

HOW TO START
A HOUSE CHURCH
FROM SCRATCH

How to Start a House Church from Scratch

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PART I



FIRST STEPS IN STARTING A
HOUSE CHURCH

HOW TO START A HOUSE CHURCH FROM SCRATCH

How many are in your group?

Are you serious about seeing the church as it was, first-century style?

You have heard of house churches and, perhaps, the house church movement. You would like to be a house church. But how? You may even be aware there is a chance your little group may fizzle over the long haul. Most do. You do not want that to happen.

So, then, how to begin. . . .

I have seen house churches begin in a dozen different ways. There are several very viable ways to begin, but let me suggest the best way.

A CONFERENCE

One way to begin is by holding a weekend conference. I strongly urge that the speaker be someone from a house church. But who? The kind of house church you will become will probably be decided by the speaker you invite. Do you want a legalistic church? Do you want a charismatic house church? Are you wanting a church whose women function freely or are silent? Do you want elders who are in the forefront, or. . . ?

You have many options.

There *is* help out there. *You* make the choice. Above all else, I strongly suggest you invite someone to speak at the conference who has had a great deal of living-in-

church-life experience. A speaker who is not a theorist.
A speaker whose church is beautiful to behold.

THE CONFERENCE— HOW TO MAKE IT KNOWN

How can you let others in the community know about your conference? Well, in every large city there are usually some, but not many, who are interested in being part of a house church or are having serious doubts about going to Sunday church. How to get the word out? Announce the conference on Christian radio. Put flyers on car windshields. Put a notice on the bulletin board at the grocery store and your local Christian bookstore. Take out an ad in your local newspaper. Be creative. Cast your net far and wide! Send for a case of one or two books on house churches and pass them out to all the Christians you know. With the right speaker, you should see anywhere from thirty to one hundred people present for your conference. And yes, some of those present (maybe ten or twenty) will at least be there for your first home meeting after the conference.

DECISION MAKING

As you plan this conference, there is a good possibility you will encounter one very large problem: Because all of you are new at functioning, chances are,

you will have a very difficult time making corporate decisions. In fact, making any decisions at all! Someone from outside your group needs to help you to learn how to make corporate decisions, especially in the beginning. (After all, you have been sitting in a pew and others have made all the decisions.)

What if you cannot agree on a conference? Or whether to have outside help? What will you do then?

This brings us to the tenuousness of *beginning*.

BEGINNING IS DANGEROUS

Beginnings are full of opinions! Ideas, philosophies, theories, maneuverings, schemes, and, perish the thought, politicking are almost always present. Many, for instance, are quietly dreaming of becoming the group's leader (while you in turn, know you are).

Do you, the group, have enough cohesiveness to make decisions? Enough cohesiveness that you dare to begin meeting?

This is no light thing . . . the building of the body of Christ. In Paul's lifetime, it is estimated that he planted only thirteen churches! And he was a man who had been taken up to the third heaven!

WHO WILL MINISTER?

There are critical decisions you must face when you gather.

1. Will there be one person, someone who is part of the group, who will minister regularly to you (like a pastor)?
2. *Or*, will all ministry be shared by everyone (like in the early church)?
3. And will you work with someone who visits from time to time to help redirect you to Christ and to God's eternal purpose and help you to stay on a course in which the whole body functions (like Paul did)?

This decision is foundational to your gathering.

A LOCAL ESTABLISHED LEADER?

Here is something else that will affect who your conference speaker will be. Do you already have an established leader? The answer is crucial. Do you have someone who is going to keep on being your leader? If that is your current situation, you may have some difficulty finding anyone from outside to help you. Leaders in a house church who will continue to be *the* leader do not usually want *outside* help. Nor is outside help all that thrilled about helping your leader to continue being the leader! It is contrary to the heart of an organic house church. If you do have a well-established leader, let us hope this leader is a highly capable person, centered on Christ, one who is capable of handling many crises, someone who is *not* inclined to getting his way. And especially, not one who is raising up a church in order to establish his identity!

Of course, having previous house church experience (having actually lived in church life, not read about it) would help. Does he have a good reputation from the house church he was previously in? (Such people are rare.)

Your house church is no place for amateurs or dreamers or theorists . . . or people trying to find their place in life. A rule of thumb: If his house church fails, will he be doing something else, come next year? There are those who go from one failed house church to another, using their same “leadership” style and leaving a wake of damaged Christians.

