

## **Module 1**

# **Zen And The Art Of Riding Dead Horses**







## Module 1: Zen And The Art Of Riding Dead Horses

*"The Twentieth Century is the name of a train that no longer runs" - David Lehman<sup>1</sup>*

### Welcome!

Welcome to the emerging church movement, and to that expression of emerging church known as "house church". Let me begin by addressing some of your possible expectations regarding this Workbook. If you are expecting another church growth book, another "how to do house church" book or another book on the history of the house church movement you are going to be disappointed. Sorry. Or if you are thinking that the "house church thing" might be a good supplement to your small group program and you are hoping to find a curriculum that will make that happen in your church, let me save you the trouble of time and disappointment. We don't have (and probably never will have) a CD of sermon outlines for *"40 Days To A Purpose Driven House Church"* here.

What you will find is a clear call for a new paradigm of what "church" is all about in our Post Christian, Post Modern culture, and that will make many people uncomfortable. It is a paradigm that calls for an "apostolic conversion" of believers into genuine radical disciples and an apostolic recovery of the very nature of church, of New Testament *"ekklesia"*. It is a paradigm that calls for more talk about the Kingdom of God, and less talk about institutional expressions of church. It is a paradigm that emphasizes ministry over programs, and people over organizations. It is a paradigm that emphasizes revival and transformation over church growth. It is a paradigm of a river, rather than a swimming pool. It is a paradigm that encourages and empowers believers to become "churches without walls" and outposts of the Kingdom of God in their homes, their neighborhoods and their marketplaces. It is a paradigm whose motto could well be summed up as: **"We don't go to church; we are the church!"** The purpose of this Workbook is to challenge and to encourage you to consider this new paradigm, and to become the church that meets in your house, in your neighborhood and in your market place. If that thought makes you uncomfortable, then stop now. ***It will only get worse!***

If we are going to fully understand, appreciate and embrace the need for such a new paradigm of "churches without walls" (such as house churches and marketplace gatherings) which God is raising up in our day, we must first come to terms with the scope of the collapse that is currently engulfing our culture both inside and outside of the existing Church as we have traditionally known it. And, sometimes, in order to understand the present (or the future) we must first understand the past.

Some twenty-five years ago theologian and philosopher Dr. Francis A. Schaeffer wrote a book documenting *"The Rise and Decline of Western Thought and Culture."* The title of his work was taken from Ezekiel 33:10, ***How Should We Then Live?*** Ezekiel 33 is, of course, the great "watchman" passage in which the Prophet Ezekiel is warned of God's impending judgment if Israel does not repent of its sin. The culmination of the passage comes in verse 10 where Israel declares, *"If our transgressions and our sins be upon us, and we pine away in them, how should we then live?"* While this may sound like a lifestyle question, it is not. Rather, it is a survival question. The Israelites were wondering, if everything Ezekiel had said was true, how could they possibly survive the pending judgment of God. In the end, Israel did not survive. She did not repent. The nation was taken into captivity by the Babylonians and Jerusalem was destroyed.

Twenty-five years ago Dr. Schaeffer wrote his book in the hopeful prayer that the coming generation (in which we now live) "may get its feet out of the paths of death and may live."<sup>2</sup> Unfortunately, the decline which Dr. Schaeffer so ably analyzed and documented has continued, even accelerated, during the intervening years. And in the ensuing struggle the organized and institutional Church as most Christians have known and experienced it has become caught up in and overwhelmed by this cultural collapse of historic proportions. During the years since Dr. Schaeffer's prophetic analysis, numerous church growth and renewal programs have run through their predictable life-cycles of excitement, activity, decline and eventual relegation to the "church growth" section of the church library, leaving the church itself fundamentally unchanged. The reality is that 40 years of cultural rot and collapse are not going to be reversed by 40 days of purpose driven anything. *"Its more than numbers,"* writes Reggie McNeal, *"The American culture no longer props up the church the way it did, no longer automatically accepts the church as a player at the table in public life, and can be downright hostile to the church's presence. The collapse I am detailing also involves the realization that values of classic Christianity no longer dominate the way Americans believe or behave."*<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>David Lehman, "The Answering Stranger," *Operation Memory* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1990), p. 20.

<sup>2</sup>Francis A. Schaeffer, ***How Should We Then Live? : The Rise and Decline of Western Thought and Culture*** (Old Tappan, New Jersey: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1976), p. 258

<sup>3</sup>Reggie McNeal, ***The Present Future: Six Tough Questions for the Church*** (San Francisco: John Wiley & Sons, 2003), p.

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Perhaps you are among the growing number of Christians who sense that something is desperately wrong both in our culture and in the Church, and who are increasingly frustrated with the institutional/denominational Church as most of us have known it. Your comfortable, traditional church paradigm is being shaken . . . and it isn't over yet.

### Prepare to Have Your Paradigm Shaken

A powerful "shaking" is occurring in the Church today, not unlike the shaking described in Hebrews 12:26ff, *"And His voice shook the earth then, but now He has promised, saying, 'Yet once more I will shake not only the earth, but also the heaven.' And this expression, 'Yet once more,' denotes the removing of those things which can be shaken, as of created things, in order that those things which cannot be shaken may remain."*

This shaking is related to the rise of a Post Christian Post Modern culture in America and the West, a culture that questions the validity of the form of the Church as well as its message (we will explore this more deeply in Module 2 as we explore the rise of Post Modernism and its impact upon the church). For too long we have operated out of a flawed paradigm of Church which is no longer functioning as it did in previous generations. We have defined "Church" as an institution, and we have identified the institution with a particular building, organizational structure or denomination. Unfortunately, I do not believe that this represents a biblical definition of church, not the church that our Lord Jesus intended to build. In the words of Reggie McNeal, *"As He hung on the cross Jesus probably never thought the impact of his sacrifice would be reduced to an invitation for people to join and to support an institution."*<sup>4</sup> Our non-Christian culture, along with an increasing number of believers, has noticed this discrepancy and, in increasing numbers, is looking elsewhere for authentic spirituality. The "paradigm" or model of Church as we have traditionally known it is being shaken to its very core, to the breaking point . . . and beyond. This shaking is both external and internal, both cultural and institutional. In the words of Reggie McNeal, *"We are entering a new epoch of human history called the postmodern age. The postmodern world will demand a new church expression, just as did the rise of the modern world"*<sup>5</sup> (more about this later).

Our English word "paradigm" comes from the Greek word *paradeigma* meaning "model" or "pattern" (used in classical Greek to refer to an architect's blueprint). The word is curiously absent from the New Testament. Perhaps there is a lesson here. Men create paradigms, models and patterns. It is God who shakes them. If we try to put God into a fixed paradigm, model or pattern (i.e., "put God in a box"), God will shake or destroy our box. He wants us to be flexible and willing to change and adjust. His Spirit is a river that is ever moving, ever flowing; not a lake or a pond, and not a man made swimming pool where the flow of the river can be trapped and collected in a box. He is shaking our paradigm because, I believe, He has a new plan in mind, a plan that will bring the message of the Kingdom of God to a new generation. And this new plan requires a new paradigm. Are you ready to have your paradigm shaken, maybe even broken? Are you ready to "dismount" the dead horse you may be riding?<sup>6</sup>

### Zen And The Art of Riding Dead Horses

In his book *Surfing The Himalayas* Frederick Lenz, an American snowboarder, journeys to the Himalayas in search of the ultimate snowboarding experience. There he meets a Buddhist monk who attempts to reveal the essence of Zen to him. *"Become the board,"* says the monk, adding to a long list of ambiguous Zen remarks. You know . . . *"if you have to ask, you won't understand"* . . . that kind of thing.

What does a snowboarding American and a Buddhist monk have in common with the Church? Simple. Much of Western institutional Christianity has heeded the advice of the Buddhist monk: We have become the institution. Unfortunately for the ministry of God's people today, that institution, which many of us grew up with, is looking suspiciously like a "dead horse." In other words, much to the chagrin of the monk, the horse and the church, we are now "one" with a dead horse.

