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The Believers' Church (Part 3)



**LIFE AND GROWTH
IN GOD'S FAMILY**



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Editorial

KEES VAN KRALINGEN

The Believers' Church

LIFE AND GROWTH IN GOD'S FAMILY

PART 3



This issue of *RT* is the third and final thematic issue on the topic of the believers' church (see *RT* 284 and 287 for the first two).

Part 2 of Luke Jenner's article continues to look at the biblical approach to the church as a family with lots of practical applications. He addresses issues such as how to balance the priorities between our natural families and the church family and what being a church family means for loving and caring for each other.



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Jesus

OUR ONLY HOPE FOR OUR MINISTRY AND FOR THE CHURCH



Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by command of God our Saviour and of Christ Jesus our hope. To Timothy, my true child in the faith: Grace, mercy and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord

1 Tim 1:1-2



In addition, he deals with the important topic of singles; how the church is a family to those who do not have a natural family for whatever reason. Being members of the church as a family also implies faithfulness to the church; something that goes against the current trend of 'church hopping'. The article ends with applications for pastoral care in the church family.

Ray Evans offers us an article on how to grow a believers' church. He focuses on the work of evangelism and most helpfully shows how this is part of our whole-life discipleship. He calls us to equip the church in such a way that evangelism becomes an attitude rather than a specific task. He draws a number of important lessons from Acts 16, from the three very different stories presented by Luke from the life of Paul. Topics treated include the role of Word and deed and the building of relationships. He encourages us to realise that people may be more open to spiritual conversations than we tend to think. This does not necessarily mean they are open to the biblical gospel, but that there is good reason to speak more boldly and naturally about Jesus and the gospel. We should also make people realise that they have permission to spend time in activities where they meet other people as in leisure activities, sports etc.

Finally, Ray reminds us on the one hand to realise the urgency of evangelism, and on the other hand to exercise patience, as for many people the journey to faith can take years. I will stop here, and not mention more of the insights and practical suggestions in this article. Please read it yourself and share, discuss this article with your elders and deacons and the whole church.

I realise that we have had some rather lengthy articles on this theme of the believers' church in the previous and current issue of *RT*. I hope you will share my conviction as you read them that this theme is of the utmost importance these days. Who and what we are as churches is of primary importance for our witness to an increasingly secularised society where individualism is rampant and in which everyone not only does what is right in their own eyes (Judges 21:25), but actively promotes such an attitude to life.

To complete our treatment of this theme, I have added some information on recommended books on (church) leadership. ■



Introduction

The apostle Paul made a special effort to train new pastors and elders for the newly planted churches. One of these was Timothy. When Paul was away, he still instructed his pupil by letters. We have these letters in the New Testament. In the first of these, Paul starts with his introductory greeting which refers to the fact that he is 'an apostle of Christ Jesus by the command of God our Saviour and of Christ Jesus our hope'. The occurrence here of these last two words is remarkable as Paul does not always mention them in similar introductions to his letters. Right from the start of his letter he wants Timothy to know that Christ Jesus is our hope. Why does he mention this here specifically to Timothy and what does this mean? Let's first look at who Timothy is, in order to understand these words.

Who is Timothy?

His name refers to one who is honoured by God. He is one of the closest co-workers of Paul, perhaps his closest fellow-worker. Paul mentions him in the introduction of six of his letters. He comes from Lystra in Asia Minor. He is the son of a mixed marriage of a Greek father and a Jewish mother (Eunice). His grandmother's name is Lois. His mother and grandmother bring up Timothy in the faith, presumably initially in the Jewish faith; he is made familiar with the Scriptures. We read more about this in 2 Timothy 1:5, and in 2 Timothy 3:14-15 where we read: 'But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith

in Christ Jesus.' He comes to faith in Christ during Paul's first missionary journey.

The text also shows that Paul is instrumental in Timothy's conversion: Paul calls him 'my true child in the faith'. True means legitimate or authentic, which is especially relevant given that Timothy was a son of a mixed marriage. This shows that no matter what our background may be, by faith we become legitimate, true children of the living God.

Timothy quickly gains a good reputation among the Christians in Lystra and Iconium. When Paul returns there on his second journey, Timothy joins him (Acts 16:1). Paul also circumcised Timothy, although this was for tactical purposes; circumcision no longer had any value for Paul, as he says in Galatians 6:15. Timothy accompanied Paul on many of his journeys.

But Paul also sends Timothy on special missions: first of all to Thessalonica (from Corinth); later he is sent on a journey to Corinth via Macedonia when Paul is in Ephesus, see Paul's recommendation in 1 Corinthians 16:10-11 'When Timothy comes, see that you put him at ease among you, for he is doing the work of the Lord, as I am. So let no-one despise him. Help him on his way in peace, that he may return to me, for I am expecting him with the brothers.'

Later we find him with Paul again in Corinth when Paul writes his letter to the Romans (Rom 16:21) and then accompanies Paul on his journey to Jerusalem. Paul is then taken to Rome as a prisoner and at some point Timothy is

with Paul again. We know this because Paul wrote several letters from his prison cell (to Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, Philemon), see for instance Philippians 2:19-22: 'I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you soon, so that I too may be cheered by news of you. For I have no one like him, who will be genuinely concerned for your welfare. They all seek their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ. But you know Timothy's proven worth, how as a son with a father he served with me in the gospel.' After Paul's release from prison, Paul travels most likely again to Ephesus, because we read in 1 Timothy 1:3 that Paul left Timothy in Ephesus. Some time after this, Paul writes our current first letter to Timothy. Paul intends to return to Ephesus but says he might be delayed (1 Tim 3:14,15).

Paul is then imprisoned again in Rome from where he writes a second letter to Timothy urging him to come to Rome and to bring with him some materials (2 Tim 4:9-13). At the same time Paul feels his departure from this life is imminent and we do not know if Timothy made it in time to see Paul again. Paul was killed in Rome. We also know from the letter to the Hebrews that Timothy has also been imprisoned for a while as we read that he has been released (Heb 13:23).

What kind of person is Timothy? From various references in Paul's letters we can form an impression. Timothy is still young as Paul says in 1 Timothy 4:12, 'Let no one despise you for your youth.' Apparently, Timothy is somewhat timid and humble as 2 Timothy 1:7 may suggest; he needs encouragement (1 Cor 16:10; 2 Tim 1:7). He has some health problems

as Paul encouraged him to take some wine for his recurring stomach problem (1 Tim 5:23). All of this illustrates the point that God uses what seems weak by this world's standards. But, as Paul knows from own experience, when he is weak, he is in fact strong (2 Cor 12:10).

All of this becomes especially significant when we realise that young Timothy is called to a crucially important ministry in Ephesus and to a major task for which Paul commissions him. What is the task ahead for Timothy? We can see this from the remainder of Paul's first letter. Timothy has to identify and confront false teaching (1:3-20; 4:1-5), especially the danger of materialism and the pursuit of wealth (6:5-21). He also has to implement gospel-shaped living in the church: worship and the use of prayer (2:1-15). He has to appoint elders and deacons for which Paul presents him with instruction regarding the necessary qualifications for these offices (3:1-13). Furthermore, Timothy has to teach the people on how to behave in the church, the household of God (3:14-16). In the middle of all of this we find Paul's personal charge to Timothy with the exhortation how his ministry should be shaped by the gospel (4:6-16). This includes instruction regarding specific groups (the elderly, widows) and the honouring of elders in the church, and of masters (5:1-6:2).

What an overwhelming job description for this young and timid brother! How is he going to handle this? Likewise, we can feel overwhelmed when we consider the work of the ministry in the church. This can even happen when you read this (and the previous issues) of *RT* dealing

with the believers' church. We may get the feeling: is this what the church should be? How far removed is my church from this biblical ideal! And what does this tell about my ministry? We can easily feel a sense of failure. Paul understands this from his own experience. Before addressing Timothy's ministry and the task ahead, he draws attention to a crucially important truth:

Christ Jesus, our only hope

Against this background of Timothy and his ministry and the challenging conditions of his ministry, we can now understand why Paul points to Christ Jesus our hope. This points us to the gospel that Paul preaches and for which he was commissioned by the Lord Jesus himself. This gospel is all that God has done in his Son Jesus Christ, in his birth, life, suffering, death, resurrection, ascension in order to save a people for himself and to restore his creation to a new humanity and a new earth and new heavens all to the praise of his glorious grace. The gospel speaks about what God has already done, but also points to the future: Jesus Christ will come again, which is what we hope and long for. As Paul

says to the Romans: 'In this hope we were saved' (Rom 8:24a). This does not mean that we have the outcome already now, but we wait for it with patience as Paul continues: 'Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience' (Rom 8:24b-25). As somebody has said with reference to the Second World War: we live in between D-day and VE-day.

The ministry of the gospel as preached by Timothy, Paul and now also by us and our churches stands between Jesus' 1st and 2nd comings. This is what determines history, the progress of the gospel throughout the

world (Matt. 24:14). As a church we are part of this through the ministry of the church, through evangelism and mission. The only way to succeed is if we keep our eyes fixed on Jesus Christ our Lord, the founder and perfecter of our faith (Heb 12:2). Because our faith is faith in Christ, this hope will not fail us; 'Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen' (Heb 11:1).

Our only hope for our ministry of the gospel is in the one



WITHOUT HIM WE CAN DO NOTHING (JOHN 15:5). THIS IS AT THE SAME TIME A SOBERING TRUTH FOR US, BUT ALSO A GLORIOUS REMINDER OF WHO CHRIST IS FOR US!

who the gospel is all about: our Lord Jesus Christ. Our only hope for leading the church is the one who is the head of the church: Jesus Christ. Our only hope for dealing with issues in the church whether they are doctrinal, practical, personal, is in Christ in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge (Col 2:3). He has given us his Word and Spirit to help and guide us. Without him we can do nothing (John 15:5). This is at the same time a sobering truth for us, but also a glorious reminder of who Christ is for us!

God's gracious gifts of encouragement through Jesus Christ

Our hope is made and kept alive through God's gracious gifts to us. Paul mentions these as follows: 'To Timothy, my true child in the faith: Grace, mercy and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord.' These are familiar words; we read them routinely, and as a result they are overlooked and we deprive ourselves of the blessings they contain.

In these gifts we can find our source of strength to continue in the faith and in our ministry; these are our spiritual resources. They come from God, the Father. We always have to begin with God and not with our conditions and problems. Grace is God's goodness and kindness to us guilty people who have not deserved the least of God's gifts, let alone to be saved and to be called children of God. The word mercy is not always mentioned in Paul's greetings in his letters, but here it is. He adds this word probably because of two reasons. Paul remembers his own background and realises he has received mercy, as he mentions God's mercy for himself in vv13, 16. Although Timothy's

background is different from that of Paul, he needs mercy too. It points to our need, our own inadequacy and lack of resources. But God will supply all our needs. Peace is the final of these three words: we have peace with God through the blood of the Lord Jesus. In this way we have been reconciled to God. He is our peace.

We obtain all of this from God, the Father through Christ Jesus our Lord. The word Christ means the Anointed One. This refers to the threefold office of Christ which is explained in a wonderful way in the Heidelberg Catechism (Q&A 31). 'He is our chief Prophet and Teacher who perfectly reveals to us the secret counsel and will of God for our deliverance. He is our only High Priest who has set us free by the one sacrifice of his body and who continually pleads our cause with the Father. He is our eternal King, who governs us by his Word and Spirit, and who guards us and keeps us in the freedom he has won for us.'

