

# A Kingdom, A People & A River

A New Paradigm  
For the Post Modern House Church Movement

by R. Maurice Smith, M.A.



The Parousia Network  
*of House & Cell Churches*  
[www.parousianetwork.com](http://www.parousianetwork.com)

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**Published by:**

Teen-Aid, Inc  
723 E. Jackson Avenue  
Spokane, Washington 99207

**Distributed by:**

The Parousia Network  
P. O. Box 18793  
Spokane, Washington 99228  
[www.parousianetwork.com](http://www.parousianetwork.com)

Cover design & original water color art work by Gale A. Smith.

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ISBN

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## Author's Musings

*God is our refuge and strength, A very present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, though the earth should change, And though the mountains slip into the heart of the sea; Though its waters roar and foam, Though the mountains quake at its swelling pride.[Selah]. (Psalm 46:1-3)*

Our world is changing. My world is changing, and your world is changing too.

The ancient biblical writer was familiar with change, and the challenges which come with it. The Old Testament poet Korah understood this profound truth. Our world changes, usually from the familiar and stable to the unfamiliar and uncertain, and we are faced with the timeless challenge of how to respond accordingly and appropriately.

This workbook is about some of those changes, from old and familiar paradigms which no longer serve their purpose, to new paradigms which take us back to the roots of historic biblical Christianity. It is about understanding these unfolding changes and how they are impacting both our culture and the Church. Fifty years ago our cultural paradigm of faith and values could be expressed in such films as "The Robe," "The Ten Commandments" or "Quo Vadis." Today our cultural paradigms are seen in such films as "The Matrix," "The Lord of the Rings" (an optimistic Post Modern mythology which Tolkien built upon a biblical understanding of mythology).

These changing paradigms will be forced upon us by two powerful unfolding trends. I believe the Church in North America stands today between the book of Jeremiah on the one hand, and the book of Acts on the other hand. The great theme of Jeremiah is God's pending judgment upon Israel's unrepentant "spiritual adultery," whereas the great theme of the Book of Acts is the Pentecostal outpouring of the River of God's Spirit to empower the Church. Judgment versus spiritual outpouring; the two opposing yet complimentary sides of God's coming visitation. The tension between these two unfolding trends of God's activity will, in the years ahead, undoubtedly find expression in spiritual and cultural upheaval of monumental (even Biblical) proportions (consider for just a moment the changes which have taken place just since the events of September 11, 2001). Times of great revival often presage or coincide with times of great cultural upheaval and even judgment. It is like standing at the turbulent confluence of two great rivers. On the one hand, the River of God's Spirit, the River of Ezekiel 47, will flow in great power and blessing for spiritual renewal and revival the likes of which have not been seen or experienced in the West in well over 100 years. On the other hand, the River of God's judgment upon our increasingly "spiritually adulterous" culture is also preparing to flow in great power. One divine visitation with two powerful and different results. That is the challenge now facing the Church.

This workbook is about how God is preparing His people for these coming changes by raising up a new paradigm of Church, a radically new (but old) understanding of *ekklesia*. Specifically, this is an equipping workbook for the emerging house church movement. You should understand early on that I did not choose the house church movement. By God's Providential workings, it chose me. Following a disastrous business failure and bankruptcy my wife and I "*fell into the house church movement through the back door.*" Our journey into house church reminds me of British author and apologist G. K. Chesterton, who begins his *Orthodoxy* with the fanciful thought of "*an English yachtsman who slightly miscalculates his course and discovers England under the impression that it is a new island in the South Seas.*" That, said Chesterton, represented his own story of discovering Christian faith in Christianized England. "*What could be more delightful,*" observed Chesterton, "*than to have in the same few minutes all the fascinating terrors of going abroad combined with all the humane security of coming home again.*" Chesterton's description of his own journey into Christian faith is also an apt description of many people's journey into house church, including my own.

I was raised from an early age in the United Methodist Church by sincere parents who believed in the importance of Church involvement (my elderly mother is a licensed lay speaker in the United Methodist Church). I came to saving faith in a traditional Southern Baptist Church at the tail end of the Jesus movement. I did street ministry in Fayetteville, North Carolina among GIs returning from Southeast Asia during the waning days of the Vietnam War. I then became a Campus Christian radical at the university of North Carolina (Chapel Hill) during the 1970s. After two years on staff with Campus Crusade for Christ, I left to study Christian apologetics at Denver Seminary under Gordon R. Lewis. I have planted churches, split churches (Oh yes, that was fun) served as a ruling elder in a Presbyterian Church, pastored a small Assemblies of God Church . . . well, you get the idea. I am a child and product of the traditional institutional Church. But I am also a child of Christian philosophers, apologists, para-church training, business experience (oh, yea, that went well) and more. But at the end of the day, I am a contemporary believer who is absolutely convinced that the church in the West is losing (I could even say has lost) its battle with materialism, secularism and Post Modernism, and who is equally convinced that the only hope for the Church and our culture is a divine visitation of historic, even biblical, proportions which will manifest itself in and flow like a river through new channels called house churches.