In an article for *Focal Point*, a publication of Denver Seminary, Dr. Haddon Robinson gave an illustration regarding organizations and dead horses. One bit of wisdom addressed to organizations is *"When the horse you are riding dies, dismount."* That sounds like keen insight into the obvious. Unfortunately, many organizations refuse to embrace it. Writer Karen Peterson came up with some alternative strategies that organizations and institutions often use to deal with the problem of dead horses (the comments in parenthesis are mine, not hers):

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<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p.1

<sup>5</sup>Ibid, p. 5

<sup>6</sup>Yep, we know. We are both criticizing "paradigms" on the one hand while offering "new paradigms" on the other. Chalk this inconsistency up to the very real limitations of language. In other words, we're running out of words to use to describe what God is doing. I'm reminded of the ol' golfing joke, *"You know why they call it 'golf'? Because all the other four-letter words were taken!"* Why do we refer to these changes as "paradigm shifts"? Because all the other fancy Greek words were already taken!

- 👉 **Change riders** (If you can't do the job of riding this horse we'll find someone who can!).
- 👉 **Appoint a committee to study the horse** (After all, we mustn't rush to judgment. Perhaps the horse isn't really dead, but sleeping).
- 👉 **Attend a seminar to increase riding ability** (When in doubt, blame the rider and question his abilities).
- 👉 **Get a stronger whip** (even if this doesn't motivate the horse, it will make the rider feel better!).
- 👉 **Enroll in a seminar to learn how others ride dead horses** (Perhaps if you improve your technique no one will notice that you lack substance).
- 👉 **When there is nothing else to do, remember, the time honored wisdom of desperate organizations:** "No horse is too dead to beat!"

Dr. Robinson added a couple of ways that churches and other Christian organizations handle dead horses:

- 👉 *Preach a series of sermons assuring listeners that "this horse is not dead!"*
- 👉 *Keep reminding people of how strong the horse looked when it was alive and hope that they won't notice that it has died.*
- 👉 *Pray that the dead horse will be resurrected.*
- 👉 *Move the dead horse to a new location.*
- 👉 *Label anyone who points out that the horse is dead a "heretic" (or a person of "no faith").*

So let me ask you: Are you trying to ride a dead horse? In recent years many committed Christians have become tired, frustrated and disillusioned with the institutional, organizational and denominational structure of the Church as they have traditionally known it. As one ministry friend of mine declared with a note of frustration, *"If Moses had relied on a committee he'd still be wandering around in the wilderness!"* Many of those Christians who are disillusioned with the Church as it exists today are among the 20% who have been doing 80% of the work of the ministry. They are tired of trying to ride a dead horse!

### 10 Myths About Church Leavers

As a result of their frustration with attempting to ride dead institutional horses, many Christians are opting out of traditional institutional church structures. Christian researcher and writer George Barna states that, according to his research, four out of ten born again Christians do not attend Church, and there are more than 10 million born again Christians in America alone who are not attending Church. Author Reggie McNeal, Director of leadership development for the South Carolina Baptist Convention writes:

*"A growing number of people are leaving the institutional church for a new reason. They are not leaving because they have lost faith. They are leaving the church to preserve their faith. They contend that the church no longer contributes to their spiritual development. In fact, they say, quite the opposite. The number of "post-generational" Christians is growing. David Barrett, author of the World Christian Encyclopedia, estimates that there are about 112 million "churchless Christians" world wide, and about 5 percent of all adherents, but he projects that number will double in the next twenty five years!"<sup>7</sup>*

Author and pastor Alan Jamieson wrote his PhD in sociology on the topic of *"Churchless Faith"* which analyzed why people leave churches and their journeys of faith outside the church. In an article for **Reality** magazine entitled *"The Ten Myths About Church Leavers"*<sup>8</sup> he listed the top 10 misconceptions or myths most of us have about Christians who have left the institutional church:

- 👉 **Myth One:** *It is only the traditional mainline churches that have large numbers of leavers.*

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<sup>7</sup>McNeal, 4.

<sup>8</sup>Dr. Jamieson has used his thesis as the basis for a book entitled **A Churchless Faith** (ISBN 0473070219). For snips from this book you can go to [www.pgpl.co.nz/bkchurchlessfaith.html](http://www.pgpl.co.nz/bkchurchlessfaith.html). A copy of *"Ten Myths About Church Leavers"* is still available on the **Reality** magazine website at [www.reality.org.nz/articles/32/32-jamieson.html](http://www.reality.org.nz/articles/32/32-jamieson.html).

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- ✍ **Myth Two:** *The people who leave are young adults, people on the fringe of our churches, and people who have not been in the church for very long.*
- ✍ **Myth Three:** *Those with children are less likely to leave.*
- ✍ **Myth Four:** *If Mum and Dad go to church, their children will grow up to be churchgoers too.*
- ✍ **Myth Five:** *The people who leave lack commitment.*
- ✍ **Myth Six:** *Leavers don't have an adequate grounding in the faith.*
- ✍ **Myth Seven:** *They leave because of the increased pressure on people's time today.*
- ✍ **Myth Eight:** *They leave because of personal issues and disagreements with church leaders.*
- ✍ **Myth Nine:** *They'll be coming back.*
- ✍ **Myth Ten:** *They are backsliding and giving away their faith.*

Jamieson's research (along with that of many others) has helped to document the reality that many believers are leaving the traditional church paradigm (George Barna presently estimates between 15 and 20 million in America alone). These people are not "abandoning their faith," but are, for the most part, on a personal quest for a more meaningful and authentic expression of their faith. They are in search of a more authentic expression of the Kingdom of God. Many of these people who have left are actually leaders who wanted to grow spiritually but felt they could no longer do so inside the confines of the traditional, established church.

### The Collapse of The Traditional Church Culture

*"The current church culture in North America is on life support. It is living off the work, money, and energy of previous generations from a previous world order. The plug will be pulled either when the money runs out (80 percent of money given to congregations comes from people aged fifty-five and older) or when the remaining three-fourths of a generation who are institutional loyalists die off or both."*<sup>9</sup>

We are witnessing and experiencing a cultural collapse of historic proportions, a collapse which involves both the church and non-church cultures. And in the midst of this collapse the traditional, institutional expression of Church, as many of us have known it, has lost its power. And this apparent powerlessness in the face of a wave of cultural collapse has taken its toll.

✍ Our evangelism is ineffective. According to Christian researcher and author George Barna, a majority of the people who made a "decision" for Christ in one of our evangelical churches *"were no longer to be found in a church context within eight weeks of having made such a decision."* Indeed, a study conducted by the Southern Baptists discovered that out of every 10 converts who professed faith in a Southern Baptist Church, only 1 was still active in the church one year later, and of the 15 million Southern Baptists carried on membership rolls, only 1-in-3 attend church in any given month. We have evangelized for decisions rather than conversions. But conviction is not conversion and a decision does not produce a disciple. We have made Jesus and His Church the answer to questions no one in our Post Modern culture is asking. Jesus has become the parachute on the "plane of life" which no one seriously believes is in any peril of crashing. And when you make Jesus the unneeded extra baggage on life's journey, we shouldn't be surprised when He gets dropped as soon as He becomes inconvenient. We never convinced people of their absolute need in the first place. Our evangelism has degenerated to little more than a slick ad-marketing campaign, so we shouldn't be surprised that the commitment of the average "convert" is about as deep and authentic as a celebrity commercial endorsement.

✍ We close more churches each year in America than we open, and some 5,000 pastors leave the ministry every month. I was recently stunned to hear that the evangelical denomination from whose seminary I graduated recently declared that it was closing some 50 churches in the Northwestern United States. Across America we are closing down more churches each year than we are starting. In Scotland, the Church of Scotland recently announced that it is closing 600 of its 1,400 fellowships. Dead horses litter the

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<sup>9</sup>McNeal, p. 1

landscape.

- ✍ A recent study conducted by sociologist Stanley Presser of the University of Maryland and research assistant Linda Stinson of the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics pegged church attendance in America at only 26% of Americans (as opposed to the standard claim of 40 to 43 percent).<sup>10</sup>
- ✍ A recent CBS News report highlighted a paper entitled *"The Vanishing Protestant Majority"* by Tom W. Smith and Seokho Kim of the University of Chicago <sup>11</sup> which declared that for the first time since colonial times, the United States will soon no longer have a Protestant majority. Their paper documents that the number of Americans identifying themselves as Protestants has fallen from 63.1% in 1993 to 52.4% in 2002, a precipitous decline of 10 percentage points in a single decade. During that same period of time the number of Americans professing no religion grew from 9% to 13.8%!
- ✍ According to George Barna, the unchurched population in America has grown from 24% to 34% in just one decade.
- ✍ According to Dawson McAlister, national youth ministry specialist, 90 percent of kids active in high school youth groups do not go to church by the time they are sophomores in college(?)<sup>12</sup>
- ✍ In 2001 Youth For Christ in Vancouver conducted a survey which revealed that despite pouring millions of dollars and tens of thousands of hours into the lives of nearly 4,000 kids, less than 2% of them went on to have any ongoing relationship with the church.