His name Jesus means he is our Saviour to save us from our sins and from the wrath of God because of our sins. He is our Lord because he has bought us with his precious blood, and he has set us free from the tyranny of the devil, and has bought us, body and soul, to be his own.

Thus Paul therefore has many reasons for the exhortations in the final part of this first letter: 'Fight the good fight of faith,' and 'O Timothy, guard the deposit entrusted to you' (1 Tim 6:12,20). This is indeed a great deposit to encourage us in our ministry; a deposit which we also share with all those who are in Christ Jesus, who is our hope! ■



LIFE IN GOD'S FAMILY

EXPLORING THE
 NEW TESTAMENT'S
PRIMARY
METAPHOR FOR
 THE CHURCH

This is the second and final part of this article (see RT 287 for part 1).¹

3. The biblical-theological progression: tracing family through the Bible

The Bible begins with biological family as the central social context of human life. The Old Testament unfolds and commends the ties which that biology creates. But then this view of the family becomes extended into a spiritual and heavenly reality as the Bible progresses, and particularly as God's only natural Son enters the world to build a new family on a different basis from biology. Then you realise that all the family language of the Old Testament was simply a picture of the spiritual reality towards which it was all pointing (much as marriage is a picture of Christ and the church). Blood relations are the shadow. Christian relations are the reality.

It is important enough, and perhaps even foreign enough, to repeat it: the reality that history was always waiting for was the church family. The little pictures of it were ... families. You might hear me and say, 'What, you mean real families?' But that's exactly the point. No. The Bible thinks the other way round completely.

¹ Addendum to part 1: the source of the illustration on p7 of RT 287 regarding the Titanic film is the book: Joseph H. Hellerman, *When the Church was a Family: Recapturing Jesus' Vision for Authentic Community* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2009).

The real family is the church. The picture, the journey to get there, the scale model, the growing-up process, the preparation for reality, is the dads, mums, children, households, extended communities related by blood. 'Families'.

You believe this without realising you are doing it when you read a Psalm like 133. It's about blood family – at the very least fellow-Israelite kinsmen. But when you read it, who *really* are the brothers (and sisters) for whom it's good and pleasant to live together in unity? You have New Testament eyes and hearts, and you know that you can and must legitimately read that and think, 'It means it's a good thing when I live in unity with my brothers and sisters in Christ.' You think of Ephesians 4:3; Philippians 2:2; 4:2. And that's right! The Holy Spirit is working out in your experience what we're about to see is his whole message in the storyline of Scripture.

So let's begin at the beginning. What you might call a 'family story genre' dominates the 'domestic epic' of Genesis, doesn't it? In the first book of the Bible the sphere of action is not the nation but the family. Crucial events occur not in the court or on the battlefield, but around the home. The world is saved, in fact, through a single household of eight members. So here the genesis of a whole idea appears, which will then be taken up and developed throughout the course of the Old Testament.

Even when the focus of the Old Testament's narrative becomes more 'public', with the exodus and the emergence of the monarchy, even here

domestic life is seldom lost sight of. Moses and David, for example, are great public figures and leaders, but they are also sons, brothers, husbands and fathers. The Mosaic law has a lot to say about the regulation of biological family life. The rights and duties of a firstborn male, or a kinsman-redeemer, or a head of a household, are all clearly outlined for Israel's obedience. Blood family was important; and not just as a social or biological unit, but one through which God perpetuated his *spiritual* blessings and judgments. Obviously the Abrahamic covenant (Gen 12) set the tone for that. Then think on to each Hebrew family daubing blood on their lintels that first Passover night – and each Egyptian family losing one of its members. Think of Joshua's conquest, and the way Rahab and Achan bring blessing and curse, respectively, on the rest of their families. Think of the importance of David's family, both for (eschatological) blessing and also for the judgment (the mess, really) that ensues after the Bathsheba debacle. Think of the seriousness with which the father (or mother, 31:1-9) in Proverbs exhorts his/her physical progeny.

So who you were physically related to in the Old Testament was of utmost importance. I want to focus for a moment on the usage of one particular term that captures those relationships very well, the word אָח (ah), 'brother', which occurs 630 times in the Old Testament. Its basic and most commonly used meaning is simply that of a literal blood brother, whether a full brother like Cain and Abel/Moses and Aaron², or a half-brother like Absalom and

Amnon (2 Sam 13:4)/Abimelech and his seventy brothers (Judg 9:1-2). There is a proliferation of this kind of usage in the book of Genesis, although interestingly that most significant of half-brother relationships, that of Isaac and Ishmael, is never described using אָח.³ As you progress through the Old Testament, this 'literal brother' usage remains fairly frequent, but it is joined by the extension of the term to cover first wider family relationships (eg Lot and Abraham, Boaz and Elimelech⁴) then (with the establishment of the nation of Israel) to denote either a member of the same tribe⁵, or beyond that, the 'kinsman' relationship of any Israelite to any other Israelite, regardless of tribe⁶. This is of particular significance in texts framing civil laws that place obligations upon any Israelite towards a fellow-Israelite, especially if they are in need (eg Deut 15:1-11; 22:1-4) and even if they are otherwise a stranger to them (eg Deut 22:1-2). When used in this broader way, אָח can just as easily refer to a female Israelite as a male (eg Deut 15:12) – even though there is a Hebrew word for sister (ahot).

It is these wider relationships that become the main referents of the word 'brother', especially once you travel beyond the pages of Genesis. In the developing Old Testament mindset, 'brothers' can share a mother and father; or they can share a more distant common tribal ancestor; or

they can simply both trace their history back to Abraham himself. They certainly know that they are both bound by God's covenant with the nation. Thus brothers are as much united by a national/covenantal identity as they are by blood. The two ideas became inseparable. Brothers shared a special relationship both with each other, and together, with God. But this extended sense of covenantal brotherhood was very much limited to other Israelites. Texts like Leviticus 25:35 maintained that you were to be kind to a foreigner, treating him *as you would a brother*! There was something very special under God about a fellow-Israelite.

Considering that the concept of brotherhood formed such a precious and central role in the thinking of an average Old Testament Jew, you would be forgiven for assuming that the *real-time history* of the Old Testament would paint a corresponding picture of fraternal respect, peace and harmony. But such an assumption would be some miles distant from the truth. Virtually every narrative account of family (and particularly brotherhood) in the Old Testament is in fact a story of friction and disharmony. This is particularly true at the level of literal, 'same-parents' brotherhood. Brotherhood didn't even start well and gradually degenerate. As soon as there

³ References to wider family relationships using 'ah are not entirely absent from Genesis, but blood brother references predominate. The term is also used on one occasion in Genesis to refer to any member of the human race (Gen 9:5, NIV 'another human being') rather than to either a full blood brother or a 'kinsman'. Of course, it should be noted that at this point in the world's history, tracing one's family tree back to a common ancestor was a far simpler procedure (!), making the extension of the term 'ah to cover simply any member of the human race a not-too-impossible leap of meaning.

⁴ Gen 14:12 (Abraham and Lot are, of course, in reality uncle and nephew); Ruth 4:3.

⁵ Eg the Levites, in Num 16:10; the Danites, in Judg 14:3.

⁶ Eg Lev 25:25, 35; 2 Sam 2:26-27; Neh 5:8.

² Gen 4:2; Ex 4:14.

were brothers, there was envy, anger, hatred and murder (Gen. 4:1-8). Old Testament brotherhood began as badly as it possibly could, and never got better. In fact, Cain's murder of Abel is the only recorded instance of fratricide between full blood brothers in the entire Old Testament. Cain's envy, anger and murder seems to lay out the blueprint for fraternal relations from that point on. Be it Isaac and Ishmael, Jacob and Esau, Joseph and his brothers, Absalom and Amnon, or Solomon and Adonijah, brothers just never seem to get on. Even when Er was already dead, Onan was unwilling to do the right thing by him (Gen 38:6-10). More than one man with kingly ambitions in Israel seeks to secure the throne by killing all his brothers.⁷

Now that is not to say that there were not or cannot have been, out there amongst the common followers of Yahweh, instances of brotherly love and joy. The sentiment of Psalm 133, for example, must be more than a merely hypothetical or idealised vision of brotherhood. David must have seen real-life examples of such good relationships. The tragic irony, of course, is that in his own family (both 'horizontally', with his own brothers, and 'vertically', in the lives of his children) David personally experienced precious little of the 'pleasantness' of which he wrote. Very significantly, that joy came from elsewhere – from his relationship with a man who was no close relative of his at all. It is a fascinating fact, especially in the light of what we are going to see in the New Testament, that it is *Jonathan* – not Eliab, Abinadab, Shammah, or any of his other 'real' brothers – that David

really saw in this way (2 Sam 1:26). David's anointing occurs 'in the presence of his brothers' (1 Sam 16:13); his triumph over Goliath on Israel's behalf is framed explicitly within a context of fraternal conflict and failure (1 Sam 17), and yet it is the relationship forged with *Saul's* son directly after that incident (not any of Jesse's)⁸, that really becomes the heartbeat of David's fraternal joy. If we're going to tie this in with what we were seeing about adoption in the previous article, *there is more than one way of being family*, you see. That's there even in the Old Testament.

What is true of brothers is true of family life in general in the Old Testament. No doubt there were Israelite families where peace, love and stability reigned. Surely little Obed found himself growing up in a happy, secure environment of Yahweh-honouring love⁹; and we are intended to see a picture of health and happiness in Job's family both 'before' and 'after'. But these are the exceptions. The Holy Spirit chose to weave a tale of family *ideals* juxtaposed constantly with *failure and discord* in that very same environment. Even when there are instances of apparent reconciliation, there still remains a measure of unease, distrust, and fear (eg Jacob in Gen 33:12-17; Joseph's brothers in 50:15-18). Ironically, it is only when Joash (for example) is taken out of his family and brought up by a foster parent that the pattern of successive dysfunctional households seems to be broken, at least for the time being.¹⁰

So the real world of Old Testament family/brotherhood is not a picture of happiness.

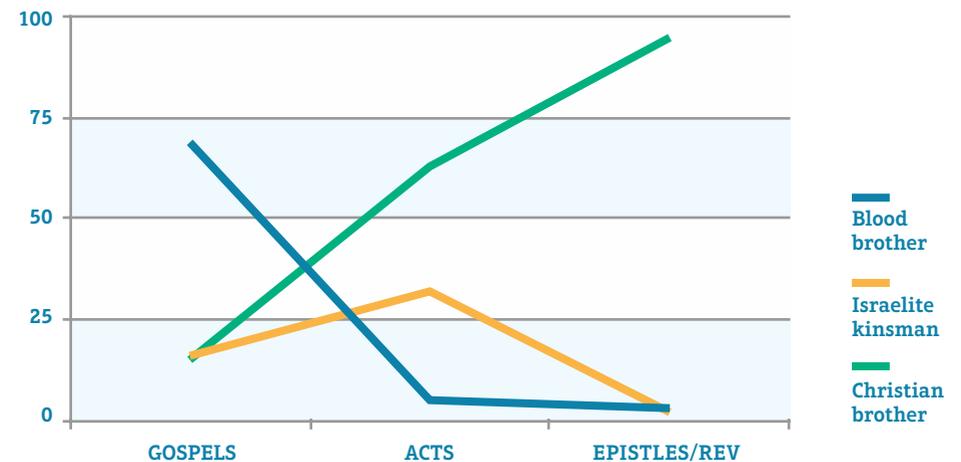
The ideal of Psalm 133 was rarely enjoyed. What ought to have been a thing of unity and love was instead full of suspicion and enmity.¹¹ In short, family in ancient Israel was crying out to be redeemed – to be made able to live up to the ideal. And that is exactly what you find in the New Testament.

