them how to live it. This is power-before leadership.

If a church launches its small group initiative with more than five groups, it is paramount to develop an oversight structure from the beginning. The problem churches encounter in such situations is that the people in oversight positions won’t have the experience of actually leading a small group, and therefore find it difficult to speak into the lives of those leading the groups. Determining the structure is crucial, but if the people in that structure don’t understand how to mentor others, then it matters very little what kind of structure you develop.

The popular small group oversight models were not predetermined structures that pastors received from God in a vacuum. They arose through the journey of trial and error, through following God’s leading in the messiness of ministry. In such organic development found on this journey, God shapes his people into the Bride he desires. You can and should learn lessons from these models; you don’t have to recreate the wheel. But you cannot short-circuit the journey and arrive at a perfect oversight model without going through the process of following God to see what kind of model he wants to create in your church.

The oversight model should develop out of the relational investment that is provided to the group leaders. The model must be a servant of the relationships, not the other way around. As soon as the model becomes the focus, we miss the point. God does not move through models; people are his preferred conduit for life. As an oversight model emerges in your church, you must recognize that it must continue to emerge and change. The Spirit of God calls us on a journey of experimentation and risk, not one of stagnation and risk. And as soon as we think we can settle on one way to structure groups, we will miss out on the new shift that God wants to introduce.

**Structural Myth #9:** Equipping that solely addresses ‘right Christian thinking’ will adequately prepare people for relational kingdom living and fruitful small group life.

**The Relational Truth:** In God’s relational kingdom, equipping the people must prepare them to walk as aliens and strangers in this world.

**Equipping for Alienship** As members of the church of God, “Our citizenship is in heaven” (Phil. 3:20). We are aliens and exiles according to the apostle Peter. We do not belong to the kingdoms of this world but the kingdom of our God in heaven. The church is in the business of training its people to be good aliens in this world and therefore good citizens of heaven. God has charged the church with the task of equipping people for kingdom citizenship, people who stand out as having something radically different than the citizens of this world. Equipping for alienship is the process of inviting and then preparing people to advance along a journey, which is a walk with the triune God and a walk with others in his church.

**Where do I belong?** The people of God need equipping in this principle because even the most faithful of churchgoers often miss this point. To most people, church is not a place to belong. It is a place to receive spiritual food. When that food becomes less than tasty, it is time to go elsewhere. There is little to no understanding of entering covenant relationships as a people and with a people. Most churchgoers enter into contractual relationships with a church. As long as the

church upholds its side of the contract—providing the right spiritual food—then people will continue warming a seat and contributing tithes. This is even true of volunteer leaders. They too belong to a church around a silent contract. As long as things are working well, they will serve. **Who am?** I learn who I am as a person, set upon the living stone of Jesus Christ, as I belong to others. It is in church that I catch the mystery of who I am in Christ. Many times, the best way I receive truth comes through the voice or actions of another. Sometimes it is just through the consistent presence of the other. In this context of life with others, cognitive teaching takes on the role of providing direction, pointing the way to truth. This truth provides the foundation that becomes real as I live it out in experience with others.

**What do I have to offer?** We need to learn the art of listening to the voice of God's leading in our lives. Each person has a vocation, a calling to impact the world. Small group members who serve as accountants, grocers have just as much a calling to impact their world as does the small group leader. To hear this calling, we need to create space in our hearts to listen to this voice. To find this space, we need to make room in our lives by doing less so that we can hear God's leading to do what he desires for us to do.

**What is my destiny?** Leaders in the church have the call and the responsibility to shape the imaginations of ordinary people who have failed in life. The church enables us to be better people than we could have been if left to our own devices. Life in small groups will start this process of doing something extraordinary. A process of equipping will reinforce the potential for heroic acts.

#### **What does this mean... practically?:**

How then does the church raise up workers for the harvest. We begin with Jesus' instruction. We pray. Prayer allows us to tap into the mysterious part of following Christ as a disciple.

The most direct approach to raising up workers is leadership training, specifically small group leadership training. This component is important. Training of new leaders should be held consistently and often (At least twice per year, even if only two or three are interested)

Making disciples is a much bigger undertaking than putting people through classes or checking to see if they read the assigned pages for the week. It needs a way to equip people for alienship, to prepare the army of the Lord to be the people of God.

**The Gift of the Teacher** The gift of the teacher as outlined in the fourth chapter of Ephesians works of service. This extends beyond the provision of cognitive information and enters into the domains of affective learning and social learning. As a result, teachers are those unique individuals within the church who have been called to establish and facilitate learning experiences. This format releases people to live in the truths of the kingdom, which requires knowledge as well as new values and practices.