Some of us are in church revolution for life . . . win, lose, or draw!

On the other hand, if you have no leader, then you have a wide choice of people to help you get started, so add this to your consideration.

BIBLE-CENTERED OR CHRIST-CENTERED?

Will you seek help from someone who is Bible-centered, and will he set you on a course of mastering “what the Bible says” and ordering your life accordingly? Or, will you seek help from one who is Christ-centered and will point you to knowing Christ? The difference? Three years from now, if you choose the first, you will *still* be seeking out truth from the Scripture, *still* looking for that *one* great truth in Scripture which will change your life. Should you choose the Christ-centered way, then three years from now there is an excellent chance you will know Christ *and* you will also know the Scripture!

If you are Bible-centered, you may know the Bible and yet learn virtually nothing of *knowing Christ*. Why? Knowing Christ does not automatically come to you by way of studying the Bible. A man who gives you the Bible knows the Bible. The man who gives you Christ will know Christ *and* Scripture.

WHICH APPROACH TO SCRIPTURE

For over 1800 years, we have had but one approach to Bible study. Actually, there are two. The difference in what you learn by one or the other approach is life changing. One approach is flat and one-dimensional; the other has shape and is multi-dimensional.

One takes Paul's letters exactly as they are bound in your New Testament: that is, out of order, with no chronology and no reference to times, dates, places . . . and therefore not showing any forward movement of time! That gives you an open field (the New Testament) from which to pick and rearrange verses into a doctrinal bouquet. Without knowing chronology, without knowing context, you select a verse and compare it with another verse (say verses in Galatians and I John), fourteen books apart. There is a time span of thirty years in between the writing of one verse in Galatians and the writing of the other in I John. Those two verses (two sentences from two letters) are written by two different authors, and in totally different circumstances! To say the least, this is a little dangerous. Context, circumstances, times, dates, and places *are* important! Without considering them, the Word of God may be misunderstood.

The other approach to learning Scripture, in a three-dimensional way, is to include the context of the first-century environment (political and social) in which Paul's letters were written . . . and to read them in their proper and chronological order.*

IS HELP NEEDED?

Have you ever been to a nice but dead house church meeting—a meeting where everyone walks in and sits down with that lost look? The lack of direction can be felt in the air. Pitiful singing of pitiful songs, with pitiful sharing. There is no sense of purpose, joy, or expectation. Just the blahs!

If this little gathering is an *elder-led* church, and if this elder has chosen to place all emphasis on Bible study, Bible exegesis, and Bible direction . . . with no internal aspect of the faith . . . and if the (usually *self-appointed*) elder is the teacher . . . and if the group is ten years old . . . listen to him speak. You will surely notice that life left that group a long time ago.

This is what *most* house church meetings are.

Imagination, creativity, variety died before gestation ever set in!

Welcome to run-of-the-mill house churches. Is this what you want?!

This word I give to your local leader and to whoever is the Bible teacher. After a few years you will run out of

* We recommend you read *A Primer to Revolutionary Bible Study*, SeedSowers Publishing House.

solutions and teachings (run out of soap), and you will have ever-mounting problems.

In every church in the first century, there was an awareness that there was a non-local worker to turn to. And this non-local worker (such as Timothy, Epaphras, Gaius, etc.) had previous church life experience.

Somewhere along the way, you will find someone espousing this philosophy: “We do not need any leaders. God will lead us.” If you choose to go it alone with that philosophy, chances are that your small gathering will collapse . . . and soon!

I recommend the Paul approach: infrequent visits to a church by a non-local worker in order to help that gathering, practically and spiritually, to stay on course.

HERE ARE SOME QUESTIONS UPON WHICH ALL THINGS HANG

Here are some secrets to a good start. Can you do these?

1. Do you have a heart to read a great deal? There are nearly a dozen pamphlets and booklets about house churches to read, and a few books. Read them! Read them all. All of you! Find those books that are written from the *experience* of living in church life, not arm-chair philosophy.
2. Are you cohesive enough that you, as a group, can go visit another house church? Spend a weekend with them. Watch them in the meetings. Ask questions. Are the women freely functioning in the meeting?

3. Can you, together, raise enough money to buy a plane ticket for an out-of-state speaker to speak at your conference? (The purchase of a plane ticket can cause your group to crash.)