What I find fascinating in the New Testament is what I would call the dual trajectories of familial terminology. Take the word *adelphos* (adelphos = brother), for example (which consistently translates *ἄδελφος* in the Septuagint, by the way). At the beginning of the New Testament, in the Gospels, where the culture is still largely that of the Old Testament, *adelphos* is used overwhelmingly to refer to biological relationships. Out of 86 total uses, 59 of

them refer to blood brothers, 14 to Israelite kinsmen, and 13 to 'Christian brothers'. Go on to the birth of the Christian church in Acts, and the picture starts to change. There *adelphos* (total refs: 57) accounts for just three references to blood brothers. It still maintains a strong sense of Israelite kinship, though (18x). But the 'Christian brother' idea is starting to grow, and take over: that has 36 occurrences. Now we can proceed on into the letters and Revelation. There, out of 182 uses of the word *adelphos*, six of them refer to blood brothers, three to Israelite kinsmen, and 173 to a brother in Christ (see figure).

Do you see what's going on? We have two trajectories here. The idea of blood family starts strongly at the opening of the New Testament; but its trajectory is essentially

Uses of *adelphos* in New Testament books by percentage



¹¹ '[T]he family is an inherently ambivalent image of disappointment and struggle on the one hand, and of hope and blessing on the other... at once an image of security and protection, and of conflict and victimization.' Leland Ryken, James C. Wilhoit, Tremper Longman III (Eds.), *Dictionary Of Biblical Imagery* (Leicester: IVP, 1998), 265.

⁷ Judg 9:1-6; 2 Chron 21:4. ⁸ 1 Sam 18:1-4. ⁹ Ruth 4:13-17. ¹⁰ 2 Kings 11-12.

downward as you progress through the New Testament. It never *quite* goes away, but it is truly diminished by the end of the canon of Scripture. The same is basically true for Israelite kinship, though that takes a little longer to lose its prominence as the church finds its feet regarding its true identity, through the clarifications of Acts 10-11 and the debates of Acts 15. But the idea of Christian brotherhood, distinct and even disconnected from both blood relationships and national Jewish identity, grows from relatively small beginnings in the Gospels to become the totally dominant meaning of the whole idea of what it means to be related to each other.¹²

What we are witnessing in these 'dual trajectories' is nothing less than the fulfilment and redemption of the family idea in the church of Jesus Christ. The shadow has passed away; the reality has arrived. It is the beginning of the purging of sin from family life. It is the start of what God always intended: a family for his

Son that gets along, for ever. A holy, happy family – for himself.¹³

4. The practical implications a. *Priorities*

This has significant implications for our relationship to the biological families we are still very much part on this side of the new creation, especially in terms of how we balance that relationship with our new identity as part of the everlasting family of God. In my own church I felt it good to preach a whole sermon on this question, which we followed up by devoting an entire midweek discussion to it too, which ably demonstrated just how challenging many Christians find it to get the balance right between commitment to their biological and their spiritual families. Jesus' words in

Matthew 12:46-50 are a helpful guide to the issues. This passage comes at the heart of a similar sort of microcosmic trajectory within Matthew's Gospel – just as with the whole New Testament, his book begins

In short, family in ancient Israel was crying out to be redeemed – to be made able to live up to the ideal. And that is exactly what you find in the New Testament.

with more blood family references and fewer spiritual family ones, but by the end the pattern has swung the other way: from chapter 23 to the end of the book all the occurrences of *adelphos* refer to the spiritual family of Christ. Matthew 12:46-50 is something of a pivot to the book in this regard.

The passage definitely starts with the implicit acknowledgement that the Lord Jesus himself, just as we all, obviously had a physical biological family. And as I've said, that note is never finally lost in the New Testament. Indeed, with Jesus and the apostles there is still a high view of blood family, and how becoming and being a Christian redeems and transforms those relationships in their own right – the household codes of the Epistles, for example; not to mention 1 Timothy 5:8 – 'If anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for his immediate family, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.'¹⁴

But then it's also clear from Matthew 12:46-50 that Jesus' mission (and therefore ours for his sake today) created tensions within his biological family. Matthew is almost certainly making a symbolic point when he records (twice) that Jesus' mother and brothers were 'outside'. His relatives at this point are strangers to Jesus' spiritual priorities; and this isn't the only case of this kind of tension within the Gospels. (Happily that changes when his brothers are converted later on.) What's critical to see is that all this happens *even though* Jesus had a very high view of the family, respected his

parents, and rebuked people who didn't. In other words, the tension didn't arise because Jesus was a bad son or an awkward brother. It came because of his radical commitment to God, which never sits easily with people, especially with family members who just don't 'get' Jesus, and sometimes even with those who are real believers.

It should be an encouragement to us, and to members of our churches who face real tensions with non-Christian family, to realise that they are not going through anything which the Lord didn't experience himself first. It's clear that Jesus loved his blood family, and it was no doubt a trial to him to face their antagonism to his priorities. But it's also clear that he loved God more than he loved them. When faced with a choice between the two, he chose God, and his family suffered, became confused and even rejected him. None of that is inconsistent either with Jesus' perfection or his love for his biological family. Still, just a couple of chapters earlier (ch 10) Jesus had very clearly taught that where spiritual commitments clash with biological-familial ones, there is only one way to go, whatever the cost. 'Anyone who loves their father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves their son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me.' (10:37). That is such a great challenge, is it not? Jesus says it involves nothing less than dying (10:38).

But we've also got to see the shocking question that arises out of this situation with his family in 12:46-50. The question is not actually, 'How do I balance my dual

¹² I am conscious that these trajectories only represent a fairly crude counting of occurrences of one particular NT word. Thus I would not want to make too much of data like this, especially since more factors may be behind these apparent 'trajectories' than simply the move of emphasis from biological to spiritual family. For example, the fact that we are not looking at the same genre of literature in each of the three categories (Gospels/Acts/Epistles) could have skewed the data somewhat in the direction I have presented here. All the same, I feel that numbers still must count for something, which is why I have chosen to flag the numbers up as pointing towards a definite trend that needs explaining somehow. I think the theological shift from 'biology' to 'faith' explains it well, and feel there is significant NT warrant for that theological shift outside a mere numerical word-study (eg Matt. 12:46-50; Rom. 2:28-29). Also, even though of course the Epistles/Revelation are of a different genre (or genres) from the Gospels, Acts is not. Yet comparing the Gospels and Acts, there is still an easily observable movement in both blood brother and Christian brother usages, even though there is no change in genre. So the numerical trend does still carry some weight, even though a search for additional factors that may have influenced the numbers may yet be worth carrying out. Thanks to Matthew Seymour for his very helpful comments on this point.

¹³ For an excellent biblical-theological treatment of many of these issues from a different angle (that of our pastoral approach to the matter of singleness), see Barry Danylak, *Redeeming Singleness: How the storyline of Scripture affirms the single life* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2010).

¹⁴ See Ephesians 6:1-4; Colossians 3:18-21; 2 Timothy 1:5 & 3:15. Cf also a passage like Mark 7:9-13, where Jesus condemns the Pharisees for failing to honour their (biological) parents because of a man-made tradition that trumped the 5th commandment in practice.

commitments?' It is, 'Who are my mother and brothers?'; not 'How do I cope with this pain?' but 'Who really is my family then?' This is not a pragmatic question; it is a gospel question. It's a question that Jesus had no doubt often considered as he read over the Scriptures to discover who he was, and what (and who) he was here for, well before he ever got to this point. The answer to this question comes to define the gospel itself. The answer is found in verses 49-50. A new group of people has taken on the identity of his family members: those who are his disciples; those who do the will of his Father in heaven; the church. This is Jesus' answer to what to think, ultimately – how to react, when any Christian faces tensions in their biological family. You realise who your real family is, and you look to them for your real family relationships.

Crucially, Jesus isn't just using family as a metaphor for believers – 'they're like family'.

No: 'they are my family.' He's teaching that even though he has great respect for his biological relatives and the institution in which they belong, that institution was only ever meant to be a picture of a far greater reality. This is the family that will matter for ever, the family created by the gospel, which is greater than the family created by blood.

Of course this raises pretty big questions in practice – how do I balance my commitments as a husband and father and son with my responsibilities as a church member and disciple-maker

and evangelist? Should my biological family ever suffer because of my commitment to the church family and church relationships? Should my church relationships ever suffer because of my desire to be obedient to God in what we call my 'home life'? Should I share personal (or maybe privately traumatic) matters just with people in my biological family or people in my church family, or both? That's certainly something to think through for yourself with an open Bible.

THIS IS THE FAMILY THAT WILL MATTER FOR EVER, THE FAMILY CREATED BY THE GOSPEL.

For now, let me summarise what I think Scripture commends on this: if your relationships in the local church *always* take precedence over your commitments to your natural family, I think you've probably got the balance wrong. You've misunderstood the emphasis that is still given to respect for the *natural* family God's placed you in. But – if your commitment to your natural family always takes precedence over your

involvement in the relationships of the local church, then you've *definitely* got the balance wrong. You've misunderstood the gospel itself. The gospel has changed your identity and calls you to be transformed by the renewing of your mind. In a word, your natural family should sometimes call you away from your spiritual family. But not usually. That is the upshot of the biblical-theological progression from picture to reality in family matters.

b. Love

We've seen that that progression of the family theme is not just one that goes

from picture to reality (a kind of 'morally neutral' way of seeing it); it is also a progression from mess to maturity. This family is not just new; it's (supposed to be) *better*. This is what makes the *practical* teaching of the New Testament about the church as a family so important. We are beginning to live out God's grand design, pictured but messed up in the Old Testament, but now recreated and sanctified in the ultimate Son in the New Testament and beyond. So what does this look like?

The heart of the New Testament teaching on this is essentially that God expects us to move on beyond the squabbles and fights that were until this time only natural in the largely unregenerate families of the Old Testament. He expects us to be what we are: adopted into a new family, where we are actually capable (through the Spirit) of behaving as family ought to behave. We must actually love one another. This is brought out using specifically family-oriented language in texts like Romans 12:10; Hebrews 13:1; 1 Peter 1:22; 3:8; 1 Thessalonians 4:9, which call us again and again not just to love (that ought to be enough!), but to brotherly love – *φιλαδελφια* (*philadelphia*). 1 John is of course full of this, chapter 3 particularly, where the awful and archetypal paradigm of sinful brotherhood (Cain) is placed in stark contrast with everything true Christian love should be. Be clear, friends: if you hate your brother, you may be a pastor, elder or church worker, but you are not a Christian. That's what the Holy Spirit says.