Cognitive teaching alone will not make a true disciple of Jesus. Training in beliefs is crucial, but the social domain requires equipping in belonging while the affective domain demands equipping in behaviors. In addition to beliefs and belonging, holistic discipleship includes equipping in behaviors. They need equipping in the practice of hearing God for others and edifying others as Paul instructs in I Corinthians 14. While believers must rid themselves of the stuff that is on the not-to-do list, if they don't understand what they are to do, they will not have anything to replace the old stuff with, giving permission for that old stuff to come back even stronger.

#### **A Holistic Discipleship Strategy**

##### *Pattern #1: One Message*

Weekend sermon is the large group presentation of the message which provides a forum for preaching and teaching and the small group for processing and application of that message.

Another pattern uses the Sunday school hour for the same purpose, where teachers teach the same

text. Another way to communicate the same message is through the written medium. What if the pastor or a group of gifted writers wrote daily devotionals on the topic of the week? Such will keep the people thinking every day about the message.

*Pattern #2: 40-Day Spiritual Adventures*

The primary key to such an adventure is to include the four elements: the sermon, small group discussion, devotionals, and a corporate project. This will promote the campaign to the church, inviting everyone to participate in an experience that is different than what happens during the rest of the calendar year.

*Pattern #3: Parallel System*

Some small group systems have relied upon the small groups to also be the place for discipleship. But the test of time has proven this approach lacking in effectiveness. It is now recognized that an equipping track or path must run parallel to the small group system. The church leadership must develop an equipping process that addresses the needs of individual Christians: it must take a person from baby Christian, to a growing Christian, to maturity, and then into ministry and leadership. If the pressure is placed on the group leader to walk every member through this process, he will become overwhelmed. Needed: one that provides clear steps that promote progressive maturity from new believer to mature minister. This track is separate from the small groups. But not independent. People don't choose between them. The small group is the place of spiritual family. The equipping track is the place where they receive teaching appropriate to their level of maturity and their unique needs.

*Pattern #4: Spiritual Freedom Experience*

Faithful men and women of God struggle with things that they don't want anyone to know about. The best equipping leads people through a process to deal with those nagging sins—paralyzing fears, overwhelming guilt, and other secrets of the heart—allowing them to walk in true freedom. Many churches call these encounters.

Imagine your church full of people on a journey toward maturity. Imagine people who are hungry to learn, hungry to meet with God and hungry to live their lives in radical ways. Imagine people who are initiating radical practices like fasting, silent retreats, and random prayer meetings in their homes (not on small group meeting night). No matter how wild your imagination becomes, let yourself dream and then let those dreams lead your church into a different kind of equipping, that kind that will prepare people for kingdom relationships.

**Structural Myth #10:** Small groups will grow and multiply if they simply serve as a place to discuss the Bible and connect people in relationships.

**The Relational Truth:** In God's relational kingdom, groups and individuals are mobilized into units for spiritual warfare.

The spiritual war is not confined to Third World countries or to pre-Christian cultures. In fact, spiritual warfare is a biblical perspective of what is transpiring on the earth. Satan's strategy to undermine the Western church has been to quietly and subversively weave the lie into the church's self-understanding, that the battle against evil is much smaller in Western culture than it is in countries around the world. Believing such a lie results in a life of spiritual mediocrity and below-average small groups. People gather every week to help each other feel better about their lives, but there is no call to war, no call to enter into the spiritual battle to lead men and women from captivity. Instead, small groups become enclaves for what Eugene Peterson calls the spirituality of narcissism.

Therefore, we inadvertently facilitate the propagation of groups of likeminded individualists who reinforce the focus on "me." Often, such groups grow because they reinforce

the goals of individuals and, of course, we look at this growth as a mark of success. If not group growth, then what should be the goal? The church is not in the business of getting big for the sake of getting big. The church has been charged with the goal of creating a place where God's relational kingdom is practiced. Pastors that have adopted the small group vision to accomplish visions of grandeur will be sorely disappointed.

No church leader wants to find himself in a time that is less than successful. Yet, such an experience shapes us for the coming blessing. The goal, then, is not growth, but allowing God to shape the people of God into a kingdom people who reflect his glory through humility, servanthood, and prayer. We must develop warriors who are on mission with God to live in a way that contrasts the ways of the world and live risky lives. This will serve as a witness to the world that there is a God who is bigger than the present reality. The church in America has a long history of being at war. Sadly, most of these conflicts have been civil wars focusing on internal disputes, causing division and shame to God's body). We are in a spiritual war against very real powers in the heavens that directly impact and destroy lives of people every day. There is a war out there, and the Lord is waiting for his church to recognize its reality and become his warring partner.(Eph 3:10-11 and 6:12).

Dealing with personal attack upon individuals, nor is it just addressing social problems, but it is coming against demonic lies that the culture assumes true—then it will fail to reveal the manifold wisdom of God. The war is much bigger than we can imagine.