I have heard tell of men being invited to speak at a house church conference . . . invited by a group of Christians wanting to get started . . . but when the speaker came, he paid his own way there and back and paid for his own motel room and food. Some groups felt they should pay no one's expenses because it was "too religious." My advice: Fold your tent. *You* may be too religious to even exist as a group.

Then there is the story of the group that did buy a plane ticket, but because one route cost \$25 more than another, they routed the speaker on a flight that took ten hours longer. In order for the group to save \$25!

Then there is "Well, maybe the speaker can raise enough money at the conference to pay for his own ticket!"

Dear ones, if you have enough desire and cohesiveness to provide transportation and accommodation for a speaker to and from the conference, you may have just done far more than you can imagine toward getting started!

Do these simple things, and you have an excellent chance of surviving and flourishing.

IF I WERE STARTING A HOUSE CHURCH

After forty years at this, let me imagine: What would I do if I were thirty years old and there were fifteen or

twenty people serious about restoration of the church? What would I do to get started? Here is my forty years' experience of "how" for someone who is thirty!

AN IDEAL WAY TO BEGIN

As I pick up this pen, I am watching a group of people doing the greatest job of preparing to be a house church I have ever seen. They are taking a year to prepare for their opening conference. What they are doing is utterly unique *and* they are enjoying every day in that year of planning.

They practice singing songs and psalms in a half-dozen different ways. They are taking serious the practical ways of how to meet. Example: Have you ever been in a home meeting where there are two or three minutes of silence between songs, sharing or prayers, etc.? They have been practicing how to eliminate those long gaps of deadly silence. These folks are serious. They know how to start a meeting (on time); they know how to end a meeting (instinct); they make announcements at the end of each meeting; and they have openly discussed just about every problem which Christians have in open meetings (such as the person who wants to lead the meetings, someone who is emotionally distraught, or someone who came to disturb the meetings).

This group will make it! And have fun doing it.

Would you like to learn how to do all this?

Go to genedwards.com and click on *House Church Helps*. Expect to find a great deal of help . . . with a little light-heartedness sprinkled in.

The next part of this book is addressed to one who would be in the forefront of starting a house church. Of course, Part II should also be read by everyone who wants to be part of a house church.

PART II



THE ENORMOUS
RESPONSIBILITY OF
STARTING A CHURCH

THE HIGH ADVENTURE AND THE TEST OF ALL WE BELIEVE

To work with God's people for a short period of time and then dare leave them is the greatest challenge leadership will ever face; yet, Paul did it constantly. You believe in the power of the Holy Spirit, of preaching through the Bible, healing, miracles, the baptism of the Spirit, prophesy, etc. Put those practices to *this* test: After you leave, will God's people be well-enough equipped by your ministry to carry on without you? Never forget that leaving a people on their own is *the best measure* of any man's life and ministry. *This is the acid test* of all you believe and all you can do.

You as a leader may fear the very scriptural practice of leaving the church on its own. This "by the Book" way of raising up a church takes ability on a dozen levels. True, it is hard to imagine leaving an infant church without help. This reluctance often reveals a clergy mentality. It takes passion to take the road of the lay-led church. You will be measured! So, is your vision revealing an I-centered ministry or a lay-centeredness?

What do you want to see rise up all over this world? Make your choice. Can you envision a professional's *absence* and a people, with no human leader, surviving after they are totally left alone?

Daring God's people to have a period of time of *discovering*, a discovery made totally by lay people—that is the very best of Christian adventure. It is the foundation of a church. It is the way to begin.

To back away from the venture is to admit we do not trust laymen. We personally admit, unconsciously, that

we are not *equipped* to *equip* God's people for such high adventure.

Should not God's people at least know about this option and be allowed to make this choice? Let's tell them. Sir, please do so!

Tell this story: Tell God's people about how Paul abandoned every church he ever raised up . . . and did so *before* the church had elders. Yes, *before* there were elders, the churches were left on their own.

God's people are willing to try. What is needed are church planters who dare this way and Christians just as daring, to believe, to agree, and to do.

I dare you to tell them that story.

THE "HOW" OF THE BIRTH OF THE ORGANIC CHURCH

God's people *alone* are the ones who can *discover* organic church life. Paul's way is not novel. It is the way. We can never teach, nor impose, an organic church life on people. True church life is *layman*-discovered church life!

It is discovered, or it is not organic.

You who would raise up a church, you cannot produce an organic church. God's people can. It is our calling to make this wondrous thing happen by 1) raising up a church, 2) preparing her to be left alone, *and* 3) leaving her.