This is not another book on a "theology of house church." I will demonstrate (as have others) that house church represents both good theology and good "peripatetics" (Greek: *peripateo* - to walk around, hence, "lifestyle" or "application"). Ultimately, house church isn't a theology club or discussion group. House church is an extended family of people who have been called

out of the domain of darkness and who now share a common journey into the Kingdom of God. It is the pursuit of God in the company of friends and family. And that is good house church theology. Your journey into house church will not be successful because of your erudite understanding of house church theology. It is not that theology is unimportant. It's just that one's theology isn't ultimately determinative of success as a family!

The house church paradigm represents several significant things. *First*, it represents a return to a fresh understanding of fundamental Christian faith and community. *Second*, it represents a return to radical transformational Christianity which requires a level of spiritual courage and commitment seldom seen in contemporary Christianity. As my friend, Dr. Tony Dale likes to say, "*Many are called, but few can stand it!*" *Third*, it represents a new (but old) channel through which the River of God's Spirit can flow to bring the Kingdom of God into our homes, our neighborhoods and our communities.

Let me briefly discuss the layout of this workbook. There is a rhyme and reason to it's purpose and content. I have arranged the material in this book in "Modules" rather than "Chapters." (Why? Because I liked the sound of it!) And each Module is a self-contained study. Each successive Module is intended to build upon the foundation laid by the previous module (well, theoretically, that's how it should work). At the end of each Module you will find three things. **First**, you will find a set of "*Questions For Reflection And Discussion.*" These are intended to create opportunities for you (and your house church or leadership mentoring group) to interact with the material, and to help you determine where you are on your own journey into house church and the Kingdom of God. We have tried to create intelligent questions based upon the material. **Secondly**, you will find a Bibliography of recommended reading consisting of books which are directly related to that module. Ever mindful of the Preacher's admonition to his son in Ecclesiastes 12:12, the bibliographies are not intended to be exhaustive or even extensive, but rather they are intended to be significant and complementary to the material. **Third**, you will find (when available and appropriate) a listing of Internet Resources which contain additional material on the topic covered by the Module. Warning, the internet is "not entirely stable." Sites and pages come and go. Addresses change and articles appear and disappear with no predictability, so please don't blame us!

Module 1 will be a challenge for a lot of people, particularly those who are still at Point -2 on Wolfgang Simson's "*5 Steps of Apostolic Migration.*" In fact, a good measure of where you are on that chart (yep, it's in Module 1) is how you respond to this first Module. The late Dr. Francis Schaeffer (whose prophetic warnings to the Church have found their fulfillment in the rise of our present day Post Modern culture) was fond of saying that sometimes you must first critique and point out the flaws in a person's worldview before he or she is willing to listen to any alternative. This is the purpose of Module 1. It is a wake-up call. There is nothing uniquely new in this material. It is a summation of a growing mountain of evidence that our traditional paradigm of church simply isn't working. "*Church as we know it is preventing Church as God wants it.*" It is also a call for an "Apostolic Migration" into the new paradigm which God is raising up of a Kingdom, a people and a river, and a new form of *ekklesia* called "house church" (this new and unfolding paradigm is frequently referred to as the "emerging church" movement, of which house church is an important expression).