### Tough Questions, Revolution and The Emerging Church

According to author Reggie McNeal, this shaking of our traditional church paradigm is confronting the modern church with "new realities" which, in turn, confront us with wrong (but often traditional) ways of addressing those new realities. McNeal argues that the church must begin asking itself new questions. An example of the wrong type of question the Church may be asking during this transition is, *"How Do We Do Church Better?"* The new question we must ask is *"How Do We Deconvert From Church-ianity To Christianity."* According to McNeal, the Church needs to recapture its sense of mission. *"The appropriate response to the emerging world is a rebooting of the mission, a radical obedience to an ancient command, a loss of self rather than self-preoccupation, concern about service and sacrifice rather than concern about style."* In this new transition from traditional church to what is now referred to as the "emerging church" McNeal sees a need for the Church to engage in kingdom thinking. *"Kingdom thinking challenges church thinking. Kingdom thinking does not force people into the church to hear about Jesus or maintain that church membership is the same thing as kingdom citizenship."*

Another voice in this emerging church movement is long-time Christian trend watcher, statistician, sociologist and author George Barna. For the past 20 years the Barna Research Group ([www.barna.org](http://www.barna.org)) has worked to provide *"current, accurate and reliable information, in bite-sized pieces, at reasonable prices, to ministries in order to facilitate strategic decision-making."* During that time they interviewed nearly a half million people in the course of hundreds of research studies, provide seminar-based training to leaders from more than 50,000 churches, produce more than 60 books and syndicated reports. They also developed and maintained a website that provides free information to hundreds of thousands of people every month. According to Barna, the most discouraging study they ever conducted was one in which they attempted to identify churches in the U.S. that consistently and intelligently evaluated life transformation among their people. Barna found that very few churches measure anything beyond attendance, donations, square footage, number of programs and size of staff. Finally, Barna hit a point of crisis in 2003. He came to the conclusion that he was basically giving information to people whose sole interest was finding facts that confirmed what they had already chosen to do without any concern for genuine life transformation. Frustrated, Barna told the Lord that he could not continue doing what we had been doing for the past 20 years. According to Barna their research had also shown that most of the influence on what people think and do comes from just seven sources: movies, television, music, family, books, law, and the Internet, and that the local church has virtually no discernible influence on people's lives. As a result of this information (much of which simply confirmed what other researchers were already discovering) the Barna organization made a choice in 2005 to change the focus of their

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<sup>10</sup>McNeal, p. 4

<sup>11</sup>Tom W. Smith & Seokho Kim, *"The Vanishing Protestant Majority"*, July 2004, NORC/University of Chicago, GSS Social Change Report No. 49, available on the internet at [www.norc.uchicago.edu/issues/PROTSGO8.pdf](http://www.norc.uchicago.edu/issues/PROTSGO8.pdf).









<sup>12</sup>McNeal, p. 4

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research and their output. According to Barna, upcoming research and books will “*reveal what is happening in the emerging Church - not the postmodern, candles/coffee/couches types of anti-modern ministries, but the Revolutionary ministry that is percolating to the surface of American society through new forms of ministry such as the cyberchurch, house churches, marketplace ministries, and tribal faith experiences.*” The first such book, **Revolution**, indicates that, over the next 20 years, the number of Christians seeking spiritual fulfillment in traditional churches will decline. Today 70% of Americans rely upon a local congregation as their primary spiritual expression. But by the year 2025 (only 19 years away, if you’re counting) this number will decline to 30-35%. During that same time frame Barna projects that “alternative” expressions of spirituality (e.g., house church, market place gatherings, etc.) will rise from the current 5% to between 30 and 35%.<sup>13</sup>

Welcome to the reality of “the emerging church” (including house churches). The concept of the “emerging church” or “the emergent church” embraces a wide variety of new expressions of church which are, for the most part, radical departures from the traditional institutional church expression of Christianity most of us have known. Writing in Christianity Today Andy Crouch observes, “*Like all labels, this one conceals as much as it reveals. But the phrase ‘emerging church’ captures several important features of a new generation of churches. They are works in progress, often startlingly improvisational in their approach to everything from worship to leadership to preaching to prayer.*”<sup>14</sup>

These tough “new realities” embodied in and expressed through the “emerging church” movement are challenging the traditional church paradigms which most of us have grown up with and are causing the rise of a new paradigm for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. What does this new paradigm look like? Leonard Sweet (of “**Postmodern Pilgrims**” fame) offers “*24 Transitions for moving into the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*”<sup>15</sup> Let me offer just a handful of my own ideas:

-  It is less institutional and more organic and personal.
-  It is “incarnational,” rather than attractional. It doesn’t create “holy places” or “holy buildings” where people must come to encounter God. Instead it “disassembles” itself and seeps into the cracks and crevices of society, bringing the Kingdom of God to people who need it most in their homes, work places & dorm rooms.
-  Because it is “incarnational,” it places less emphasis upon structure and location (i.e., a church building or campus) and more emphasis upon “networking.”
-  It is “Apostolic” rather than “hierarchical” in its leadership, recognizing and utilizing the 5-fold gifts of Ephesians 4, along with elders and deacons.
-  It is an extended family, rather than an extensive organization.
-  It places less emphasis upon “church” and more emphasis upon “the Kingdom of God.”
-  It emphasizes the need and role of genuine spiritual renewal and revival which results in personal, church and community transformation.
-  It regards the Kingdom of God as a River that “grows as it flows” through our homes, our neighborhoods, our market places and our communities, rather than as man-made institutional swimming pools to be supervised, controlled and maintained.

### What Difference Does It Make?

*“Objective and relevance - these are the crucial issues of our work. Both are interrelated, and the measure by which they are made compatible will largely determine the significance of all our activity. Merely because we are busy, or even skilled, doing something does not necessarily mean that we are getting anything accomplished. The question must always be*

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<sup>13</sup>George Barna, **Revolution** (Wheaton: Tyndale House Publishers, 2005), page. 41.

<sup>14</sup>Andy Crouch, “*The Emergent Mystique*” in Christianity Today on-line edition posted 10/22/2004 at [www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2004/011/12.36.html](http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2004/011/12.36.html)

<sup>15</sup>You can read these at [www.leonardsweet.com/includes/ShowSweetenedArticles.asp?articleID=95](http://www.leonardsweet.com/includes/ShowSweetenedArticles.asp?articleID=95)

asked. *Is it worth doing? And does it get the job done?*<sup>16</sup>

When we look at the current state of the traditional church in America (and Europe) we are forced to ask a very simple yet profound question: What difference does it make? One church leader put it this way, *"Would the community weep if your church were to pull out of the city? Would anybody notice if you left? Would anybody care?"* Or in the words of evangelism expert Robert Coleman, when measured by our **stated objective** (discipling the nations, Matthew 18:28-29) and by **relevance** (are our activities actually accomplishing our stated objective) we must painfully conclude that much of the Church in America (and the West) is floundering badly and is making very little difference. We are a church full of activities, something for every age group. A virtual "Wal-Mart" of Christian activity! But how much of that activity is actually relevant to our stated objective. What are we measuring. Are we measuring the "success" of our ministry in terms of congregational attendance or by community transformational impact?<sup>17</sup> This is not so much a criticism as an observation of the times. The Church today is better funded, its leadership better educated and its programs better produced than at any time in its history. But answer a simple question: Is America (& the West) "more Christian" today than it was 100 years ago (or even 50 years ago)? If our stated objective, as given by Christ Himself, is to disciple our nation, then, by all measures of our impact upon our culture and its people, the Church has failed at its primary task. And that means that all of our activities, which contributed to that failure, are apparently irrelevant, for they have done little or nothing to achieve our stated objective.