Nor shall we say "We gave them the right to function." Functioning is the divine right of God's people!

If we do not do this, we are *still* a clergy-centered movement, even if we meet in a home.

Live with this constant question: Who owns the function of the church? The pastor? The elders? No, not even the one who raised up the church.

Let me put this in other words. Dear leader, follow Paul by so ordering your life that laymen end up with total *ownership* of the church. Let that be your passion.

OWNERSHIP OF THE CHURCH

Until we are gripped by an insatiable passion to see laymen in total ownership of the church, all our present efforts are of little merit. When the dust clears, we will see a clergy-dominated meeting. Our present effort will be as it has been for 1800 years, the clergy-led church.

Tell a people “You will be left alone!” This is one of the great transforming statements of all time. People listen when they know they will become responsible for all that the church becomes.

We must abandon the church to the church. Without a passion for the organic, for the priesthood of believers, for ownership in *their* hands, not yours, we are but engendering another movement.

In a word: The only way there will ever be ownership of the church in the hands of ordinary saints is when those ordinary saints have been left on their own.

When there is *no worker*, no leader, no *almost-leader*, no sort-of-leader, no *pseudo* leader, or *accado**

* Latin for *near*.

leader present, then we have a shot at being truly New Testament. And after the leader has left, no one, be it man or woman, like a spy, keeps the absentee worker informed about what is going on from week to week.** No, the *leaving* must be absolute.

ELDERS

Without 1) abandonment and 2) organic discovery, you will place ownership of the church in the hands of *elders*! Or in the hands of ever-present ministers moving in tandem with elders.

Elders are not supposed to be chosen by the leader. If they are, face it, the leader is a *controlling* leader, and insecure. Elders emerge out of an organic setting of the ecclesia. Elders emerge from among a people who are *already* in full ownership of the church. Never *before* that are elders to be chosen. Elders are not to be chosen by a local leader. Never in all first-century records does an elder choose elders.

A good-sized part of the present house church phenomenon still has a psychological bent to seeing church direction in the hands of near-pastors, and/or elders. All elders in Paul's world were chosen by the non-local itinerant worker. You can find no exception.

My observation: Virtually every house church in America was started by a local leader who stays local, then chooses the elders, and declares himself to be one

** Yes, the worker does return, as an outside worker, to strengthen the church or to deal with a crisis that is life threatening to the church.

of the elders! This is unscriptural, manipulative, and self-aggrandizing. When God's people own the church, there is true, though unconscious, ownership.

The "eternally mute" finally have something to do! *Really* something to do. This is high drama. True, it is risky! But God's people love it. They also love you for your trust in them. They love you for releasing your control of them. What a change. What a revolution. Behold an organic church, sensitive to the possibility of the headship of Jesus Christ. She is an organism, not an organization: a New Testament church by divine biology.

The question is: how to make this become reality. You must know how to reveal the Lord to the Lord's people.

Please experience an organic church before becoming a planter of the church, thereby saving yourself and God's people from many a terrible disaster.

WHAT IS YOUR GOSPEL?

Our present approach to the gospel may not be deep enough, fresh enough, *Cross*-centered enough, spiritually dynamic enough to bring God's people into the high drama of being left by the church planter.

If we can but admit that the gospel we preach is inadequate for building the church as she ought to be, then we are half way home. The other half is that we begin looking for answers that are outside the evangelical mind-set. The goal of your gospel is to work yourself out of a job. The goal of your gospel is to bring God's people to a

point where you are not needed. Will you do it the way Paul did it? That is, leave the church in a position where the ordinary brothers and sisters in the gathering can lead the church for an indefinite length of time without your help? To accomplish that goal, you must deliver a very high gospel.

The people I have worked with *own* every aspect of the church. They do not think about the fact that they own the church, but if asked, they *know*! Further, many have never *seen* me. None have seen me come for a visit that lasted even one month. In any case, the church is in no way dependent on me for her continued existence nor her growth. In one case, at this writing, one such church has not seen me or heard from me for *over* thirty years! Previously, my time with them was less than a month total!

Could we not, gentlemen, in all we are saying about “the pattern” and about being “New Testament” churches, could we not include *the organic* in that pattern?

PAUL’S WAY

Just what is Paul’s way?

Could we not admit to this: Of the nine* churches clearly presented to us in Scripture which were raised up by Paul, the record shows that *seven* of them saw Paul present among them for no more than five months.