Let me flag up just one area of church life where demonstration of that love within

the church family is particularly crucial: the attitude of the church towards people for whom being part of a *biological* family is not so much of a daily reality. I refer of course to those who are single (whether never-married, divorced, or widowed), and to those who are married but have been unable to have children. There will be differences from case to case (some single people, for example, may be far more involved with their biological parents or siblings; others may be almost entirely 'on their own'), but however much they are involved with their natural family, it is *essential* that they know – in *practice*, not just in theory – that they are a very real part of their spiritual family. Indeed, the theological reality is that they are part of the *true* family, when all around them at church are (simply) little shadows/scale models of it. Single people (of all the above categories) should regularly be absorbed into the home life of church members who experience the blessings (and challenges) of the *shadow* – what we call 'family life'. Both the single person and the family can be a blessing and benefit to each other as they then seek to work out what the *reality* should look like.

In addition, there should be deliberate, thought-out *sensitivity* to Christians (and, for that matter, non-Christians who attend our churches) who find themselves outside what many people consider 'normal' Westernised life – marriage and family (in so far as marriage is still considered the norm in Western society). For a start, it is crucial that we publicly teach that no one 'status' is 'normal' and all others 'abnormal'. Passages like 1 Corinthians 7 or Matthew 19:12 only go to confirm the trajectories I've highlighted

earlier, in favour of the position that actually singleness may even be the *preferred* option for Christians now. Why? Because bringing *spiritual* children into being is now more important than bringing natural children into the world.¹⁵ If singleness (or perhaps even childlessness?) makes us more free to devote ourselves to that ultimate task, then it is surely to be preferred. How often do we say *that* from the pulpit?¹⁶

At the very least, singleness ought to be presented as an *equally* viable 'calling' in which to serve God, which (like marriage) has its blessings *and* its challenges. Similarly, childlessness can be a terrible heartache for those who experience it. People need to know that being part of the *church* family really *can* provide help and support and even blessing; in our preaching we should make this clear. And people need to hear us use illustrations drawn from places other than life with our children or our wives! Such a habit only reinforces what is *not in fact true* – that somehow life with a spouse or life with children is the only context in which God calls us to work out our salvation in practice, so without it, you are not (or even

can't be) a proper Christian. In reality, the exact opposite is true: it's the church, *not* the (biological) family, which you cannot be a proper Christian without. The church family is the *primary* context in which he calls us to work out our salvation, and biological relationships must ultimately give way to that chief setting for discipling and being discipled.

But outside the pulpit too – in our general approach to church life – we should allow the trend of the New Testament towards our spiritual family to be clearly seen. So (again, by way of example) there's nothing *absolutely* wrong with matchmaking the singles – sometimes it can be helpful – but if it bolsters the idea that singleness is second-best, then it needs to be jettisoned, or at the very least *very* carefully regulated. In tandem with that, let's find ways of really using the single people well, in addition to simply *including* them, thus avoiding all risk of seeming patronising. Surely this is the way of love within the church family.

Another bugbear, if you'll allow me: too often we casually designate an activity a 'Family Day' or a 'Family Service' – or

simply make it 'geared' towards biological families – without considering the single/widowed or childless people in our congregation. I doubt very much that these designations refer to the *church* family, and even if in the mind of the 'designator' they do, they are very unlikely to be *heard* in that way because of the unhelpful bias towards 'dad, mum and children' as the sort of 'normal spiritual unit' of regular church life.¹⁷ But dad, mum and kids *isn't* the normal spiritual unit of church life. The *church* family is – with its single people, its married people, its families, and its childless couples: all these people together are the spiritual dads, the spiritual mums, the spiritual kids of each other, regardless of the family connections they were born with. It is ultimately this broader, non-biological unit (apologies if that makes it sound like a washing powder) which is the wonderful, diverse, *faith*-united powerhouse that God has chosen to use for the transformation of the world. *Not* the 'nuclear family' united by blood. (So let's come up with a better, more theologically-informed name for the 'Family Day'.)

Note: my apologies to any paedobaptists who may think I am knocking them with some of the things I've said here. I'm not intending to – even though I think that this emphasis in the New Testament's teaching does give me more confidence about my Baptist convictions rather than make me

more nervous of them. I hope you can see the thrust and relevance of what I'm saying even if you believe that your physical progeny are indeed included in the new covenant prior to their conversion.

c. *Community*

It ought to be obvious, following on from all I've just said, that the way of love is the way of *action*. 1 John 3:16-18 calls us to exercise love not in mere 'feeling' or words but in practice, 'with actions and in truth!' So those texts describing early church life in Acts dovetail so well with these didactic principles: they loved each other by sharing their stuff; they loved each other by sharing their lives; and they loved each other by staying with each other, even when they had painful issues to address. They lived in genuine community. That is such a challenge to us, both in terms of the adherence of our hearts to such a thing, but just as much in terms of how it works practically in our churches, in our society. How do we help genuinely busy people cultivate this? Some say maximise Sunday; others say focus on more informal get-togethers, less on formal meetings; or encourage people to be dropping in on each other. Some other notes of application I tried to sound when I preached some of this material in our church (and it's not rocket science):

» Since we are a family, do you actually know where other members of the

¹⁵ Again, Danylak's *Redeeming Singleness* is very helpful in this regard.

¹⁶ In the case of married couples who are in the position of 'building' a biological family, and are deciding how many children they ought to have (if God wills) – let me offer a personal comment about this matter. Against the backdrop of groups like the 'Quiverfull' movement, who believe that you should have as many children as possible (and this most glorifies God), I have come to a different conclusion. If it is more important/ultimate that we focus our energies on bringing spiritual children into the world (now that the old, 'physical seed'-focused covenant has passed away, and the new, 'spiritual seed'-focused covenant has come), then if the number of children we have becomes prohibitive of our service in the kingdom, we have had too many. (I say this very conscious that prior to the age of contraception, most couples would not have been in the position to have much choice about the matter, of course. So take it with a historically-contextualised pinch of salt!)

At what point/number it would become prohibitive will vary from couple to couple, depending on their age, energy levels, degree of child-rearing 'support' they receive from the rest of the church family, and so on. These are, to a degree, not a great deal more than personal opinions; and they do not constitute a 'judgment' on any couple who might see things in a different way; but still they are an honest attempt to give due weight to the biblical principles outlined in this paper, and they certainly have informed my own decision-making, with my wife, as we have worked through these very real questions in our own family life.

¹⁷ Or because of its malformed cousin, namely, the notion that attracting young people/families to the church is the be-all and end-all of evangelism. After all, if that 85-year-old sinner is converted, well, that's ok, but they'll only have a few years to offer to the life of the church, and they won't be very useful, will they...? Best concentrate on getting young ones in. It's *their* conversion that really matters – as if the top end of the demographic didn't also have an entire eternity in heaven or hell stretching out before them (and rushing up all the more urgently, for that matter). I know that in one sense the next generation are genuinely 'the future of the church'. But shame on us all the same if we ever forget that each and every person is heading unswervingly for the resurrection of the just and unjust, regardless of their age *now*.

family live? Have you ever been in their homes?

- » If you were asked about any member's job, how much would you know about what they do and what it's like for them to be a Christian witness there?
- » Since the Christian life is a community project, how involved are other family members in your growth in holiness? Who *really* knows you? Does anyone?
- » Since we are a family, do you take every possible opportunity to be there when the family gets together? Do you help others get there if certain factors (eg travel, childcare) can often hinder them?
- » Since we are a family, and you do generally attend on Sundays and Wednesdays, how much time do you spend with other family members outside of those meetings?
- » Since we are a family, does your money go more towards family life, or your own life?
- » Since we are a family, how much input did you ask for from other church family members when you last made a big decision about something? How much thought did you give to how your decision would affect other members and your own involvement in church life?
- » Since we are a family, do you leave the

church gathering on Sunday and spend the rest of the day not seeing anyone else in the family?

- » Since we are a family, when was the last time you borrowed something from another family member? Or shared your possessions with another family member?
- » If our spiritual family is more important than our natural family, have you thought through how that will be lived out in your own life?
- » Since we are a family, when was the last time you arranged to get together with other family members just to enjoy each other's company?
- » Finally, if we are a family but no one can ultimately tell because you've not taken the step of membership, how will you grow and thrive as a Christian without that recognised network of support?

d. *Sticking at it*

One thing living as a family *must* mean is surely that people don't hop off to the church down the road when things get difficult. As Joe Hellerman says, 'We stay, embrace the pain and grow up with each other.'¹⁸ What he's saying is this: too many Christians have this view of Jesus as their 'personal Saviour' (critiqued earlier from the perspective of its complete omission from the Bible), whom they can take off with them from one church to another as soon as they come upon any difficulty or someone who offends them. Now we're

all familiar with the phenomenon of church-hoppers, but I think it's important to link it to the fact that this shows they think their Christianity is basically just about Jesus and them, and the churchy bit is an optional add-on. Now *why* do they think that? Is it because they haven't been taught to understand that they are in a family now? That the problems and relationships that are hard to work out are God's exact intention for developing them as his children?

If people haven't 'got' that, then tragically, as a person goes on to the next church, he/she is 'desperately hoping that he can somehow improve the quality of his life by escaping the immediate pain that often clouds the potentially redemptive relationships in which God has placed him ... a person does not grow up by running from family to family' (Hellerman).

That last phrase is true in our biological families, and it's true in our church family. Now Hellerman makes it clear that sometimes there are legitimate reasons for leaving a church, and I agree with him; but he also points out that when Paul writes his letters to churches in a mess, in Galatia or Corinth or on Crete, he never once advises his brothers and sisters to leave that community in order to find a healthier church. 'Instead, he challenged them to stick it out and partner with God to make things better.'

This isn't just the affliction of 'Christians out there' or those difficult people who

immediately spring to your mind now. And it's not just something for us to teach on. It's for us to take to heart in our own lives as pastors. The fact remains that though actually *practising* church-hopping might not be the *greatest* danger or temptation for you or me or your pastor, trying to avoid 'embracing the pain' *whilst staying* really can be. We avoid the confrontation and the hurt and the humiliation of having to talk plainly with one another, or the need to show willing to be spoken to about something in our lives, or the suffering we have to absorb

One thing living as a family must mean is surely that people don't hop off to the church down the road when things get difficult.

in order to bear patiently with someone. And so our church families don't progress. This applies in terms of the pastor-people relationship, but in the context of what I'm saying here it even more fundamentally applies at the level of your brother-to-brother relationships, your brother-to-sister relationships and your sister-to-sister relationships. If you're a pastor, you will be that for 20, 30, or 40 more years, perhaps. But you are going to be a brother forever. Keep loving your brothers and sisters as brothers and sisters – not just your 'people'. Work out your equality with them first, your need of them first, their familial need of you, too ... *then* you can move on to the different roles and responsibilities God has given you within the structure of the local church (family!).

e. *Pastoral balance*

Particularly striking in this respect is Paul's pithy summary of how Pastor Timothy is to relate to the different members of his church (1 Tim 5:1-2). He

¹⁸ Joseph H. Hellerman, *When the Church was a Family: Recapturing Jesus' Vision for Authentic Community* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2009).

uses family language! We can't 'move on' from that, to some kind of more business-like language of the world of commerce, or trade, or military structures. Paul basically sticks with the family idea when telling Timothy how to get on with the diversity of people he's got in his congregation. It seems to me that these words encourage us to think in terms of two broad principles:

i) *Encouraging others within the local church family is not to be restricted by age and gender boundaries.* It is encouragement/exhortation (παράκαλεω, parakaleō) that Paul commends to Timothy as his master strategy for healthy church life. And it covers everybody ('exhort' grammatically governs all the examples, not just older men). Timothy's reaction (maybe ours?) to being responsible for the encouragement and spiritual growth of all these very different people in his church might have been, 'Really? All of them? I hardly know some of them! And quite a lot of them are pretty different from me. We're not the same age. We're not the same gender. I can't just dive in and cross those boundaries. I normally just interact with people who are more my age and stage. I understand them better. I would do everybody more good if I just stuck to them.' But Paul encourages Timothy away from that – by asking him to think of them as family members.