And this failure raises an interesting dilemma. Are we as individuals, leaders and churches, prepared to stand before God on judgment day and be held accountable for these failures, and for our failure to either recognize or correct them? Contrary to much popular opinion, the Christian life is not a "zero sum game" (where everything adds up to "zero" in the end with no winners or losers). Consider the following passage: *"Therefore also we have as our ambition, whether at home or absent, to be pleasing to Him. For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad. Therefore knowing the fear of the Lord, we persuade men. . ."* (2 Corinthians 5:9-11), Here the Apostle Paul acknowledges that life is not a "zero sum" game where, regardless of what we did as Christians in this life, everything "zeros out" in the end. Instead, Paul declares that His ambition is to please God. Why? Because, Paul argues, we **must** (it isn't optional) **all** (no exceptions) make an appearance before the judgment seat of Christ. For what purpose? *"That each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body,"* declares Paul. Commentators have labored over the years to explain exactly what this passage means for the believer. The usual conclusion is that it has to do with our rewards, and that some Christians will receive more while others receive less (See also Colossians 3:25). Whether or not this is the correct interpretation we won't know until that Day. But what we do know is this: Paul's understanding of this "event" struck fear into his heart, because in the next verse Paul declares, *"Therefore, knowing the fear of the Lord, we persuade men. . ."*

The Christian life and ministry are not a "zero sum" game. A day of reckoning is approaching for the Church as a whole and for each of us individually when all of our work and efforts will be tested by fire (1 Corinthians 3:12-15). Now is the time to ask ourselves, while there is still time to "please the Lord," whether or not what we are doing is worth the reckoning that will eventually take place. Are you personally ready to stand before God on judgment day and give an accounting for your failed church paradigm, and for continuing to "sell" unbelievers on the merits of an obviously dead horse?

### The Problem of Shifting From Old to New Paradigms

A "paradigm shift" of historic and biblical proportions is under way as the shaking of the old gives way to the rise of the new. There is both good news and "bad" news in this new paradigm shift that God is now bringing about. The good news is that God is moving, raising up new paradigms to accomplish His Kingdom purposes, and He invites us to move with Him. The "bad" news is that not everyone who "should" move will move. And there are present leaders of the old paradigm who believe that with a few minor adjustments they can become leaders of this new paradigm. But this is not true. Keepers and tenders of public church swimming pools are totally unprepared for the uncontrolled "wildness" of life along God's River. Leaders of the old paradigm cannot move into this new paradigm (much less lead it) without experiencing a profound "death" to self and to the old which is now passing away. Wolfgang Simson has created a diagram which illustrates and helps to explain this dying process. He calls it **"The 5 Steps of Apostolic Migration."** It is Wolf's thesis that an "Apostolic Migration" (what I call a "paradigm shift") from old paradigms to new paradigms is sweeping across the Church, a migration (or "paradigm shift") which is being led by apostles and prophets whom God is calling out and raising up for this new move. I have reproduced this diagram (with Wolf's permission) on the following page and I want to explain the diagram in an effort to help you come to terms with where you are on your own personal journey into this new paradigm of New Testament house church and the Kingdom of God.

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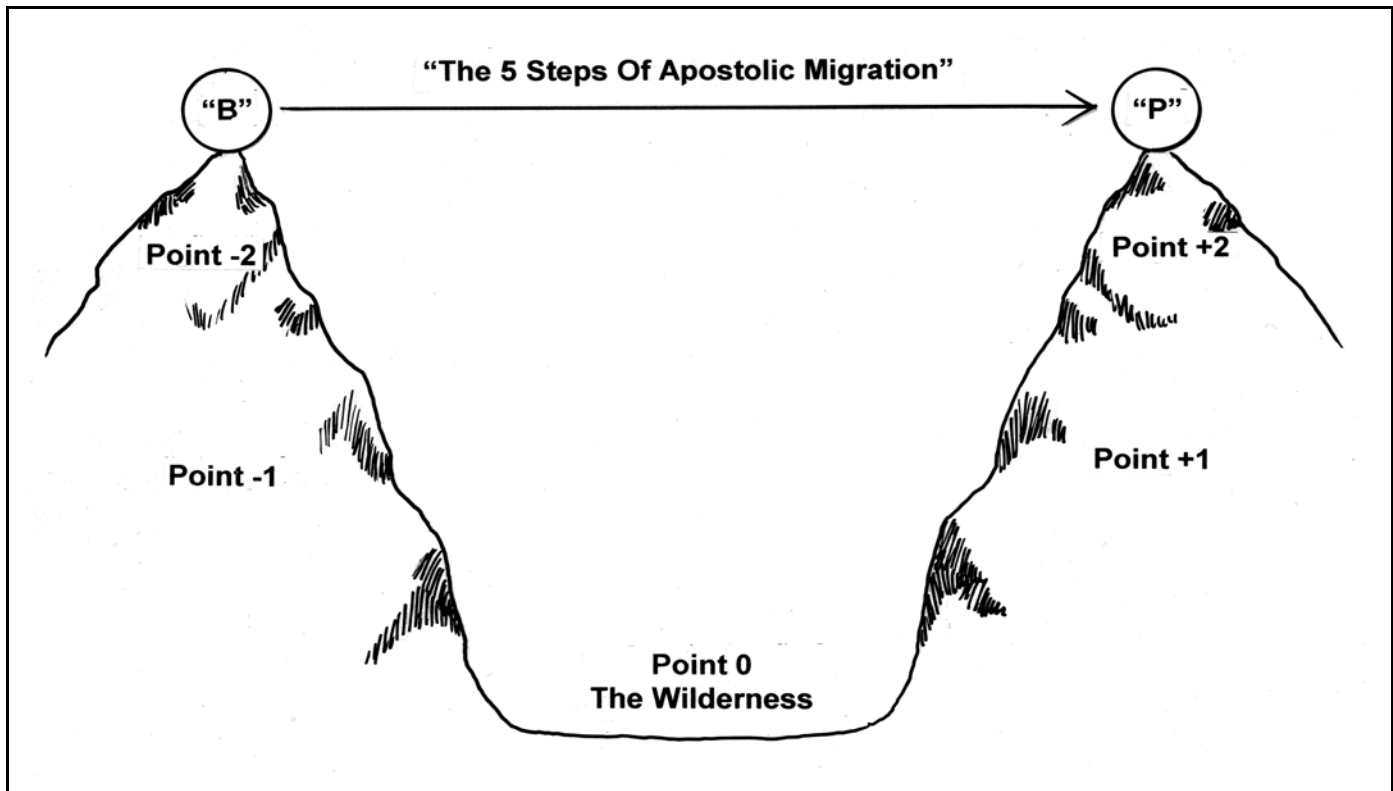
<sup>16</sup>Robert Coleman *The Master Plan of Evangelism* (Tarrytown, New York: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1972), page 11.

<sup>17</sup>See the article in Appendix A, *"Ten Paradigm Shifts Towards Community Transformation"*.

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The heart of this diagram consists of two mountain peaks. The peak on the left represents what Wolf (following Martin Luther) calls the new and present "Babylonian Captivity of the Church." The present day church is being held captive to programs and paradigms which no longer serve God's purpose of restoring authentic New Testament Church. Church as we know it is now preventing Church as God wants it. So, we have labeled this peak "**B**". The mountain peak on the right represents the "Promised Land" of house church and a restoration of authentic church as seen in the New Testament (in such passages as Acts 2:41-47). I have labeled this peak "**P**". The line/arrow going from **Peak "B"** directly to **Peak "P"** represents the mistaken belief on the part of some people that they can migrate directly from the old paradigm to the new paradigm with few (if any) significant changes. This is a false view which seeks to avoid the personally painful process of dying to ourselves and to the old in order to give birth to the new.

### Wolfgang Simson's "5 Steps of Apostolic Migration"



Lets examine "The 5 Steps of Apostolic Migration" from the old into the new!

**Point - 2:** This is where most Christians are today as this new move of God unfolds. This is the point of "happy clappy" churchianity where most people are content with where they are in their church experience. When you talk to them about the need for a new paradigm their response is basically, "I have no idea what you are talking about."

**Point - 1:** This second point or step in apostolic migration represents people who are no longer satisfied with "happy clappy church" as they have known it. These are people who have heard from God about more authentic expressions of church. They have begun to move in their spirits, but their bodies and their money have not yet moved. They are frustrated pilgrims. Some will move to the next step, while others will not.