In one church, Paul was present a whole eighteen months, and in the last of those churches, he stayed three years.

* Pisidia, Iconium, Lystra, Derbe, Philippi, Thessalonica, Berea, Corinth, Ephesus

This is the *only* pattern that is present in the first-century story. Every church was organic.

HERE THEY ARE

Pisidian-Antioch	5 months
Iconium	5 months
Lystra (less than)	5 months
Derbe	5 months
Philippi (less than)	5 months
Thessalonica	5 months
Berea (less than)	5 months
Corinth	18 months
Ephesus	3 years

So goes Paul's ministry, and even the twelve apostles were itinerant.

The only exception was Jerusalem, the very first church. The apostles were there seven years. Repeat: The apostles (that is, church planters) were with the church in Jerusalem for no more than seven years.

Can we not make room for this pattern . . . even if bringing it up strikes fear in the hearts of all who hear!

Telling the Lord's people "I will leave you" gets everyone's attention and gets everyone excited!

THEN!

Then you say, "When I leave, I will depart without giving you elders or any other kind of leaders!"

A PERSONAL WORD, IF I MAY

I would find no reason for raising up a church if I had to do it any other way. To me, if it is not an organic approach to the church, it is not the church at all, that is, if it is a clergy-led church, or a one-man-led church.

THE MISSION FIELD

How we raise up churches in foreign lands is not a small issue. In fact, it may well be *the* issue. We will never see an organic, indigenous expression of the church on the “mission field” until we adopt “leaving,” because only then will locals be free of the world-wide Americanization of the church.

If we do not leave the church in the hands of the local Christians, we doom churches in other lands to be *American* churches.

See a church so grand that she is diverse in her expression, different in one nation and another. Right now we evangelicals essentially have *one* church expression, the American version. The present *American* version of the church is not even organic to America. It is a diluted version of the British *high church* . . . which is a Lutheran/Geneva-Calvin version. And before that there was the Reformation church’s own adaptation of Roman Catholicism! In a word, none of those versions of church were naturally conceived, birthed, or grown. Only in raising up a church, preparing a church, and *leaving* a church can we discover organic, *native*,

indigenous churches . . . churches which *fit* the soil they grow in.

Our choice is between “cookie-cutter” churches or churches of endless variety: variety born of a high compound of spiritual encounter, coming out of the DNA of God’s people, people who are experiencing Christ in their native habitat.

All it takes is . . .

EXPERIENCE FIRST

It is not far from the mark to observe that no one seems to want to be in church life before starting a church.

Amazingly, most house church leaders have not had two weeks in a house church *before* planting a church. Needed: a minimum of a year (or two) in real, honest-to-goodness church life.

SEVEN YEARS

Personally, I spent seven years. After that seven years came *eleven* more experimenting, that is, *learning* the needs, the problems, crises, and the endless kaleidoscope of experiences found in church life—an eighteen-year preparation. May I urge you to spend at least *one* year in church life, and as an *ordinary brother*, if for no other reason than for the sake of God’s people.

We speak of “New Testament *order*.” We speak of the “New Testament *model*” and “the first-century *pattern*.” The men of ages long ago were *itinerant* church planters, ever moving. So, let us mention these men, their model, when we urge a New Testament pattern.

Those early church planters all *left* churches on their own, *before* there were elders.

Yes, let us mention *that* model. Let us also mention that Jesus Christ was the prevailing message of these men. Christ was the gyroscope, the revelation, *the* message, the experience of these men. Christ was the center of the church. Should we not make as big an issue of that fact as we do of elders, prayer, Bible study, or evangelism?

We have a chance to do something new, making a genuine, new contribution.

With that said, we now come to the most important aspect of starting churches.

MINISTERING JESUS CHRIST

Let us suppose we can minister Christ to God’s people—pure, undistracted by lesser things.

A young man called me, insisting that he could raise up a church and also remain *local* after he did so, with no problem. I responded: “What would you preach to the Lord’s people at the outset?” His answer came lightening quick. “I would preach about giving up the world, about their dealing with their self-nature. I would tell them they have to die to self.”

Unfortunately, his response is not too far distant from what many are preaching. (I am aware that most

men also talk to God's people about Bible study and about what a New Testament church is, that is, a church after the "New Testament pattern.") That message is sterile and methodistic.