When I was growing up we had an average sized family home with (unsurprisingly!) different rooms. I had access to every one of those rooms, because I was a member of the family. I could go in to Dad and Mum's room. I could go into my older brothers' room. I

could go into my younger brother's room (that was my room too!). I could go into the kitchen, where Mum often was. I could go into the study, where Dad often was. There was not a single room of the house that was barred to me. Because I was part of the family. That's what it's like in the church family: there aren't some rooms you're allowed into but others that you're not. You're not to be intimidated if someone is older; not to be inaccessible or proud if someone is younger; not to be put off if someone is a different gender or personality type. More than that, you have a responsibility to spend some time now and again in the different rooms – a responsibility to encourage every (kind of) member. To praise them when they've done well. To point out something if they're going wrong – to encourage them to come a better way. To tell them they can call on you if they need you in that difficult situation this week. To say you will pray for them, then to see how those prayers were answered by asking next time you see them. Encourage anybody and everybody in the church, Paul says – regardless of age and gender boundaries. We're family.

ii) *Encouraging others within the local church family is to be shaped by age and gender boundaries.* This is where balance is urged upon us. Because there is more to the room analogy. It is absolutely true that I had access to every room in the house, but I did not have the same *kind* of access to every room. My parents' room, for example, was to be treated with respect. I wasn't allowed to just barge in there. If my parents found me in there without their permission they'd ask me what I was doing. Even on Christmas Day we had

to wait! With my older brothers' room it was similar – though a bit less so, and it depended on which brother was in there. If I had had a sister, I guess that would have created another set of protocols. As for my younger brother's room, that was my room, so I could come and go as I pleased. That was the room of the most 'debates' (to put it charitably) but also the most camaraderie and comradeship.

Paul is saying that that's what it's like in the church family. You have a responsibility towards all and should be encouraging all. But you don't do it in the same way to everybody. Christian encouragement in the local church family is shaped by age and gender boundaries. Harshness towards an older man is out of the question. If you see him going wrong then you don't just barge into his room. You treat him as your father. You respect him. You acknowledge his life experience – that he may actually know more than you! He may have something to teach you through the way he's behaved. He may indeed on the other hand need redirecting in a better way – older men are not infallible or sinless – but it is to be done carefully. The same is true for older women – behave carefully, respectfully. Encourage them with both age- and gender-appropriate encouragement. Just ask, 'How is my *biological* mother most encouraged by me?' For all I've said about the trajectory of biological and spiritual families, for Paul she's still a helpful model! Safe to say that my own mother would be cheered by a bunch of flowers in

a way that my father would definitely not be! So think about that with your *spiritual* mothers and fathers.

The same applies to younger people – or simply people your own age (no one who's older should think that there's nothing here for them. The principle is that you treat people of your own stage in a particular way – because Timothy was one of the 'young men'). There can be greater freedom amongst you if that's the case. I could go into my younger brother's room whenever I liked, because it was my room. That didn't mean I treated his stuff with contempt or slept deliberately on his bed! Our conversations were the closest, our understanding of each other the best, our fights the most frequent, our 'brotherhood' the most keenly felt. So it will be with those of your own age and stage: that's the context for the greatest openness. This may lead among some (particularly, but not exclusively, the young) to the kind of wrestling matches that you never would have with your mother; but that is the place for it. Men of the same age particularly need that 'brotherhood'. So do young women need a sisterhood – a place where they can be open with each other.¹⁹

But what about when there's a difference in gender? Timothy is to simply take care. To not treat women of his own age in the same way that he would treat men of his own age. He is to be more guarded, more careful – to be pure. So yes, have those friendships across gender boundaries – you have access to every room, remember

¹⁹ As an example of this, from time to time in my own church we deliberately split our central prayer meeting for part of the time into smaller groups of men (only) and women (only). This seems to help both groups to share and pray more openly about certain issues pertinent to them.

– but do not go into your sister’s room as you would your brother’s. Knock first. Maybe take your mum with you. Definitely take your mum with you (or even another sister) if you knock and find she’s there on her own. Do you see what I’m saying?

f. Multiple identities

This was something that Paul really lived. He didn’t just exhort Timothy to do it. He saw himself in this way too. A lovely and instructive study is all the ways Paul refers to fellow Christians in the New Testament using family terminology. It’s clear from such a study that Paul actually saw himself as having multiple identities, depending on who he was talking about, or to. He can even have a different family relation to the same person, depending on the context! So Paul variously sees himself as a father to individuals like Timothy or Onesimus, or a whole church like the Corinthians (1 Cor 4:14-15). They are his ‘children’ (they came into being through his ministry, and tend to be child-ish, needing fatherly correction) in a different way from how Timothy is his ‘son’ (his trusted right-hand man, 1 Cor 4:17). He pictures himself as a *mother* to the Galatians and to the Thessalonians!²⁰ – and as a brother to many – including, notably, Onesimus. In Philemon 10 Onesimus is his *son*, but in Colossians 4:9 the same man is his ‘faithful and dear *brother*’. So how Paul related to

Onesimus depended on the situation – he was a father to him in one context, a brother to him in another. And Paul is not only the father-figure or the brotherly ‘equal’ of everyone he writes to or about: Romans 16:13 has this lovely touch where

he says that Rufus’s mother has been a mother to him, too. Paul could behave as a son just as much as he did a father or a brother.

Depending on who he was with and what was necessary in the situation, Paul’s theological framework of the church family informed and aided his manifold relationships within the believing community of the first century.

What’s the point? Depending on who he was with and what was necessary in the situation, Paul’s theological framework of the church family informed and aided his manifold relationships within the believing community of the first century. He could be at a gathering of a church where at one moment he was a gentle, encouraging father to a new baby in Christ, then turn round and show affection as a son to a an older woman who’d just encouraged him by her prayers, then go out the door and catch

up with men who are best described as his brothers in arms. I would say that was a great model for sensitive, realistic church life in the 21st century. A teachable and humble son or daughter in one situation, a courageous and faithful brother or sister in another, a gentle and winsome father or mother in another. Be ready to have multiple identities for the sake of Christ – and his family. ■

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²⁰ Gal. 4:19; 1 Thess. 2:7b.

Report on

The Carey Conference

2019

MICHAEL ROBINSON

This year’s Carey Conference took place between 8 and 10 January at its now customary venue, The Hayes Conference Centre at Swanwick in rural Derbyshire in the UK. This conference has been held on 49 occasions (it started in 1971) and has always been designed to encourage and edify men and women in some form of ministry and also students in training for ministry. This year’s edition did not disappoint. Numbers might have been slightly down in comparison with some years, but there were still about 100 participants, mostly from the UK, representing about 10 different countries.

Knowing God was the main theme of the conference and is there a more important theme than that? Jonathan Worsley, pastor of Kew Baptist Church in south-west London, gave the opening address on worship, with an emphasis on our public worship. He stressed the centrality of Scripture in every aspect of public worship. Dr Bob Letham, professor of Systematic and Historical Theology at Union School of Theology, was the main speaker. His theme was ‘Knowing the Triune God’ and he treated us to three most helpful sessions spread over the three days (From biblical foundations



📷 *The Hayes Conference Centre at Swanwick*

to doctrinal formulation; The Trinity, creation, and the world around us; The Trinity, redemption, and worship). Dr Letham also handled questions from the floor ably, graciously, and spontaneously. David Campbell from Preston gave a moving and inspirational address on the beauty of holiness and the holiness of Christ to conclude the first day.

This year's historical paper was delivered by Dr Robert Strivens on the theme of 'Why should Baptists care about Dort?' After outlining the historical background to the Synod of Dort (Dordrecht) in the Netherlands early in the seventeenth century, Dr Strivens reminded delegates that each new generation needs to learn and teach the doctrines of grace. Otherwise those precious truths can easily be taken for granted and are lost on the second and third generation. Henry Dixon, pastor of Poplar Baptist Church in London and a regular conference visitor, reminded us of our dependence on the Holy Spirit, expressed particularly in our prayer lives. Jonathan Bayes gave the concluding conference sermon and

preached from Exodus 34 on God's glory, which should lead to zeal amongst his children – an inspirational close. Ann Benton, from Guildford, led the women's sessions. Whilst this writer cannot testify first hand to what was said at those sessions, several of the ladies did say that they felt encouraged and helped.

It is impossible to do justice to this conference in just a few words; it goes far beyond 'just' the ministry; there is the fellowship with each other; the conversations at the meal table, the opportunity to hear missionary reports, share burdens, pray together, glance at the quality literature on show and for sale, and the question and answer sessions are always lively and helpful. This three-day event usually starts on the first Tuesday of each year (unless that falls on New Year's Day) and makes an excellent start to the new year. This writer has been coming along now for 14 years and has never yet regretted it! ■

*Michael Robinson,
De Panne, Belgium.*



GROWING THE BELIEVERS' CHURCH

Introduction

Part of my job is now to help other leaders, but my heart and passion are about seeing people saved. Good leadership is a means to forwarding that goal. It is our responsibility to bring the gospel to people, to connect and engage them, to persuade them, and to win them, being confident that the outcome is with

God. We must always recall that it is the sovereign work of the Holy Spirit for anybody to be born again.

Acts 16 is a key passage as it is very evident that it is God the Holy Spirit at work. Verses 6-10 are a significant little section, for they describe the preparation

for the gospel to come to Europe. Unusually we are told twice that the Holy Spirit says, 'No' to taking the gospel somewhere (vv6, 7), so that when he says, 'Go' it really emphasises the point that God wants the gospel to come to Europe. The two negatives serve to underline the positive call. So they concluded that God was calling them, and they 'got ready at once' (v10). God was active then, as he is now. He is sovereign; also in our part of the world!

Life was, to use Thomas Hobbes' words, 'Nasty, brutal, and short'. As today, people were ignorant, biased, prejudiced, superstitious, idolatrous, confused and needy. But God wanted the gospel to come to Europe then. He still does!

Feeling a failure?

Luke is going on to describe three of the converts in Europe. But before we look at that, I just want to reflect on how the task of evangelising Europe can feel.

We often find a sense of failure amongst Christians. It can be dispiriting when you feel the magnitude of the task, with hundreds of millions of people saying, 'We have done with Christianity; leave us alone.' Countless churches face the demographic challenge of many members being in their 60s, 70s and 80s, knowing that in the next 30 years many will go to heaven. As they are not being replaced by as many younger converts, Christians can feel overwhelmed.