The subtitle of this workbook is "*A New Paradigm For the Post Modern House Church Movement.*" Post Modernism represents the dominant philosophy of our culture today, yet few Christians are even aware of it. The rise of Post Modernism is one of the primary reasons why our old paradigms no longer function as they once did. For this reason I have devoted an extensive Module to a discussion of Post Modernism. Much of contemporary Christian writing on Post Modernism (and there is a lot of it!) seems to have missed the forest for the trees. Most of the discussions seem to be over which tree is most characteristic of the Post Modern forest (the deconstructive, the linguistic, the nihilistic etc.), rather than understanding the origin and nature of the forest itself. The ultimate question has to do with where contemporary Post Modernism stands in the 500 year flow of western thought, of which Post Modernism (regardless of which variety) is the current product and expression. To put it simply, a movement (such as Post Modernism) without a context appears as an anomaly. One of the dangers for the Church is to treat Post Modernism simply as an anomaly to be ridiculed and ignored (or, worse, as a pattern to be embraced) rather than seeing it for the gnostic-like threat it really is to genuine faith. Philosophically, Post Modernism represents a dangerous flirtation with *nihilism*, a denial both of any binding truth and of any human ability to know such truth. Culturally, Post Modernism represents a dangerous flirtation with "*cannibalism*", a willingness to consume one's own culture, and whatever stabilizing values have been built up over the centuries, in order to pursue and achieve our own personal success or fulfillment. In a very real sense, Post Modernism is like a feast among cannibals who have not yet fully comprehended what their invitation to dinner really entails. Post Modernism has infested the church and the contagion is spreading, hence, my inclusion of this module. As authentic biblical Christians, our goal is not to become a "Post Modern Church." We are neither nihilists nor cannibals. The idea of a "Post Modern Church" is an oxymoron on the same level as a "Christian heavy metal band" or a "death of God theologian." Rather, our goal is to understand Post Modernism to such an extent that we can communicate the message of the Kingdom of God in an authentic manner that challenges the "plausibility structure" of the Post Modern seeker and results in his (or her) personal spiritual transformation.

I believe the God of all creation has always been about three things in this world. First, He has always been about establishing a Kingdom of righteousness and peace. Second, He has always been about calling out a people who would love, worship and obey Him. In return He would love, bless and rule over them as both Shepherd and King. Third, God has

always been about empowering His called out people to serve Him by pouring out a spiritual River of His power, presence and blessing. As a student of the history of revival, and an occasional writer on revival related topics, I have been dismayed and disappointed by the inability of revival historians to articulate a simple yet consistent theology regarding the nature and origin of those seasons of spiritual renewal which we label "revival". We appear to have been reduced to little more than glorified "phenomenologists," absorbed (and limited) by the endless analysis of "effects" and "phenomena" without ever understanding the nature of what God is doing. Module 3 represents my "theology" of revival, an examination of the biblical teaching regarding the River of God's Spirit as found in the Old Testament book of Ezekiel. I believe that God is preparing to unleash the River of Ezekiel 47 in fresh power and blessing not before experienced in our generation, and I further believe that His chosen "channel" will consist of emerging church gatherings such as house churches.

Every living organism, be it plant, animal or a house church, has a DNA blueprint which establishes its characteristics and enables it to function and to reproduce. In Module 4 I attempt to extract that DNA from a biblical snapshot of first century house church. I have actually divided this module into two sections. The first section offers a biblical/historical overview of the rise of house churches and their continuation beyond the first century. In the second section of this Module I look at a "snapshot" of the early house churches as seen in Acts 2:42-47 in order to extract their DNA and answer the question, "*What made them tick?*" I outline what I see as 10 characteristics of New Testament house church which I call "DNA Markers." DNA represents the genetic code which defines all living organisms, determining how they function and what they will pass on to successive generations. What was the DNA of the New Testament house church which enabled it to survive and thrive in the midst of persecution and to eventually conquer the Roman Empire? And how can we graft that DNA into our house churches today?

Theory without application is little more than knowledge without wisdom. For this reason Module 5, "*Kingdom Transformation In Your Neighborhood*" is a real-life description of the impact a house church outreach can have when it comes to the task of neighborhood transformation. The module is divided into three sections. In the first section (Module 5a) I tell the story of The Off-Broadway Family Outreach in the West Central neighborhood of Spokane, Washington. In section two (Module 5b) I introduce a neighborhood house church concept, called "*Safe Houses of Hope & Prayer*," which summarizes most of the basic principles of neighborhood transformation which we learned through our experience. Finally, in the third section (Module 5c) I examine the issue of spiritual multiplication and growth and offer a practical strategy toward for seeing the multiplication of house churches (including the formation of networks of house churches).

In our local area (Spokane & Eastern Washington) only 18 out of 100 adults attends any form of "church" (and that's defining church very loosely!), and that involvement represents nothing more than 3% of their time in a given week. So, do we really think we're going to reach our cities for Christ with 19% of the people who give a whopping 3% of their time (and about the same amount of their money) to the things of God? On the other hand, how many adults work in the "market place" where the average person spends 30% or more of their lives each week? What might happen if Christians began praying for the unbelievers with whom they share that time in the market place? What if God wanted to use those praying believers to start "churches without walls" in their market place, footholds for the Kingdom of God in the heart of the halls of mammon (Sounds cool doesn't it? Sort of a "soul-saving-at-Starbucks kind of thing"). My goal in Module 6 (Kingdom Transformation In Your Market Place) is to share a vision God gave me for market place ministry and to challenge and encourage you to become an agent of Kingdom transformation in your market place.