One way or another, most center on an "it." Our message is not an "it." Our message must always be a "Him."

Gentlemen, there is only one foundation of the church. There is only one message to declare. Unless the message of Christ Himself is welling up out of the depths of a man's belly and there is a burning revelation of Christ, even that message will be sterile.

TRY SPEAKING THIS MESSAGE

Preach a message based solely on the glorification of the living Christ. Not on "read your Bible," not on salvation, or works, or "do's and do not's." Only on the glorification of the Lord Jesus Christ. Do that and you will know what your message is.*

The one who is doing the speaking must have had a profound, awesome, earthshaking, mind-boggling, soul-shattering revelation of the Lord Jesus Christ permeating him—a revelation he will never recover from. He will preach Christ, he will live Christ, he will be obsessed with Christ, and Christ will be the foundation of the church he raises up. Otherwise, his message of Christ will "run out." A man will have difficulty staying on the

* We recommend *The Centrality, Pre-eminence and Supremacy of Jesus Christ* and *Christ Before Creation*, both from SeedSowers Publishing House.

subject of Christ, or he will have a difficult time getting off that subject. The dear people who hear this awesome Christ will have things happen to them that will reach far beyond what church usually affords. You cannot truly build on anything else.

Be assured, a revealing of Christ does profoundly affect the Lord's people . . . in a way *nothing* else can. So also will it affect the messenger.

It is wonderful to see a room full of people see the glory of Jesus Christ, and then learn how to touch Him. Nothing can replace an encounter with Jesus Christ. That alone is the soil of church life and the foundation she is built on!

What do we do after we reveal Christ?

Show the Lord's dear people how to know Him! Personally. Intimately. Daily.

And after that?

More of Jesus Christ.

And after that?

More of the same.

Ever been to a house church conference? Next time do this: Note how often the name *Christ* is mentioned. Compare that with other central words, such as Bible, submission, elders, Bible study, truth, word, teaching, doctrine . . . and even *discipline*!

It is what is in the heart that the mouth speaks on! May you be the exception. May all the *other* centralities never be your centrality. May it be Christ who abounds and Christ who overflows in your heart.

Why this wall-to-wall lack of the centrality of Christ in our ministry and message and life? Because a revelation

of Jesus Christ is not easy to come by. Have you ever considered how easy it is to master Scripture as over against being permeated with Christ? There is a difference!

It is not the lack of the centrality of Christ which I address here, but it is the lack of *interest* in the centrality of Christ which concerns me. The discussion of *things* is not a substitute for *Him*. Again, shall our speaking be an “it” or a “Him?”

A THOUSAND MESSAGES ON CHRIST

On file, in storage, are over one thousand audio messages I have spoken which have been recorded. Virtually every message is on the subject of the Lord Jesus Christ. Virtually none of them touch on the Lord’s earthly life. These messages are not studies on His life, nor teachings on the book of Revelation. These messages are not theology. They are not messages on how to be a good Christian. There is nothing of “this is what Jesus did; therefore, you should, too.” There is not a single message in there on submission. Not one on elders. Not one on discipline! There is one on the gifts. (The purpose of your gift is to exalt Jesus Christ.) There is not one on social responsibility to the world.

Why none of these? For some reason, while unveiling Christ, there has never been a need to deal with such subjects.

A thousand messages that declare a present, living, resurrected, exalted, triumphant, *indwelling* Lord. That is all. What else is found in these recordings? Some of them show one pivotal message to brothers and sisters

on how to *know*, how to touch, how to experience, how to embrace, how to love Christ, how to be loved by Him . . . how to *know* and walk with this incredible Lord of ours. Individually and corporately.

Dear young man, you who would wander into the unknown world of church life, let Christ be your obsession, personally, privately. Then when you open your mouth, let it be Christ.

All of us, especially those of us who have the word *church* on our lips, desperately need to know how to *know* this Lord and also how to proclaim the One we have encountered.

Let us at last have one bright exception to the movements, one in all church history, that is centered on Christ. That will be history! And *that* must be our contribution.

PREVIOUS MOVEMENTS—AN “IT” OR A “HIM”

The Pentecostal movement was typified by fantasy, miracles, and, to their everlasting credit, praise. The rest of Christendom smiled at their delightful delirium, but somewhere there was a divine element. That tiny touch with the divine is what provided their “first-motion drive” that turned out to be the largest and most noticeable work of the last one hundred years.