The way has already been cleared for the church to live the kingdom life as an alternative society. We must remember this fact because the circumstances that surround the church—and in some cases within the church—loudly proclaim that victory is impossible, that it is too difficult and that biblical community is an impossibility in the context of Western individualism. The temptation to give up on the vision beckons pastors to quit and just do church as everyone knows it. If we press on, waging war to enter into this kingdom life, we will be ready, a bride not wearing the garments of this world, but adorned with beauty for the coming King.

#### **What does this mean... practically?:**

If the church does not develop a clear battle plan, then it can only expect to experience more of the same, mediocrity. Albert Einstein defined insanity this way: “doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results.” The kind of community described in this book cannot be done through great strategic planning, the establishing of an efficient oversight Structure, or the use of top-notch materials. Those approaches have already been tried and fell short. We can only expect different results if we are willing to fight for those desired results. And it will be a fight. The enemy of our souls hates a church walking in community. He knows that biblical community is a manifestation of the kingdom that destroys his kingdoms.

#### **How Then Do We Fight?**

*Level #3: God's Mission* Because God's mission flows from his heart, we must allow the Holy Spirit to lead us into communion with the Father to understand that mission. This is the first calling of the church. We are invited into a way of being with God before we are to do ministry. Without a prayer-filled walk, we do not have a clear sense of God's mission. When churches learn to listen to the Spirit and recognize his life and will within them, then they learn to depend upon the Spirit of God.

*Level #2: The Spiritual War Zone* Many pastors today take a different approach. They catch a vision for community and they begin proclaiming the new direction of the church at every venue. However, a pastor is not the Spirit. A man or woman cannot be the revealer. The leaders of a church must see the vision and attain its understanding together, often adding varying nuances via their gifting and perspective. Such takes time and prayer. It requires patient communion with the relational God\ who is not in a hurry and is not interested in short cuts.

*Level #1: The Physical Manifestation of a Kingdom* The spiritual battle of the church has a physical reality. Spiritual warfare cannot be relegated to prayer strategies alone. The actions that church leaders take have spiritual ramifications that impact how people respond in third level visions. Spiritual leadership is spiritual warfare. It is on this first level that the will of heaven (third level) that has been envisioned and interpreted by the Holy Spirit (second level) is manifest. The actions taken by leaders on this first level have a direct impact on whether or not the will of heaven is manifest.

**The church has a choice.** Will it return to the old ways or will it press on, allowing the Spirit to shape them, trusting that the will of heaven will manifest? Somewhere during this time, the church must break with the past. This is called discontinuous change. Up until now, change has been progressive or incremental. Incremental changes help maintain and improve the church. Such changes include adaptation to new situations and fine-tuning what has already been done. It also includes the testing out of new ideas without fully committing to them. With incremental change, the new vision can be mixed in with the old. The two run simultaneously. The choice must be made to enter discontinuous change and break from the past, or remain in mediocrity and return to what the church knows. Discontinuous change is the re-creation of the life of the church. It is the point of no return that requires full commitment of the entire church, not just those interested in small groups, and not just the small group advocate. It especially requires the full investment of all the pastors and key volunteer leaders. Without this investment of those who lead the church, the journey will result in conflicts that will immobilize the church, generating more status-quo mediocrity. In other words, the church must make a decision if it will live out the relational kingdom or be a church that provides small groups as one of many offerings.

What does this mean practically for how church leaders disseminate a vision for biblical community? Here are a few principles that can be drawn from the *Markan Messianic Secret*:

1. The larger the group, the more cryptic and secretive the message should be. Repetition and creativity is crucial for vision casting to the crowd. The kingdom life will not be embraced through a sermon series. It will take years to get this into the imaginations of the crowd.
2. Use a variety of non-propositional teaching methods with those in leadership. Leaders need time to process the vision and dialogue around its meanings. Share books and tapes with them. Hold discussion groups around what they are learning. Take them to conferences. More than anything, enter into relationship with them so that you build enough trust with one another to process what you are learning together.
3. If your church has multiple levels of leadership, there must be a different vision dissemination strategy for each level. For each level of leadership out from the core, the strategy will be more cryptic and more experiential.
4. Vision dissemination and embodiment through the levels of leadership requires time—lots of time. The further out from the core of leadership, the longer it will take for people to understand the vision. Therefore, visionary leaders must be willing to slow down the vision, without losing sight of it.
5. Facilitate dialogue around the scriptures. Create space in leadership team meetings to reflect on and share about some key scriptures that define church. (Luke 10:1-12, Matthew 9:35-38 and Ephesians 4:7-16)
6. Pray. The mission of God is mysterious stuff. We cannot expect to control it or own it. As we seek God, the Holy Spirit will include us in this mystery and the mission will take hold of us. It will consume God's church in everything that does not fit with that mission. Oh God, let this be.