"*Mankind I love. It's people I can't stand.*" This punch line, delivered by a frustrated Charlie Brown in a "*Peanuts*"® cartoon which I have long since lost, could easily apply to life in many churches. As Christians we have often kidded each other that life in church would be "perfect" if it weren't for the people. Module 7 (Life In The Kingdom) won't solve all your people problems. Sorry! But it is an introduction to what it means for ordinary people to live and meet together as extend families and house church expressions of the Kingdom of God and to live with the biblical freedom and "wildness" of life along God's river (I'm resisting the temptation at this point to break into a poor rendition of Garth Brooks' *The River*). I'm sure I haven't touched on every issue that will arise, but my prayer is that it will be enough to enable you to "Just Do It."

So, how's your prayer life. O.K., that wasn't a very smooth segue, but it did get your attention. Now, let me ask you again. How's your prayer life? The River of God's Spirit flows on prayer. Since reliable studies show that the average "ministry professional" spends around 22 minutes a day in prayer, we shouldn't be surprised that the River of God in our churches is often little more than a trickle. The purpose of Module 8 ("*Thy Kingdom Come: the Ministry of Prayer, Fasting & Intercession*") is to encourage you to pray Kingdom prayers which will touch heaven and result in Kingdom transformation.

*What exactly is discipleship?* Can it be reduced to an 8 or 12 week program or bible study course? And is there a difference between a "believer" and a "disciple"? Module 9 (Personal Discipleship: The Art Of Mending Our Nets) examines these and related issues, because the coming move of God in power and blessing will require disciples who have a Kingdom mind-set, who know how to mend broken nets (both their own and the nets of those they seek to disciple), and are prepared for the wildness of life along God's River.

*"Do you see it? Do you see the cloud yet?"* This is the question I raise in Module 10, *"A House Church Manifesto."* I took the question from Elijah's experience on Mt. Carmel in 1 Kings 18, but to know more you'll have to read the Module. This module originated as a response to a question posed by Wolfgang Simson at a house church conference, namely, how do we prepare for a spiritual wildfire. This response represents what I believe is the beginning of an "Apostolic Strategy" for planting rapidly multiplying house churches in a way that is both dynamic (i.e., Spirit-led & empowered) and sustainable (they's still exist 5 years from now).

So, there you have it. Ten Modules which are intended to challenge and encourage you to come to terms with the collapse of traditional church in our Post Modern culture, to become the church in your house which transforms your neighborhood, to practice "kingdom living" in your house church family, to pray kingdom prayers, and to practice genuine New Testament discipleship. And if that isn't quite enough, I've included additional articles on related house church topics. Oh yes, don't forget **"7 Reasons To Believe,"** an evangelistic bible study based on the seven miraculous signs of Jesus in the gospel of John which challenge people to consider how God can miraculously transform their lives, complete with Leader's Guides and Participants Outlines.

### **Of Wells, Battleships & Memorials**

O.K., I'm almost done, but not quite.

Not long ago, my family and I traveled back to visit my relatives in North Carolina and celebrate Christmas together. As my family and I began the return trip to Spokane I noticed something . . . unusual. About mid-way home, somewhere between Atlanta and Seattle, I began to sense a growing burden and groaning in my spirit. I commented to my wife on the plane that it was as if the burden was growing as we approached the Pacific Northwest. There was a groaning in the Spirit over the Pacific Northwest . . . and it was growing. I believe that we are entering into a new Season of God's dealings. The River of Ezekiel 47, the River of God's Spirit, is building in preparation to flow in power and blessing unprecedented in our generation. Are we prepared for what is about to be unleashed upon His Church?

To prepare for new battles (and blessings) I believe in remembering and learning from old ones. Why? Because God has a habit of repeating Himself, just never in the same way twice. So bear with me while I remember . . . and prepare you for what is about to come.