Before that, there were the Baptists. Baptists followed the western movement across America and swept the entire American continent. They did this armed with no more than the impetus which comes to all believers

when we receive that touch we have of our Lord at the moment of our salvation. We Baptists took that moment of divine encounter and virtually made the salvation experience our everything. We attributed to salvation all the attributes of transformation: that is, that salvation *is* transformation, that salvation is the power to utterly transform, to empower, and to solve all problems on this planet. If we did not actually teach that, at least that is the way it sounded. We focused on salvation to the point it sounded like a cure-all of all things Christian. So singular an element as the divine touch at the experience of salvation is what drove a very large engine, the worldwide Baptist movement.

The Pentecostals had praise. The Baptists took conversion and made it the power to solve all problems.

Consider this: What could come of a living, breathing walk with Christ as the center of the church?

What else does the house church movement have to offer that is true, unique? What is new? Is it the superiority of the living room *sofa* over the *pew*? The rediscovery of elders? Could we not consider the divine element . . . the “other realmness,” the quest of “touching Christ,” beholding Him? We could do worse than be known as a spiritual people, even a people who report that they have touched the Lord Jesus Christ in private encounter and in *corporate* encounter.

Again, my concern is not that we do not have this living relationship with our Lord, but rather that we have not been aware of it and do not even mention it. Why in heaven’s name are we not interested in the centrality of Jesus Christ!

Could this not possibly be observed as a weakness in these our foundational days?

You would start a home church? Then remember the *spiritual* side of the church. Knowing Christ is *everything*. If you want to restore something, restore that.

We need church planters, but we need church planters who are drenched in Christ Jesus and *also* know how to show other people how to know Jesus Christ. Gentlemen, in the name of all that is holy, someone has to have a heart hunger to know our Lord and to show Him forth until God's people are overwhelmed by a revelation—and living experience—of Jesus Christ. Never forget that the church grows out of constant revelation of Jesus Christ and nothing else. The organic church comes from no other source.

We need men who know Him and are obsessed with seeing the ownership of the church in the hands of God's people...*not* in their own. I hope, when you start a house church, you are in that way driven. For every Christian who ever breathed, I say we would see Jesus!

I close by sharing with you an incident that took place recently. In it learn what awaits you as you raise up a house church.

DIVISION IS A CERTAINTY

If a church becomes large and strong, someone will divide it. To put it another way, someone who wants to plant churches but does not have the ability will need to take some people away so he can start his own church.

I spent this last week with one of the greatest Christian workers of our day. He is from India.

Back in the 1940s, a man stepped onto the scene in India who went on to raise up a *thousand* indigenous churches, an accomplishment unparalleled in any lifetime, ever. What that man did eclipsed anything any of us have ever done in all church history. He died at the turn of the 21st century. A half-million people came to his funeral. His name was Bakht Singh. He was not well-known in the West, nor was he particularly interested in us Westerners!

Counterwise, virtually no one from the West ever came to follow his work or sit at his feet or study his work seriously.

The gentleman I was with last week is a friend of mine of many years. He was also Bakht Singh's closest co-worker.

With that background, there is one thing I would share with you. As great a Christian as Bakht Singh was, there were many men who strongly thought they could do *better* than Bakht Singh! Seeing his work, being *in* his work, they said, "I have a better idea, I have a better way." There were Christians who heard those men who "had a better way" and chose to follow. So it was these men divided, split, and severed Bakht Singh's work! Alas, those men and their splinter work were never seen again.

Why?

A man like Bakht Singh only comes along once every four hundred years! Yet, there were those in the ranks in those churches, and among the workers, who "had a better idea" and could do it better.

Each gained followers . . . and divided . . . but they utterly lacked the ability to carry out their dream and were never heard from again.

My friend from India walked with Bakht Singh for over forty years and had, himself, traveled all over India, planted churches in every direction of the compass, been through crisis after crisis, prayer vigils, preached in forty nations, slept on trains, driven in 140 degree heat, spent the night in places scorpions would not go, and sacrificed everything for the Lord.

Such men do not come by often!

But there were always other men with a better idea! Those better-idea men will not travel day and night, risk their lives, sleep on trains, pray all night, sleep on the floor of a dozen airports and in dumps where snakes would fear to tread, get lost in jungles, suffer, be lied about, hated, *and* count it all *joy*, . . . and fail and fail again and come back again and again. No, that man who has a better idea has just that, *a better idea*. No more than that. Nonetheless, he will not hesitate to divide! He will not suffer, lay down his life for others, but he does have “a better idea.”