Faced with this as leaders, we can end up pushing evangelism hard in our

churches – and making people constantly feel useless. Yet another sermon on evangelism can 'make me feel the failure that I know I already am.'

I found help here by reading Mark Greene's, *Thank God It's Monday*,¹ which emphasised that we need to start by equipping God's people for a whole life of service. They are not tools we use. We are not chess players with them like the little pawns we are moving around on a board.

We tend to read Ephesians 4:12 as saying that God's people are to be equipped for service within the gathered church (true, of course), but it is also equipping them for serving outside the church. This really helped me get away from the mindset which asked, 'What are you doing for God?', and then implied, 'You should be either earning money to pay someone like me, or you should be telling people about Jesus'. The hearer of this is left feeling that if they are not doing either, they are wasting their life. Leaders slip into a kind of utilitarianism, where things (and people) only have value and worth if they lead to a desired outcome, such as the church growing.

Greene's emphasis was a great call to 'come back to a bigger Christian worldview.' It strikes me that some who have a Reformed soteriology don't have a fully worked out Reformed worldview. I am so grateful for learning from the heritage of people like Warfield, Hodge, Murray and Schaeffer. They stressed that evangelism is seriously important, but it is part of a bigger thing.

More recently Mark Greene has produced, *Fruitfulness on the front line*², which describes God's people serving him in their everyday lives. He shows that we must make Sunday and Monday work for each other. We must not have a sacred/secular divide that says Sunday is the religious day whereas Monday is where you just earn the money or do your thing. We mustn't imply that the only important things happen in church or that what really counts is church stuff.

He stresses that the gathered church on Sunday then becomes the scattered church for the rest of the week. But the scattered church is not just made up of people who are out there as 'evangelism machines'. God has his people serving him in all kinds of ways and those things have intrinsic value. We must stress that we are equipping them to serve God all the time.

Then you can equip them for evangelising where they are. If you start with equipping them for evangelism they will often feel 'beaten up' as they sense their relative failure. But if you start by encouraging Christians to realise that God is with them in all they do, you can then equip them for outreach as the opportunities arise. So start with 'whole-life discipleship'. The occasional strongly-worded 'try harder to evangelise' sermons won't really help them for 30 or 40 years of effective work as this other emphasis will.

The genius of Acts 16

Let's now talk about Acts 16, as it is a really helpful passage. Tim Keller, in a very significant talk for me³ described how Luke demonstrates that the gospel and religion are different. A religious Jewish man thanks God he was not born a woman, a slave, or a Gentile. Luke chooses

three stories to show how the gospel can reach these very people. It can change lives in a way that religion can't. These are pattern stories. They are not prescriptive, but they are suggestive. They are more than descriptive. To discern which is which can be tricky in the book of Acts. Is it a story teaching something we ought to do, or is it just a one-off account without other implications, or is it there to make you think of parallels? Luke is a master when he tells the stories, for he picks out

things for us to learn from.

'Come and See'

There are three things here. Notice that 'the Word' is present in all three stories (for even the slave girl shouts out the gospel; but it is dominant in a way that is different in the others). Keller suggests that Luke first describes a woman reached by Word ministry – Lydia. And even then the account cuts us preachers down to size! For even as Paul is preaching, it is the Lord who opens her heart to respond. We need to hear this. Preachers can't open hearts, even with a divine message.

THE
GATHERED
CHURCH ON
SUNDAY THEN
BECOMES THE
SCATTERED
CHURCH FOR
THE REST OF
THE WEEK.

¹ Mark Greene, *Thank God It's Monday* (SU,1994)

² Mark Greene, *Fruitfulness on the Frontline* (The Good Book Company, 2014).

³ Timothy Keller, Acts 16 (A talk at St Helen's Bishopsgate, 2000?) but I have not been able to trace the details.

Unless the power of God's grace is at work, the message will come across a hard heart. By the sovereign grace of God she is born again into God's family. Then comes the outward confession of faith – baptism.

Now this woman was a 'God-fearer' (a technical phrase), and was not born a Jewess. We don't know the backstory of her coming to faith. We are only told that she, a rich and religious woman, was in a meeting place. There she heard the message, and she believed it. We don't know who introduced her to the Bible in the first place. Luke chooses not to tell us, but she would have had a backstory no doubt.

Lots of people are saved in a place with a Word-dominant context today as well. It might be a meal with a message; it might be Sunday preaching or it might be some kind of rally. How do people get to that place? Research shows that it is normally through some kind of invitation. Somebody asks them to come along to hear 'the Word'. Now it is true that some people are converted in very impersonal ways. They may just google 'Christianity' and are saved through what they find out. But it is rare. Some people get saved by reading the Word on their own. My friend Mark Troughton was converted reading the French Bible in France as he was studying the language. Some people read a tract left on a train or a bus.

But most people come to faith because somebody asked them to something. In research that is now a little dated (it was

presented in 2005), Dave Bennett found in a survey⁴ of nearly 400 adult converts that 92% had a prior friendship with a Christian and around 86% mentioned that, second only to praying for them, being given an invitation was the most significant way Christians had helped. People becoming Christians in our culture normally have a relationship with a Christian. The people 'most likely' to convert are already known to the members of the church. The members just need the courage to start inviting them to things.

Now some dismiss this idea of inviting as very old-fashioned – as if it's out of the 1950s. But Bennett's research shows it is actually how people are saved today. They get asked to all kinds of situations where they hear the Word. If we want to see our church grow, we need to create a culture where Christians actually start inviting people. Now that's not to say that we should badger people or act unwisely, but nevertheless having the courage to ask them is what it takes.

We started with Carol Services. I had to encourage members to break through that pain barrier and not put a leaflet through the door but actually give a personal invitation. They experienced both the high of a few friends saying, 'Yes', and then the normal disappointment about many saying, 'No'. But they were 'in the game now'. No longer were they in the stands watching, but on the pitch playing, and when they brought friends they really wanted you to be you at your

clearest, most engaging and persuasive as you preached about Jesus. And they prayed more when they had friends next to them. They were much more aware of how serious it all was.

So start getting people to invite people. It is the easiest step. Make it normal for Christians to invite friends to events where they hear something of the gospel. We have called this approach, 'Come and See'.

'Care and Serve'

The second person Luke goes on to describe is the slave girl. She is not reached through invitations to a meeting. Why not? Because she won't be anybody's friend. People with addictive problems, or who are chained by difficulties, rarely have friends as such. You can't get much worse than this girl. She is in trouble twice over as she is demon-possessed and economically oppressed. Now that's her unique circumstance.

But the lesson is that she, and others who are trapped by life, are reached by a compassionate deed. Clearly 'the Word' is there, but Luke emphasises that through a caring intervention in her life, a relationship is formed. Paul, by the power of God, breaks the chaos of her oppression. He knows it is going to be costly; for him the cost was the severe beating. But that is how you reach slave girls and their equivalents.

What you can do as an individual or as a church may be limited and will vary enormously. You cannot solve all the

problems. But you could help somebody. It could start with some flowers, cards and maybe some meals for the newly widowed lady down your road. That is something you can do as an individual. Or it could be something you can organise as a church. It is no good trying to compare what you do with what others do, as resources and circumstances vary so much. But can you do something to touch somebody where they have a felt need? It is not the deed doing the evangelism, but it is the deed

So start getting people to invite people. It is the easiest step. Make it normal for Christians to invite friends to events where they hear something of the gospel.

which creates the relationship. This acts as the bridge over which the Word comes. But no deed, no relationship, and so no Word. The deed builds the relationship.

The challenge is to keep Word and deed together. Churches are much better at it than Christian charities have sometimes been. Some of the Christian charities of the Victorian era have ended up with deed and Word quite far removed. But where churches do something of this, they are constantly monitoring it. They want to keep them close together. Let's not be embarrassed about Word and deed.

'Go and Tell'

These are two approaches which churches can organise. You can organise some events to which people invite friends and sometimes that can get a lot of people connected to Word. You can do some deed ministry; maybe a 'mums and tots' or an old folks' lunch club, and through that relationships are formed and the Word is heard. But there is another area of outreach you can't organise.

⁴ Dave Bennett, *A Study of How Adults Become Christians* (Seminar at FIEC Pwllheli Conference, 6 April 2005, notes accessible at www.cpo.org.uk/images/_shared/CPOcentral/.../howadultsbecomeXtns.doc).



THE CHALLENGE IS TO KEEP WORD AND DEED TOGETHER.

You can't organise an earthquake in the middle of the night! Life happens, and in life circumstances there is often an opportunity to 'Go and Tell'. You can't organise this, but you can prepare people for the opportunities that arise. What I want to emphasise is not so much what we can organise 'top-down', but to ask can we equip people from 'bottom-up'? Can we create a mindset change amongst Christians in the church? We need to underscore the lesson that the true God is with them on their front line, and they'd be amazed how many opportunities they are going to have if they really understood this. Sadly, if you ask most believers how often they speak about Jesus to anybody they know, the answer is 'Not very often at all.' Despite all our exhortations, our preaching and encouragement, actually the average person speaks about Jesus very infrequently. But if we seek to create a culture of real prayerfulness for lost people, maybe our churches will see something of a movement that changes the ways believers think about outsiders.

Jim Collins talks about 'the power of the flywheel'. When you try to get a church from being inwardly focussed to being more outsider conscious, change feels very slow – like trying to move a massive flywheel. It feels as if you have to push so hard for anybody to seriously pray for anybody who is lost. But after a while people begin to report that they had a wonderful opportunity to speak about the Lord. Then others share similar things too. The flywheel is moving faster. What you are doing is just putting a little bit more energy in, but you are not having to move the whole thing alone.

How long does it take to move the flywheel like that? In our experience about 15 years! It took that long before it became normal to pray for people and invite them. And we are all still work in progress in talking about Jesus, as God 'opens doors' (1 Cor 16:9)!

How, then, can we help one another more with this personal and individual 'organic go and tell', rather than just plan for the organised events? One thing which really helped was the 'Evangelism Styles Questionnaires' from Mittelberg and Hybels, 'Building a Contagious Church' and, 'Becoming a Contagious Christian'. It was one of those things that Brits hate to do – a questionnaire! But it's not a test, it's a diagnostic. It uses six different categories. It asks if I am a direct person like Peter. Or do I like a good discussion as did Paul? Am I an inviter like Andrew? Do I share a testimony like a man born blind? Or am I a person who just loves doing things for people like Dorcas, or just encourages people like Barnabas?

We did it as a whole church and people began to see that it was a) okay to be who they are, and b) there was a real cross-section of styles in the church. God uses all these different kinds of people. God used someone in the Bible like me or you. The questionnaire got people thinking about it and realising that God uses us as members of 'his team'. Trust God that he hasn't made a mistake making you the way you are; he can use you as you rely on him.

Your story, his story

We then moved on to getting people to

learning to tell 'your story', and to tell 'his story'. For many people, the only experience they have of sharing their testimony is when they join the church. Most people don't get much help in sharing their story, but Bennett found that 'sharing your own personal story to someone' came second out of twenty-two factors helping someone become a Christian. And he found this: hearing how to become a Christian from a friend was more significant than hearing that from a speaker at the front. God uses this personal sharing to help in profound ways. Stories vary enormously, but they have that note of authenticity which means a great deal. If we want Christians to be ready to do this on their front line, we ought at least to get them to think about telling it, in the first instance, in two minutes and jargon free. Too often stories can become long, languid, and framed in sub-cultural speak. My son says to me, 'If it is going to be a long story, start towards the end!'