When the family and I traveled home to Fayetteville I sensed God saying that I should pay a visit to UNC-Chapel Hill where I attended college. As a student there I had been deeply involved in a powerful movement of God on that campus in the mid-1970s as a result of fasting & prayer and the efforts of the various campus ministries which laid down their individual agendas in order to work and pray together for God's Kingdom purposes. As I walked the campus thirty years later I remembered the all-night prayer gatherings, evangelistic dorm meetings, speakers in fraternity & sorority houses, leading my roommate to Christ after he and the others in my dorm "forced" me to let them watch an evangelistic movie sent to me by the Billy Graham Association, hours I spent alone in The Chapel of the Cross (an Episcopal Chapel on the edge of campus that remained open all night for prayer) interceding for the campus known around North Carolina as a "hot-bed of communist insurgency" (according to a local WRAL commentator by the name of Jesse Helms). Before leaving I took the family to pose for pictures at "The Old Well" the symbolic center of campus. As I sent them on ahead to a local restaurant for lunch I stayed and began to pray there at "The Old Well." As I prayed I began to weep as I sensed God saying that there are no cold and spiritually hard places, only places where His Presence has not come. His Presence is coming. Are we prepared? Are we prepared to lay down our personal or corporate agendas in order to fast and pray and labor together for His Kingdom Purposes in our area?

My next "pilgrimage" was to the coast of North Carolina. I sensed that I should take the family down to Wilmington to visit the U.S.S. North Carolina Battleship Memorial. Now there is literally a history here. The "North Carolina" was commissioned in 1941 and was one of the largest battleships afloat at that time. It fought in every major naval engagement of the Pacific War, was torpedoed, repaired and fought again. In short, it was the "hero" of the Pacific War. But in the late 1940s it was decommissioned and in the late 1950s the Navy announced that it would be sold for scrap. I was in the 1st grade when we learned that a plan had been hatched to save the North Carolina. Thousands of school children from across the State collected dimes (well, a dime was silver then and actually worth something!) in order to save the Battleship. The plan was successful. The State bought the ship and it is now safely moored in Wilmington as a floating memorial to the men who fought and died in the Pacific during World War 2.

A visit to the Memorial is an awe-inspiring event for any student of history. The war in the Pacific was fought and won by ships like this and by the brave crews who risked their very lives to win obscure-but-critical battles now forgotten. As I toured the Memorial I was struck by several thoughts and comparisons. The problem with a Memorial is . . . that it is a Memorial. The U.S.S. North Carolina is no longer a Battleship except in name. It is now a memorial to past victories, not a weapon of war for future battles. Furthermore, it's brave crew is gone, present only in the form of an Honor Roll listing those who once

served, fought, died and triumphed. They have been replaced now with tourists whose only real risk is that of running out of film before the tour is done.

Forgive me for a harsh comparison, but here it comes. Much of the organized Church in America and the West is like the U.S.S. North Carolina; a stately and beautiful Memorial to past battles fought and won, but not a weapon of war for the spiritual battles which now confront us as individuals, as churches and as a civilization. And our congregants and attendees resemble middle class vacationers in search of the concession stand more than they resemble soldiers prepared for fighting battles and winning great victories. Just as we wouldn't tow the U.S.S. North Carolina out to do naval battle today, so much of the visible church in its present state is in no condition to confront and fight the spiritual battles that inevitably surround revival and God's Kingdom purposes. It is a memorial to past battles, not a weapon of war for future ones.

So, what does all of this mean (other than the obvious, that Maurice did a lot of sight-seeing!)? Let me summarize. Revival is coming (probably accompanied by great spiritual conflict and even judgment). I have sensed this burden before, and it is growing. The River of Ezekiel 47 is building, preparing to flow in power and blessing unknown in our generation. While the Pacific Northwest (where your author resides) has traditionally been known as a spiritually cold and hard place (not unlike a certain University campus of my acquaintance), the Lord declares that there are no spiritually hard or cold places, only places where His Presence has not yet come. And He is coming. His coming will require that each of us lay down our personal and/or corporate agendas in order to fast, pray and labor together for His Kingdom purposes of our area. And He is raising up new paradigms of church, new channels and vessels for the flow of His River, vessels known as house churches. And He is raising up people willing to fight the spiritual battles and confront the spiritual strongholds that get revealed by any great move of God's Spirit. This battle cannot be fought and won by Memorials to yesterday, or by tourists more concerned with comfort than with battle. And this coming outpouring of God's power and presence will have three great effects. *First*, it will renew, redeem and empower the true Church of God, the Body and Bride of His Son. She will once again be beautiful. *Second*, it will result in the Spirit convicting the world of sin, righteousness and judgment, just as Jesus promised (John 16:8). *Third*, it will raise up a generation of believers whose hair is on fire for God's Kingdom purposes and whose homes (and form rooms and market places) are the new hot beds of God's power and the new channels for the River of His Spirit.

He is coming. Are we ready? Is your House Church a channel through which He can flow?



*Let the River flow!*