This man can also see faults . . . lots of them. Furthermore, he is right in his assessments. Never forget, he is exactly right in all the faults he finds. *All* of them. In fact, in the long run, it will be found out that that is *all* he is good at. All night vigils, travel across the earth, spending his all, dying for others, he is *not* good at that!

YOU WOULD RAISE UP A HOUSE CHURCH

The quintessence of your life must be Christ. And would you like to reach a little higher? Then let Christ be your life without any religious pretense.

Sacrifice is a must. Losing, loss, dying, failing and failure are the quintessential essence of serving God. Rejoicing in it all is a must if you expect to survive! There is stress in raising up a church. How small, or how large, is your comfort zone?

My friend, a worker of over forty years, has scars to prove it. Like his co-worker Bakht Singh, he has been surrounded by men with a better idea who split the body of Christ and are never heard from again, but he—God bless him—is still a wide-eyed optimist!

One day *you* will meet that particular man who has a *better idea*! He will open your eyes (and the eyes of others) to all that is wrong. When you meet this man, also keep in mind Bakht Singh! My friend has been part of one of the greatest works in church history, yet there is always someone who *knows* he could do it better.

We will all keep encountering the man who has a better idea. He is here forever. Many positive things have been said about house churches; but on the other side of the coin you will find the man with a better idea. Finally, I beg you, never be the “better-idea man.” Philosophers do not spill their blood, nor wreck their health, nor give their all in following their great insights. Follow the “better-idea man” if you must, but never be him.

On the other hand, if you do not feel comfortable about abandoning all to Christ, then by all means follow the “better-idea man.” Before you do, though, there is one question you may want to ask this man.

Ask him, “What is your world view?”

Just that one question. It is enough.

(He has none.)

What is a “world view?” If you have to ask, there is little reason for explaining.

Ask my friend from India. Ask Bakht Singh. Ask any of those whose blood was spilled for Christ and the church.

A WORLD VIEW

My general impression of *most* house church meetings is that they certainly have no world view. But without one, why are we here?

Here is the general run of house churches. Half the people come into the meeting late. Everyone has a stapled song sheet. They sing a few songs. Anything after that might be classified as pretty pitiful. Hollow prayers. Shallow sharing, etc. A sense of newness of life is not present. There is no view of *anything* larger than the gathering itself.

Most home meetings are meek, mild, and exist to make those who are present feel good. It is essentially a *bless me* club. An aggressive world purpose does not exist. That, dear reader, bears *no* resemblance to any church in Century One.

Disturbing?

Most such groups have a rather large comfort zone and will pay any price to keep it that way. A world vision? Not even the next-town-over vision.

Is *this* the church of Century One, which was a rolling dynamo?

You are interested in starting a house church? Or perhaps you wish to be part of one.

Then settle this, now!

What is your world view?

Bakht Singh's world view was to take Christ and the church to the planet, beginning with raising up indigenous churches all over India, then anywhere else he could reach during his lifetime.

My friend from India? He has the same view and will lay down his life at any cost for it.

The Christians I co-labor with also have a world view, raising up a restored experience of an organic church, anywhere on earth that we can reach in one lifetime. And if necessary, we will swim to get there, to restore the church of Century One—simple, and yet like that rolling dynamo. To see Christ displayed in a meeting, a meeting led by no man. Encounter with Christ, and that encounter reported on in the meeting. Christ lifted up with joy, oneness, love, care: a corporate pursuit of Christ. In a word, a restored church, all across this planet.

For all of us who are so driven, every breath we breathe, every drop of blood in our veins, it is Christ, it is Christ, and it is Christ and the church.

What is *your* world view?

How great is the burden that burns in you? What is the length, depth, width, and height of that burden?

How obsessed are you?

To how much training have you subjected yourself?

You want to start a house church from scratch? Then how much have you subjected yourself to outside learning? While still a young man, I traveled the world in order to learn about the churches which were the exception, not the rule. Once again, there is that same question:

What is your world view?

AN IMPLORATION

Every man who served God in the first century had a world view and poured out his life to that end. A strong case could be built that without a world view you have no business serving God. Those who came after the first-century workers also had a world view: the Lollards, the Moravians, the Waldensians, Bakht Singh. If that is your world view, then I hope to have the honor of meeting you.