Then train them into how to tell 'Christ's story'; an explanation of who he is and what he has done. There are many ways of doing this. We don't want to be technique driven. But having something accessible will help them when the unexpected happens – such as an earthquake and a suicidal jailer! Paul knew what to do – he preached to him Jesus.

Now it is not about passing tests, but giving people tools to use. In the New Testament believers especially evangelised their households (their 'oikos'). That is, that wide network of people connected to them; what we might

call their 'circle'. Keller in his work on this argues that there were only two reasons why it might not happen: 1) There is such conflict between your life and your word that people will not listen to you; or 2) If you are a coward.

If you live close to Jesus you can't help but speak about him. I have to take myself to task here; I need to pray for what they prayed for – boldness (Acts 4:29, 31). Boldness isn't brashness, and it isn't arrogance, but it is applied courage that speaks about Jesus naturally and normally. At the point where there is a cowardly way out or a courageous way in, too often believers opt for the former. And why? Well, one reason is that our culture now intimidates us into keeping our faith private. It makes us feel odd, weird, and unacceptable.

Graham Daniels, the leader of *Christians in Sport*, discusses this. He argues that you should speak naturally about Jesus, and then ask a question. If there is no interested response, just be normal and move on. But if there is, then who knows where the conversation might lead.

Last year a major study found that one in five adult Brits – 7 million – were open to a spiritual conversation. That is phenomenal. We have to encourage our folks by making them aware that people 'out there' are more willing to talk about Jesus than they realise. The problem is often in the heads of the Christians. As with invitations we had to teach, 'Don't say people's "No" for them.' Yes, we will have to do a lot of listening, but we might get more opportunities than we first thought.

Permission granted

If we are to help people, we have to give permission to build relationships. That takes time, and that might be time away from other activities the church runs. Mark Greene remarked, 'Too often the mission becomes to recruit the people of God to use some of their leisure time to join the missionary initiatives of church-paid workers.' What an insight! We slip into this without knowing we are doing it.

We are always looking to extend ministry, and to do that we look for volunteers. Of course that has its place but we have to be careful. We can resent what members are doing in their lives at work, home and leisure. We can always be wishing more from them. This is too shrivelled a view of what God is doing.

Perhaps, because we are so aware of the fragility of the church (even if it numbers people in the hundreds!), we become fixated on our work. Perhaps out of a self-defence mechanism because we want to feel safe, leaders resent members being involved in a gamut of things that are not specifically church-run. In actuality we need to give them permission to build relationships with people far from God.

It is so easy, for example, when a member says that their work is taking them abroad, to ask, 'When are you back?' rather than affirming them and asking, 'How may we pray for you?' A teacher taking an assembly at school will be speaking to lots more non-Christians than most preachers do; yet we rarely pray for them as fervently as we should.

Too often what interests us is only church-based evangelism. There is a place for that – we have already explored 'Come and See', and 'Care and Serve'. But we need to support all that leads to 'Go and Tell', where believers reach people we don't know in their neighbourhoods, sports clubs, at the school gates, on the factory floor or in the office corridor.

Of course it's not either/or but both/and – both relationships in the church and relationships outside the church are important. We need to develop and encourage this healthy tension. But it is easy to 'play safe' and mix mainly, if not exclusively, with Christians.

Patience and urgency

We all would love a convert like Lydia – a very rich woman who made her resources available to the church, converted the first time she heard about the Lord Jesus! But most people's journey to faith from first contact with a believer to coming to faith in Christ is about ten years.

So a lot of church plants will need to be told not to despair. They may reap fruit from seed they have sown many years before, and at a point when they felt that it was slow going. The first converts they may see, on inspection, will often turn out to be the result of others' hard work. No shame in that, but we need to train believers and church leaders to 'hang on in there' for a longer haul. Don't assume those initial contacts and relationships are never going to result in salvation if at first there is little response. Most people are on a journey from knowing nothing,

to deepening in their understanding, then to believing. Yes, of course you sometimes see that journey take place incredibly rapidly, but most tell a longer story. Even converts in their teens or twenties will tell of grandmas, friends at school or university, and colleagues at work, all of whom God used over 10-15 years to help them come to faith. You must say to people, 'Be patient. Don't say that they will never believe. God is sovereign.'

Now the 'landscape' that people have to traverse is difficult. We often use the Navigators' 'bridge diagram' to explain the gospel. It is very useful, especially for visual learners. But we have to realise that for most people to get to the place where they want to know about that, they have to navigate many pitfalls. They are surrounded by a majority of friends whose backs are turned against God. They are not just on their own but are living in micro-societies which are often closed to Christianity. They have objections which act as high brick-wall barriers. Keller calls these 'defeater beliefs' – things which they assume are true and which mean that Christianity can't possibly be true. Then they face the ditch of culture separating them from their perception of 'Christian culture'. It is often deep and wide. Then the church can appear as a forbidding citadel which only occasionally lets its drawbridge down. The task is to help them over these obstacles so as to be in a position to explain the biggest gulf they face – their sin and its judgment which keeps them from a holy God – and to share how only Jesus has bridged that gulf for us.

The good news is that your members live 'out there' in that far country alongside their friends. They are rubbing shoulders with people, providing an alternative 'story' which can help their acquaintances begin the journey towards faith in Christ. They can help demolish some walls or make hurdling over them a bit less difficult. They can fill in the ditch by sharing many aspects of culture which are not problematic – clothes, language, music etc. There is no point in creating a barrier when it does not need to be there! They can also make access to church more possible, so that they see that is isn't a citadel after all but is a family. Then they may begin to hear the best news of all. It is not surprising that journey takes ten years!

Follow me

What is our role as church leaders? We must lead by example. We must say 'Follow me' with integrity. If you can't, you're sunk as a leader. Your followers

OUTREACH GOES DOWN A CHURCH'S AGENDA SO EASILY. IT IS LEFT TO THE KEEN FEW. BUT WE MUST USE OUR ENERGIES TO KEEP IT TO THE FOREFRONT AND CENTRAL.

take their cue from you at every level – your passion, your enthusiasm, your commitment. If you exhort them to evangelise, but never mention anyone you know, the message they pick up is that it is all a bit phoney.

It is hard in a busy life. We have to get intentional and make time to personally get alongside people outside of the church orbit. It is tiring. It is an energy sink. There are lots of disappointments, many blind alleys, and many refusals to take things forward. Of the ten healed by the Lord, only one came

back to thank God (Luke 17:11-19). We have to find strength in God, because it seems as if it is all about 'disappointment management'. But this is how it is, and when you understand that, you will have a better understanding of how most members feel. And you will encourage them more thoughtfully and effectively.

Outreach goes down a church's agenda so easily. It is left to the keen few. But we must use our energies to keep it to the forefront and central. It seems unproductive and it gets crowded out by the urgent and less important all too quickly. Kathy Keller commented about Redeemer Church in New York⁵ that it was difficult to the point of being nearly impossible to keep this value (of biasing towards those who don't come to church) at the top of the agenda.

Geoff Thomas many years ago helped me here. He pointed out that ministers need to have a bias to those coming towards the faith. Be at the forefront of the seeker

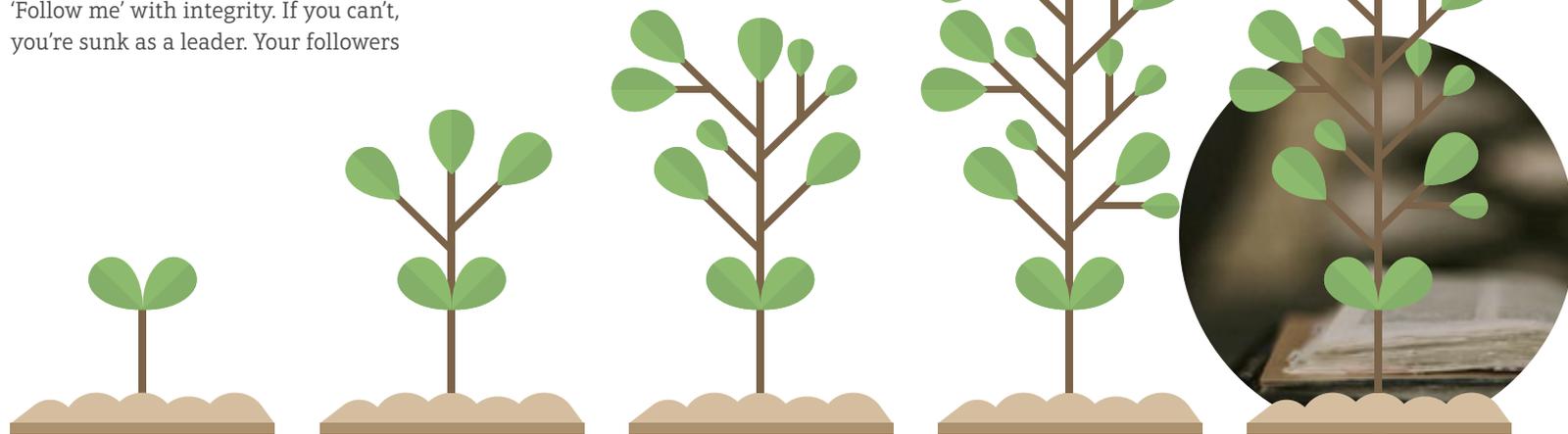
groups. Get to know them and their friends and families. And help them in all their confusion to navigate church life. It may make some older saints feel a bit neglected, but this is what it takes to get the gospel out and to see people saved and the church to grow through conversion growth.

May the Lord give us a portion of the spirit of that servant of the Lord, Paul:

'I speak the truth in Christ - I am not lying, my conscience confirms it in the Holy Spirit - I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were cursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers, those of my own race, the people of Israel' (Rom 9:1-4).

'I have made myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible... I have become all things to all people so that by all possible means I might save some. I do all this for the sake of the gospel...' (1 Cor 9:19, 22-23). ■

Ray Evans is the pastor of Grace Community Church, Bedford, UK.



⁵ Kathy Keller, 'How to Be Happy at Redeemer' (Redeemer Report, April 2013, www.redeemer.com/news_and_events/newsletter/?aid=461, quoted in Ray Evans, *Ready Steady Grow* (IVP, 2014), p215/216.

Conference on the 1689 Confession

Reformed & Baptist: Studies in the 1689 Confession organises a conference for everybody interested in Confessional Baptist history and theology:

Speaker: Dr James Renihan

Date: 11 - 15 March 2019

Venue: Westminster Baptist Church, 100 Horseferry Rd, Westminster, London SW1P 2EE



This conference is organised by: www.trinitygracechurch.net

DAY CONFERENCE Trinity, Creed and Confusion: The Salters' Hall Debates of 1719

Organised by the Centre for Baptist History and Heritage and the Baptist Historical Society.