**Point 0:** Welcome to the wilderness. This third step represents frustrated pilgrims who have finally left the old paradigm and are now "out of the system," but they do not yet know that there is a new paradigm to move into. And there is a reason for this. God knows that it is easier to get a person "out of the system" than it is to get the old system out of the person. For this reason God engineers the wilderness as a place of "spiritual death: to the old, a place of "religious detoxification" where God deals with our "baggage." It is in the wilderness that God seeks to heal our hurts, wounds, bitterness, anger and other personal "baggage" left over from our journey out of the old. Not everyone "survives" the wilderness experience to emerge healthy at the next Point. Some people are unable to "let go" of the past (past wounds, hurts, betrayals, etc.) in order to embrace God's future plans. Like the Israelites in the wilderness, some long to return to Egypt, while others perish in the wilderness. But for those who allow God to do his work of "religious detoxification" they begin to experience an alignment

of their spirits, both with what God is doing and with other people in whom He is doing it. And soon, it's time for them to emerge from the wilderness and to step into the next stage of their journey.

**Point + 1:** This is the stage or point at which people choose to leave the past and the wilderness behind and to “cross over the Jordan” into the new paradigm of what God is doing. This requires both a leaving (of the old) and a cleaving (to the new). It requires us to “uncovenant” with what has gone before, and to make a new covenant with God’s new unfolding paradigm. It is often at this point that a person’s commitment or lack of commitment to the new paradigm is revealed through statements like, “*You mean I must do house church exclusively?*” Such a response reveals that the person hasn’t yet caught the vision of God’s new paradigm and is still trying to “straddle” both worlds (the old versus the new). It means they aren’t quite ready to emerge from the wilderness because they haven’t yet fully died to themselves and to the old. In the words of psychologist Dr. Phil McGraw, “*You either get it, or you don’t.*” This refusal to die to the old while embracing the new can be illustrated from the life of David & Jonathan. In 1 Samuel Chapter 20 David and Jonathan entered into a covenant of blessing with one another and their descendants. Jonathan, the son of King Saul, was the rightful and appointed heir to the throne of Israel. Both he and David knew this. But David was the one anointed by God as the next King. Jonathan saw the future and recognized that the future belonged not to him but to David. David would be King and the reign of the “house of Saul” would soon end. For this reason Jonathan covenanted with David for the future blessing of his descendants (1 Samuel 20:42). But the chapter ends with this statement, “*Then he rose and departed, while Jonathan went into the city.*” In other words, even though Jonathan had recognized the future and covenanted with David, he had not “uncovenanted” from Saul and his system. Jonathan returned to the old and died with his father Saul. When it comes to the new thing God is doing, the new paradigms He is raising up, we must both enter into a covenant with God for the future and “uncovenant” ourselves from the past.

**Point + 2:** Welcome to the house church movement and the new paradigm that God is raising up in our day. At this point you have died to yourself and the past and have embraced the new thing God is doing. Your work isn’t over. In fact, it’s just beginning.





### New Paradigms Arising

So, where are you on this “Apostolic Migration” into God’s new paradigm. Can you place yourself on one of these five “Points”? The simple yet profound truth is that a fresh wind of God’s Spirit is beginning to blow, and it is beginning to challenge the “listening and available” church with new paradigms for the future. The “new thing” God is now unfolding is not simple an “upgrade” of the old. It is a radical shift or change from an old wineskin to a new.

Remember, God has always been about doing three things: He is building His Kingdom, He is calling out His people, and He is pouring out His River. Everything else is “religious window-dressing.” Therefore, it should come as no surprise to us that in this day of “Apostolic Migration” God is bringing about three basic paradigm shifts.

### Paradigm Shift # 1: From “Growing Our Church” To “Building God’s Kingdom”

The first thing that God has always been (and continues to be) about is building His Kingdom. As Christians, however, we love to talk about “church,” usually within the context of “our church.” When we greet one another one of our first questions is “Where do you go to church?” But would it surprise you to learn that the New Testament talks more about “kingdom” (162 times) than about “church” (115 times)? The Kingdom of God was at the heart of Jesus’ message. In fact, the Kingdom of God was Jesus’ favorite topic. And He wasn’t alone. It was the message preached by Paul and the early Church. As I stated before, the early N.T. church didn’t “do evangelism” as you and I understand it. They proclaimed the Kingdom, they taught the Kingdom and they lived the Kingdom, and people responded to what they SAW and HEARD. Here are just a few examples:

-  John The Baptist proclaimed the Kingdom of God: “*Now in those days John the Baptist came, preaching in the wilderness of Judea, saying, “Repent, for **the kingdom of heaven** is at hand.”* (Matthew 3:1-2)
-  Jesus preached the Kingdom: “*The time is fulfilled, and the **kingdom of God** is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.*” (Mark 1:15)
-  Jesus commanded the disciples to preach the Kingdom: “*And as you go, preach, saying, ‘The **kingdom of heaven** is at hand.’*” (Matthew 10:7)
-  The disciples preached the Kingdom: “*But when they believed Philip preaching the good news about the **Kingdom of God** and the name of Jesus Christ, they were being baptized, men and women alike.*” (Acts 8:12)



Paul preached about the Kingdom: *“And he stayed two full years in his own rented quarters, and was welcoming all who came to him, preaching the **kingdom of God**, and teaching concerning the Lord Jesus Christ with all openness.”* (Acts 28:30-31)

Our Post Christian Post Modern culture is increasingly dis-interested in “church” as we (and they) have known it. While they are increasingly interested in “spirituality,” their cry is one of “God, yes! Church, no!” We have contributed to this disjunction between true spirituality and church by insisting that true spirituality consists of attending weekly meetings. We offer “scriptural justification” by quoting such Scriptures as Hebrew 10:23-25 - *“Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful; and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more, as you see the day drawing near.”* But we never bother to consider that “assembling together” does not necessarily have to happen on a Sunday between the hours of 9AM and Noon, or in a building called a church. We have minimalized and trivialized the significance of Jesus declaration, *“The Kingdom of God is at hand, repent and believe the good news,”* by reducing the required response to membership in an organization which requires three hours of meetings each week. But the good news of the Kingdom cannot be minimalized or trivialized. It is a life-transforming message which demands personal repentance and the commitment of one’s entire life. It is a message about a Kingdom (and a soon-coming King) which promises to heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons and much more. It offers the opportunity to know God and to touch and taste the powers of the Age to Come. If we are to challenge and re-gain the attention of our Post Christian Post Modern culture, it must be with a power-filled life-transforming message that God is building His Kingdom with the spiritual stones of transformed lives, transformed homes, and transformed neighborhoods. We must declare to them that God is unfolding His Kingdom by planting “kingdom outposts” which we call “house churches,” footholds for the Kingdom of God, assemblies of those who have been called out of the Kingdom of darkness and into the Kingdom of God’s own Son.

**Action Step:** *We must stop trivializing our message and begin teaching and proclaiming the Kingdom of God.*

### **Paradigm Shift # 2: From Church as An Extensive Organization To Church as an Extended Family**

The second thing that God has always been (and continues to be) about is calling out a people to himself. And as He does so today, he is gathering His people together in churches or *“ekklesias”* which meet in people’s homes and which look and function like extended families (More about this in Module 4). In a recent issue of the magazine “Mission Frontiers” Dr. Ralph Winter, Editor of the magazine and founder of the US Center for World Missions, made some sobering observations regarding the relationship of house churches to the need in America for recovering the sense of church as an extended family. Listen to what Dr. Winter had to say:

*“. . . the trend to **house churches** is a phenomenon which runs counter to the long and slow drift of American churches away from **extended families**. The American church today is strikingly more and more a place for family fragments, and even seeks to replace natural families! The New Testament 'church' was a worshiping household like that of Cornelius, Lydia, or Crispus, and was called an *ekklesia*, a word that does not mean what we understand 'church' to mean. What happened to us (slowly)? Modern age-stratified, highly specialized society has become Satan's Weapon of Mass Destruction of the family - precisely where worship and accountability are supposed to be primary! The church has mindlessly followed the world's pattern: **a family driving up to a church door is instantly chopped into pieces**. Our lengthened school system also snatches our children away. Far worse, it isolates the generations. Over 300 years it has (slowly) gone from three years of schooling (as with Harvard in its first century - students without previous schooling) to 17 years of incarceration today. Whatever the merits of that long tunnel of isolation from adult responsibilities, such a system postpones marriage and in so doing pries apart the generations so that grandparents are really old. (We no longer see grandparents in their 30s!). That means that little Johnny will never see his father obeying his own father. Three- and four-generation households, which once joined churches together, and had family-level worship, are now almost universally reduced to 'nuclear' families (e.g., family fragments). The grand-parent generation is no longer a stabilizing factor, divorce has skyrocketed, wives are abused, children go wrong, etc. This happened slowly, over 300 years. Thus, today we are blind to what has happened - but must deal with the consequences. Those of us who have lived overseas, where most societies have not yet been 'Westernized' and stacked against normal marriage, may be among the only ones who can even perceive - much less unravel - the reality of this tragedy. Unfortunately, many congregations today have the idea that getting people into small groups is all that is necessary. However, **extended families can be small groups, but small groups cannot readily become extended families**. Pastors, frantic to do more than preach generalities to crowds on Sunday, may hope to get most of their congregations into small groups. Sure, those family fragments out there in the pews desperately need to rise above their individualism and isolation. Thus, a non-family, artificial small group is better than nothing. In such churches you may never hear a word about what could and should go on at the family level. I myself, in Evangelical churches all my life, have never heard a sermon on how or why families ought to have family devotions. **But it is clearly better - as well as more important - to make every real family a small group than to try to make small groups into artificial families. . . . All over the world it is gradually becoming clear that you can build a big church out of small groups, but big churches without***

**families remaining intact aren't worth much.** *Last I heard, the most famous large church (in Korea) had 800,000 members meeting in 21 auditoriums and 15 identical services a week. But the secret was that behind all this once-a-week celebration were 52,000 (!) Neighborhood fellowships mainly based on extended families. **The house church phenomenon could be revolutionary.** It just may be that the most valuable gift missions can give back to the American church is a renewed sense of the family as God intended it to be.*<sup>18</sup>

In this new and unfolding move of God, not only is He calling out a people for His own, He is restoring the basic structure of an extended family to the heart of His Church. In an age when the family is under increasing withering attack by our secular culture, it should come as no surprise to us that the God Who created the family is raising up a new paradigm which restores the transforming power of the Kingdom of God to the family, and which restores the pivotal role of the family to its proper place in the Kingdom of God.

### **Paradigm Shift # 3: From A Paradigm of A Swimming Pool To A Paradigm of A River**

The third thing that God has always been (and continues to be) about is pouring out the River of His Spirit. It is popular in traditional church circles today to talk about "organic church growth." But if we want to follow Biblical analogies, then the Church of God is neither an organization nor an organism; rather, it is a River. It is the River of Ezekiel 47, the River of God's Spirit which flows from the alter of God, which was poured out in great power on the day of Pentecost, and which grows in depth, breadth and power as it flows. And those times and seasons in the life of God's people which we call "revival" are simply those times when the River of God's Spirit rises to new levels of power and blessing not experienced before.

If you haven't already guessed, I have a love for the history of revival. This has not always been so. Several years ago God opened up a ministry in my life of fasting and prayer for revival (the same time at which He called us into the house church movement). It has become a "fire" which I have been unable to extinguish. My study of the history of revival has led me to the inescapable conclusion that the greatest periods of evangelism and growth in the history of the Church have taken place during times of historic revival. During such times it is as if men live beneath an "open heaven" when the River of God's Spirit flows in power to sweep all before it. The "practical" result (we Americans always want to know "the bottom line") is that the church is renewed and empowered for greater ministry, and multitudes are swept into the Kingdom of God. To "quantify" this for the statisticians in our midst, during periods of historic revival, somewhere between 5-and-7% of the total population of a region or a nation would profess Christ and join the church for the first time. Localized numbers could be much higher. In Atlantic City, New Jersey, during the American extension of the Welsh revival of 1904, out of a population of 60,000 the local pastors said they knew of only 50 adults who remained unconverted! These numbers do not include the uncounted numbers of believers who are renewed, or of existing church members who are savingly converted (Barna estimates that as many as 40% of existing church attendees today are unsaved).

When we discuss such things as the superiority of house church or organic church or cell church or institutional church as "church planting tools" or as "discipleship tools," I believe we are overlooking an important question. Perhaps we should be asking ourselves "*Which form of church is the channel which God is raising up to best receive the coming outpouring of the River of His Spirit as it flows in fresh power in the coming outpouring of revival?*" God is looking for channels for His River. Men tend to want to build swimming pools where they can siphon off and capture a portion of the River, appoint lifeguards to watch over the swimmers who come, offer swimming classes, hold "Holy Spirit pool parties," create committees to decide whether or not a bigger swimming pool should be built and how exactly should they rule and control what actually belongs to God. In times of revival the River of God's Spirit begins to flow. Old channels through which the River may have flowed in times past, but which have since become dammed up by unbelief, control and religion are by-passed as the River seeks new channels where it can flow freely. Reggie McNeal's book ***The Present Future: Six Tough Questions for the Church*** reminds us that, at its heart, the struggle and decline of the institutional church has, in no small part, been the result of the Church becoming an antiquated community swimming pool in a season when God is preparing to pour out a River.

**Action Step:** Every existing church, regardless of its structure (house, cell, simple, institutional) should now be asking itself a "survival question": *Are we a flowing River, a channel through which the River of God can flow freely, or have we become a swimming pool?*

### **Reflections on Revival & Shifting Paradigms**

I believe that this season of Apostolic Migration and of major paradigm shifts as we have described can best be described and summed up as the difference between "revival" and "church growth." These are, for the most part, two competing paradigms regarding God's plan for His Church. The much maligned and over-used phrase "revival" is the human term we have created to describe those seasons of divine visitation when God moves in great power to build His Kingdom, call out

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<sup>18</sup>*Mission Frontiers*, March - April 2005, page 4. Posted in PDF format on the internet at [www.missionfrontiers.org](http://www.missionfrontiers.org)

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His people and pour out His River. Such a season of visitation (or “revival”) is frequently confused with a successful “church growth” program. What God is about to do in and through the house church movement is, quite literally, a season of divine visitation, not a church growth program. Let me explain by comparing and contrasting an example of how people misunderstand and confuse these two paradigms.

Consider the following quote, then I'll tell you where the quote came from. Here's the quote: *“If your church baptized 671 new believers, added 1,200 new members, and increased your average attendance by 2,000 in just 40 days, would you call that a revival? If, during those same 40 days, 2,200 previously uninvolved people volunteered to serve in a ministry of your church, and another 3,700 committed to go on missions somewhere in the world next year, what would you call that? An awakening? What term would you use if your members became so burdened for their neighbors that they started 2,400 Home Bible Study groups and convinced nearly 25,000 of their friends, neighbors, and co-workers to attend for six weeks? A miracle? Whatever you call it, this actually happened at Saddleback Church in the Fall of 2002 during an incredible spiritual growth emphasis called 40 Days of Purpose.”* I took this quote from the official website of The Purpose Driven Church. It is Rick Warren's personal introduction to the 40 day campaign to a purpose driven church that over 1,500 churches around the country were participating in at the time. It is really a perfect illustration of the confusion surrounding the issues of revival versus church growth. Are the things he describes there a revival? I would say “No.” And I want to explain why, and I want to explain why with some help from Arthur Wallis. You may have read some of his works in the past, such as **“God's Chosen Fast”** or **“Pray In The Spirit”**. But he also wrote another wonderful book on the topic of revival entitled, **“In The Day of Thy Power.”** And I would like to share some of what he has to say on the issue of “What is revival?” Consider the thoughts of Arthur Wallis:

*“There was never a day in which the term "revival" needed to be more carefully defined. It has come to be used in relation to spiritual things so widely and so loosely that many are perplexed to know what it does mean. To some prejudiced or misinformed people the term is synonymous with excessive emotionalism and mass hysteria. Others use the word to describe a successful evangelistic mission. When they tell us that their church is "having a revival", we understand them to mean that a gospel campaign is being conducted there. This use is possibly a relic of days when the Spirit was working widely, and one had only to arrange such a mission to witness a quickening amongst the believers and an ingathering of the lost. Today it is otherwise, but in any case to use the term thus is misleading. Some, adhering closely to the etymology of the word, use it to describe a personal reviving of the believer by the Holy Spirit. If an individual or group is quickened in holiness and brought into a place of blessing, that is what they call "revival", even if there is little extension of the work. Similarly others, whose emphasis is more on a definite experience of the Spirit, will claim that when an individual or group has been filled with the Spirit they have "got revival", regardless of whether there are any repercussions outside their circle. In so far as revival always involves the reviving of individual believers these views are true, but as definitions of revival they are inadequate. Revival is more than big meetings. It is more than religious excitement. It is more than the quickening of the saints, or their being filled with the Holy Spirit. It is more than a great ingathering of souls. One may have any one of these without revival, and yet revival includes them all.”*

Do you see what Wallis is saying? He is pointing out that there is a fundamental difference between a very effective evangelistic program or church growth campaign (such as Rick Warren is describing) and a move of God's Spirit in spiritual revival and community transformation. You can have a very successful Church growth program without ever experiencing God's Presence in revival. Let's listen to more of what Arthur Wallis has to say about this:

*“There is a wealth of difference between missions or campaigns at their best and genuine revival. In the former man takes the initiative, it may be with the prompting of the Spirit; in the latter the initiative is God's. With the one the organization is human; with the other it is divine. There is no intention here of disparaging the work of missions, or of denying that God has owned them to the conversion of multitudes, but it must be made clear that they do not constitute revival. Missions may be a part of the continuous programme of evangelism which is the task of the church, but revival is a thing of special times and seasons. Revival may of course break out during a mission, but when it does so certain features will appear which are peculiar to revival, and certain features will disappear which are characteristic of missions. However, while revival tarries, the normal evangelism of the church must continue, but let us keep the distinction clear. The meaning of any word is determined by its usage. For a definition of revival we must therefore appeal to the people of God of bygone years, who have used the word with consistency of meaning down the centuries, until it began to be used in a lesser and more limited sense in modern times. **Numerous writings on the subject that have been preserved to us will confirm that revival is divine intervention in the normal course of spiritual things. It is God revealing Himself to man in awful holiness and irresistible power. It is such a manifest working of God that human personalities are overshadowed, and human programmes abandoned. It is man retiring into the background because God has taken the field. It is the Lord making bare His holy arm, and working in extraordinary power on saint and sinner.***

A successful church growth program may change your church in the short run, and cause it to grow in numbers, but God's Presence in revival will transform your church and endow it with the Kingdom Power necessary to reach and transform a city. As we in the house church movement begin to network together and to pray for spiritual revival and community transformation we need to fully grasp the difference between a season of God's visitation such as Wallis has described and

just another church growth program. After 32 years of life in the church I am convinced that most Church growth programs are little more than a man-made substitute for God's church growth program, which is revival. I have studied the history of revivals going back 500 years to the beginning of the Protestant Reformation, and I can tell you with absolute confidence that the times and seasons of the church's greatest growth have occurred during times of revival when the River of God's Spirit flowed through communities and nations in such power that people were swept into the Kingdom of God because of an overwhelming sense of the Presence of God.

Let me tell you a story to illustrate this point. During the 1830s and 40s in America the most prominent evangelist in America was Charles Grandison Finney. On one occasion in 1826 Finney was preaching in the area of Utica, New York when he was invited by his brother-in-law to visit and tour a local cotton factory where he was the Superintendent. When Finney arrived at the factory he proceeded to walk across the factory floor to meet his brother-in-law. As he passed through the factory workers on the factory floor began to weep. Soon, many of the workers were weeping and unable to work. The factory owner was not a Christian. But when he realized what was happening he closed the factory, saying "*Stop the mill and let the people attend to religion; for it is more important that our souls should be saved than that this factory run.*" He then invited Finney to preach to the assembled workers. Finney preached, and over the course of the week that followed nearly every worker in the factory professed Christ as savior.<sup>19</sup>

Now, two questions: **First**, do you think the Church of God in America could use something like that today? **Second**, do you honestly think that what happened was the result of Finney's outstanding revival methods, or his brilliant seeker-sensitive church growth plan? Do you think he could have done a better job if only he had read about the effectiveness of a purpose driven church? Do you think he would have been more effective if only he had been through some program on 40 Days to a Purpose Driven life?

You see, this is the difference between a season of God's visitation and a human evangelistic program. Let me illustrate this again. Not too long ago Spokane, Washington hosted an excellent Franklin Graham Festival which averaged 20,000 per night at the 4 day series of meetings. Now there were probably close to 500 area churches represented by the attendees at the Festival. If you divided the nightly attendance by the number of churches represented you would have roughly 40 people per church. That's not really a lot of people per church and its hardly a revival. But during the Welsh revival of 1904 every church in Wales was filled to capacity 7 nights per week, some of them 24 hours a day, for over 6 months! You see, that's the difference between a season of divine visitation and a man-made evangelistic program. Do you think all of those people in Wales who thronged the churches 7 days a week, 24 hours a day for 6 months or longer were coming because the churches had suddenly become seeker sensitive and were placing their songs & messages into power point presentations? Of course not. They were coming because the Presence of God was there. You see, in a season of God's visitation it's like living beneath an open window in heaven, and it is God Who woos people to himself. During the Manhattan Prayer Revival of 1857 there are stories of ships at sea (two ships in particular, the U.S.S. Virginia and the U.S.S. North Carolina) and as the ships approached New York Harbor the men on board became overwhelmed with a sense of God's Presence and their own sin and need for Christ. As soon as the ships docked the men all headed for churches on shore! In the Welsh Revival of 1904 there are documented stories of people walking into bars, ordering a drink and then being unable to drink it, setting it down, leaving the bar and going to the nearest church to find Christ. Taverns went bankrupt due to the loss of business. In some jurisdictions crime all but disappeared and some judges were issued white gloves signifying no cases to try. That's what it's like to experience a season of God's visitation in revival. It's like living beneath an open window in heaven.

What lasting impact could such a season of divine visitation have upon the growth of the Church? According to revival historian Frank Grenville Beardsley, during the Great Awakening of Colonial America (1740s), "*more than 7% of the entire population of (the) colonies would have been gathered into the churches as a direct result of the revival.*"<sup>20</sup> Such figures are reported again by historian Byrnmor P. Jones who confirms that during the Welsh Revival of 1904 some 5% of the population of Wales was converted and added to the church.<sup>21</sup> In America today a revival which resulted in 5-to-7% of the population coming to faith in Christ would mean between 15 and 20 million new believers.

Revival is what God does (in spite of our best efforts) to extend His Kingdom and to build His Church. And while He sometimes uses our "programs" for His purposes, more often than not He supercedes them. I believe that God wants church growth and community transformation even more than we do. He just has a different plan for how to do it. God's plan is what I call "the desperation plan." God wants for His church to become so desperate that it is willing to acknowledge and own up

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<sup>19</sup> You'll find Finney's account of this story on page 183 in his memoirs.


<sup>20</sup> Frank Grenville Beardsley, *A History of American Revivals*, 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition (American Tract Society: New York, 1912), p. 65


<sup>21</sup> Byrnmor P. Jones, *Voices From The Welsh Revival 1904-1905* (Evangelical Press of Wales: Bridgend, 1995), page 65-66.


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to its own failure and spiritual bankruptcy so that when He moves to sweep people into His church the praise and the glory will belong to Him alone. Revival comes when the people of God begin to pray the prayers of desperate people who have come face to face with their own spiritual poverty and failure.

**Action Step:** If McNeal is right, then we must implement **New Reality # 6**. We must stop “planning for church growth” and start preparing for the revival which God desires to send. So, exactly how do we prepare for revival? Allow me to suggest three preparation steps we can take:

 **Preparation Step # 1:** The first step is to realize that we cannot “force God’s hand” in revival. Charles Grandison Finney, the great 19<sup>th</sup> Century Presbyterian evangelist was wrong when he declared that revival is simply the result of the right use of the right means.<sup>22</sup> Finney implemented, in a systematic way, methods of presenting the gospel which were blessed with impressive results. But he fell into the logical fallacy of “*post hoc, propter hoc*” (roughly, “after the event, because of the event”). Finney assumed that the revivals which broke out under his ministry were the results of his methodology. In reality Finney was the beneficiary of a season when the River of God’s Spirit was flowing in great power. Finney could have preached from the New England phone directory and gotten the same results - because the revival wasn’t about the method, or even the messenger, it was about the River. Our first preparatory step must be to understand that revival is a sovereign work of God, and God has His seasons which men cannot control.

 **Preparation Step # 2:** Our second preparation step should be to recover the history of Revival. Much of the Church today is woefully unaware of the glorious history of God’s dealings with His church in times of revival and its impact upon both the church and the world.<sup>23</sup>

 **Preparation Step # 3:** Our third preparation step should be Fasting, Prayer & Repentance as a means of waiting on God for Revival. This is the promise of Isaiah 64:1-4: *Oh, that Thou wouldst rend the heavens and come down, That the mountains might quake at Thy presence — As fire kindles the brushwood, as fire causes water to boil — To make Thy name known to Thine adversaries, That the nations may tremble at Thy presence! When Thou didst awesome things which we did not expect, Thou didst come down, the mountains quaked at Thy presence. For from of old they have not heard nor perceived by ear, Neither has the eye seen a God besides Thee, **Who acts in behalf of the one who waits for Him.*** Here the promise of God’s rending the heavens and coming down in revival is tied to His people waiting upon Him, and fasting, prayer & repentance are biblically appointed means of doing that.

**Action Step:** Each of us must now identify and come to terms with where we are on Wolfgang’s “5 Steps of Apostolic Migration” illustration. If we don’t know where we are, how can we prepare for what’s ahead? If you are at **Point -1** and have “left” spiritually, it may be time for you to leave physically and enter the wilderness for healing and “detoxification.” If you are at **Point 0** perhaps it is time to ask God to complete His wilderness work in you so that you can press on. If you are facing **Point +1** perhaps it is time for you to finally “cross over” by uncovenanting with the past and making a new covenant with God for the future.

### Conclusion (or Beginning?)

There is an important movement underway today which I believe is a genuine movement of God. God is moving in fresh power to accomplish the three things which He has always been about: He is building His Kingdom, He is calling out His people, and He is pouring out His River. As a result, thousands of Christians are moving out of traditional, institutional and denominational churches and are beginning to meet in new paradigms as house churches and market place gatherings. This phenomenon is widespread and it is growing (outside of North America and Europe it represents the fastest growing church phenomenon in the world)! In order to meet the challenges of the 21st Century I believe that God is raising up thousands, even tens of thousands of house churches to provide the needed leadership for the times in which we live, to be the new channels for the River of God’s Spirit in the coming revival, and to disciple the tens of thousands of new converts who will be the fruit of that revival. And I believe He is raising up thousands of house churches which will be

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<sup>22</sup>Charles G. Finney, **Lectures On Revival** (Bethany House Publishers: Minneapolis, 1988). Finney explains his view of revival in Chapter 1, “What Is Revival?” Unfortunately, Finney’s view of revival is commonplace within “revivalism” movements of the past 100 years.

<sup>23</sup>Allow me to offer some help here. For his Doctor of Ministry degree at Gordon-Conwell Seminary in Charlotte, North Carolina, Stewart Michael Pattison wrote a thesis entitled “*Revival as a Model For The Growth of the Church*”. It is designed to be a six week “Workbook on Revival” to be used as a curriculum by churches & Sunday School Classes. While we are working on making the Workbook available, you can order a copy of the thesis directly from the seminary or via interlibrary Loan. Well worth the effort.

spiritual shelters and "*Safe Houses of Hope and Prayer*" during the difficult and turbulent times that I believe may lay just ahead. Yes! God is raising up His end-time church(es), and He is preparing and equipping them for effective ministry during the difficult times that may soon come upon both the Church and the world.

Some 100 years ago a powerful movement of the Spirit of God swept around the world, shaking old paradigms and raising up new ones. This worldwide movement of the Spirit between 1904 to 1907 gave birth to a new paradigm that found expression in the Welsh Revival of 1904 (an "Evangelical-Pentecostal" revival without "tongues") and the modern day Pentecostal movement. Then, it was a new paradigm for a new day. But people and movements eventually get trapped in their boxes and become the prisoners of their paradigms as they attempt to siphon off the River of God's Spirit into their private, institutional swimming pools. Eventually, these new paradigms become institutionalized, trapping their members inside and fending off outsiders who might bring change. When that happens it isn't long (and 100 years isn't long in God's sight!) before God moves in a fresh way, challenging and shattering "once new/now old" paradigms, whether Evangelical or Pentecostal, and bringing in new paradigms for a new day. What does it mean? It means that God will not allow Himself, His Spirit or His Kingdom to become trapped in anyone's box, model, pattern or paradigm (or swimming pool!). It also means that God isn't done yet. He has more to teach us. And it means that He fully intends to accomplish His original stated goal of empowering and equipping us, His Church, to be His witnesses "even to the remotest part of the earth" irrespective of any humanly created box.

I believe that house churches represent one of God's new paradigms for this time. I also believe that the River of Ezekiel 47, the River of the Water of Life, is about to flow in unprecedented power through a new paradigm of networking house churches, resulting in renewal, revival, awakening, empowerment and a great harvest. The issues will not be baptism, tongues, healings or any one experience or gifting. The question of the day will be, "*Are you standing in the River?*" Why? Because everything else the people of God so earnestly seek (revival, cleansing, healing, empowering, gifts, evangelism, etc.) is a by-product of The River. And when this River begins to flow in renewed power and blessing, the safest (and most exciting!) place to position ourselves is standing in the dry river bed awaiting the coming of The River. ***And when this River of God's Power and Presence truly begins to flow, then our homes, our families and our house churches will begin to change the world!***



*Let the River flow!*

## A Kingdom, A People & A River - Page 32

### Questions For Reflection And Discussion

- ⇒ Try to write down the topic your pastor preached on six months ago. How about six weeks ago? Now, can you recall the last time you 1) experienced genuine personal revival? 2) Saw someone healed? 3) Saw someone delivered from demonic oppression? What event had the greatest impact on you, the sermon you heard or the person you saw healed or delivered? Which do you think would have the greatest impact upon an unbeliever and make him or her want to return to church with you?
- ⇒ Discuss where you find yourself on the “5 Steps of Apostolic Migration” illustration and what you think your next step should be.
- ⇒ Describe your understanding of the difference between “growing your church” and “building God’s Kingdom.”
- ⇒ How do you see the Church functioning as an extended family?
- ⇒ What is the difference as you see it between the Church as a “public swimming pool” and the Kingdom of God as a “River.”?
- ⇒ How is “preparing for revival” different from “planning for church growth”?
- ⇒ Discuss how you and the ekkllesia which meets in your house can begin preparing for the coming move of God’s Spirit in revival.

### A “Paradigm Shifting” Reading List

Barna, George. *Revolution*. Wheaton: Tyndale House Publishers. 2005.

Frost, Michael and Hirsch, Alan. *The Shaping of Things to Come: Innovation and Mission for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Church*. Peabody, Mass: Hendrickson Publishers. 2003.

Gibbs, Eddie & Bolger, Ryan. *Emerging Churches: Creating Christian Community in Postmodern Cultures*. Grand Rapids: Baker. 2005.

Kimball, Dan. *The Emerging Church: Vintage Christianity for New Generations*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan. 2003.

McNeal, Reggie. *The Present Future: Six Tough Questions for the Church*. San Francisco: John Wiley & Sons. 2003.

Sweet, Leonard. *Post Modern Pilgrims: First Century Passion for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Church*. Nashville: Broadman & Holman. 2000.

Wallis, Arthur. *In The Day of Thy Power*. Columbia: Cityhill Publishing. 1997.

### Internet Resources

Andrew Jones’ “blog” site: [www.tallskinnykiwi.typepad.com](http://www.tallskinnykiwi.typepad.com)

Emerging :: Church: [www.emergingchurch.org](http://www.emergingchurch.org)

Emergent Village: [www.emergentvillage.com](http://www.emergentvillage.com)

Leonard Sweet’s Home Page: [www.leonardsweet.com](http://www.leonardsweet.com)

Vintage Faith: [www.vintagefaith.com](http://www.vintagefaith.com)