Date:
Saturday 23 March 2019,
10 am – 4 pm

Venue:
Regent's Park College, Oxford.
Commemorating almost exactly 300 years since the controversy of February 1719

Keynote Speakers:

- » David Wykes, Director of the Dr Williams's Library
- » Stephen Holmes, Senior Lecturer in Theology, University of St Andrews
- » Stephen McKay, Lecturer in Baptist Studies, Morling College, Sydney

Cost:

£10 per person, including unlimited tea and coffee during the day.
Please register with: paul.fiddes@regents.ox.ac.uk



Upcoming trip of Stephen Nowak to Indonesia; call to prayer

Stephen Nowak (pastor of Stowmarket Baptist Church, UK; please see *RT 287*) writes the following about a trip he has planned for April this year (extracts from his recent newsletter):

'As many will know that I have been involved in Indonesia for over 10 years now. I am going again on the 24 April till the 21 May, which will be my 7th trip.'

'There are a very few Churches that hold to the *1689 Baptist Confession of Faith* which I have copyright to in the Indonesian language, but there are many students and pastors all over Indonesia

who would not really understand what the Reformation was really all about. The theology of the Westminster Confession is held by a number of Presbyterians who have done a magnificent work of translating and printing nearly one hundred books from a solidly evangelical and reformed perspective.

We buy our books in bulk from them at very generously discounted prices and they ship the books to the various islands as we need them. We also print thousands of copies of the *1689 Baptist Confession* for all church officers, Bible college students, evangelists, church planters and pastors.'

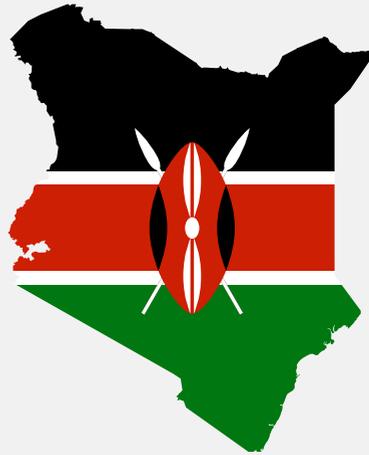


New Books

The following books have been published recently and are recommended for your attention:

- Derek W H Thomas, *Strength for the Weary* (Reformation Trust [Ligonier]), 148 pages, ISBN 978-1-56769-864-0 (Exposition of Isaiah 40-46).
 - Paul Schlehle, *John G Paton. Missionary to the Cannibals of the South Seas* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2018), 188 pages, ISBN 978-1-84871-765-7.
 - Richard D Phillips, *The God of Creation. Truth and Gospel in Genesis 1* (EP Books), 196 pages, ISBN 978-1-78397-220-3.
 - Glenda Faye Mathes and Joel R Beeke, *Puritan Heroes* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2018), 224 pages, ISBN 978-1-60178-637-1.
 - The bestselling *Recovering the Gospel* series by Paul Washer is now available in Spanish from Reformation Heritage Books
 - William Bradshaw and Arthur Hildersham, *Preparing for the Lord's Supper* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2018), 192 pages, ISBN 978-1-60178-660-9.
 - Campegius Vitringa, *The Spiritual Life* Translated and edited by Charles K Telfer (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2018), 272 pages, ISBN 978-1-60178-658-6.
- Campegius Vitringa (1659–1722) was professor of Oriental Languages, Theology, and Church History at Franeker University from 1680 until his death in 1722. *Publisher's description:* What does it mean to have spiritual life, and how does a believer achieve it? What are the fruits of this spiritual life, and what are the hindrances and helps for cultivating it? In this classic treatise of Reformed spirituality, Campegius Vitringa provides answers to these questions as he teaches what it means to be made alive in Christ. Translated into English for the first time, *The Spiritual Life* is accompanied by a helpful biographical sketch of the author and revives the riches of Reformed piety for a new generation of readers.

Please note that we are unable to supply these books; please contact your local bookshop.



Kenya

Recent issues of the *Pray for Kenya* newsletter written by Pastor Keith Underhill reveal some encouraging developments in the Pokot area. Last year Keith was able to appoint six new pastors/elders as leaders for the churches in that area. This was the climax of a long-time development which was celebrated in a service with over 400 people present. The newly appointed leaders are: Andrew Chemolok & Samuel Waswa (Chepkinagh), Thomas Lokerisa & Patricko Odhiambo (Kamketo), Joshua Sitet & Isaiah Juma (Kasei). There is both the need and the opportunity for more church plants.

Somewhat later, Keith, together with Barnabas Olare were the main speakers at the Kisumu Reformed family Conference. This conference has been running for a number of years now. The topics covered were all related to the church: Understanding the Church; Christ building the Church; You must be part of the church; Submit to the church; Be careful with the church; Maintain the unity of the church; There is hope for the church. ■

'We are planning a possible return to Sumatra for a few days as I haven't been there for a few years now. Indonesia is a large country with over 220 million people and possibly 100,000 churches. It is not so much where are we going but where are we not going to be going.

'The 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith has been well translated into the Javanese language of the Indonesians. Very few pastors and preachers can speak English and so we are dependent upon translators and distributing books in the local language. We plan to print at least 1,000 and hopefully 2,000 copies of the 1689 to distribute among students and pastors. Many Sunday school teachers and elders have no literature at all to help them teach and spiritually lead the congregations. The 1689 is a great help.

'As usual I firstly covet your prayers. This is the work of God and all the money, expertise, hard labour and sacrifice will accomplish absolutely nothing without the direct blessing of the Holy Spirit upon the work. I have seen what the Lord has done through our involvement in Indonesia and am confident that through prayer and dependence upon Christ we can continue to bear much fruit as he has promised in John 15:5. There is an unimaginably great need for sound doctrine to be taught in Indonesia. Paganism still has a powerful hold on many in rural areas. Islam is the main religion of the country claiming to have over two hundred million followers and materialism is on the increase in the biggest cities of Indonesia.' ■

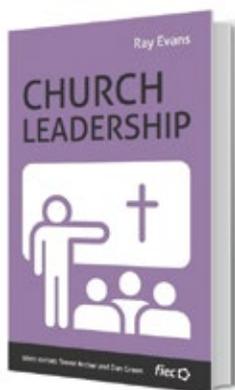


Some Recommended Books on (church) Leadership

Church Leadership

Author: Ray Evans
Publisher: Leyland, 10Publishing, 2016 (73 pages)
ISBN: 978-1-91058-774-4

This is a concise and readable introduction to the topic with helpful advice and suggestions.



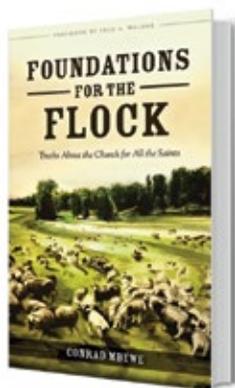
Foundations for the Flock

Truths about the Church for All the Saints

Author: Conrad Mbewe
Publisher: Hannibal, Missouri: Granted Ministries Press, 2011 (338 pages)
ISBN: 978-0-9817321-9-0

This is an excellent text to consult on a wide range of subjects regarding the local church. The titles of the chapters should whet your appetite as they indicate the important topics covered in this book: biblical church government, the Lord's supper, the role of women in the church, challenges in today's pastoral ministry, worship in spirit and in truth, relationship between church and state, biblical inter-

church associations, partners in the harvest, ending with the policy of Kabwata Baptist Church, Zambia on missions. We are very grateful to our brother Conrad for sharing with the readers his wisdom and insight based on over 30 years of ministry.

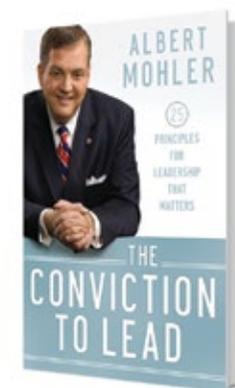


The Conviction to Lead

Author: Albert Mohler
Publisher: Minneapolis, Bethany House Publishers, 2012 (222 pages)
ISBN: 978-0-7642-1125-6

Albert Mohler has been the President of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. Under his leadership the seminary has been transformed into a thriving institution characterised by a passionate conviction for the truth. In 25 chapters the author gives us as many principles for Christian leaders (not just pastors).

The titles and subtitles of the first three chapters give a good impression of the main thrust of this book: The conviction to lead – true leadership starts with a purpose, not a plan; Leading is believing – the leader is driven by beliefs that lead



to action; Convictional intelligence – the leader develops the capacity to think in convictional terms and leads followers to do the same.

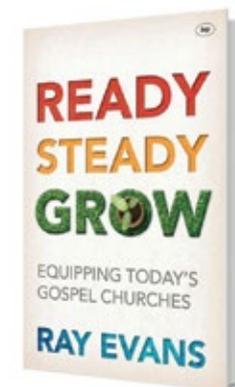
The book gives much practical and wise advice. The main point, however, is that leaders need to have strong convictions regarding what it is they are leading. This is highly recommended for any Christian leader and this certainly includes pastors and elders.

Ready, Steady, Grow. Equipping Today's Gospel Churches

Author: Ray Evans
Publisher: Nottingham, IVP, 2014
ISBN: 9781783591138

Some of the content of this book was first delivered as addresses at a previous Carey Ministers' Conference. I still remember the fascinating insights the author shared with us on how to guide the development of a growing church. Later on, I could apply many of these insights in our own church. This book contains this material and much more. Strongly recommended as

it gives such helpful advice that can avoid many pitfalls in a growing church. Even if your church is not large (in your view) or not growing, this book is very useful.





African Pastors' Conference News

The table gives an overview of recent conferences held in November 2018 and January 2019 in South Africa and the number of books distributed.

The total distributed since the start of APC in 2006 now stands at 140,767 with the number of delegates reached at well over 15,000.

COUNTRY	LOCATION	DELEGATES	BOOKS Sold & Free
South Africa	Adullam Mission	25	189
	Daveyton	31	274
	Empangeni	33	252
	Mseleni	26	137
	Soweto	33	442
	Estcourt	82	218
	Hillcrest	70	724
	Port Shepstone	34	284
	Scottburgh	24	266
	Newcastle	69	434
Orange Farm	12	48	
Welkom	52	612	



Soweto Conference with pastor David Harding from the UK



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copies to one address)

Single copies

may be purchased. In this case the cost is one-sixth of the annual cost. Postage is included, but please note that we have to charge extra for airmail. A 1-year subscription has surcharge of £5.00 if airmail delivery is required.



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Donations to APC: These should be sent to Phil Roberts, 121 Hartshill Road, Hartshill, Stoke-on-Trent, ST4 7LU. Cheques should be made payable to 'African Pastors' Conferences'. Could UK donors please let Phil Roberts know if they intend to use gift aid.



Further Details

Further details about individual APC conferences are available from Phil Roberts (phil@tentmaker.org.uk) or Frederick Hodgson (frederick.hodgson@gmail.com)

Important new pages added to **REFORMATION TODAY WEBSITE**

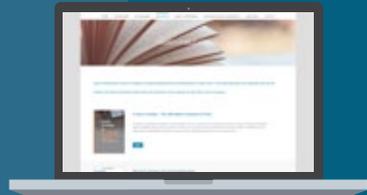
A FAITH TO CONFESS

The Baptist Confession of Faith of 1689 (rewritten in modern English); text of the Confession with the texts of Scripture references.



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Carey Publications page with a list of books published by the Reformation Today Trust



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Next Issue

► **The Canons of Dordt**