

UNDERSTANDING
**LOCAL
CHURCH**



Contents

1	Introduction	3
2	Biblical Foundations	7
3	Four key Pillars	12
4	Four roles of a local church	22
	Family	23
	Army	28
	Hospital	32
	Equipping centre	35
5	Building a solid local church	37

Introduction

Words

Isn't it interesting how words change their meaning over time? Did you know that the word "awful" originally meant, "full of awe"? So when you described something as awful it meant it was amazing and powerful and incredible! Now, however, it means exactly the opposite - something awful is to be avoided. Another example is the word "artificial". This originally meant something that was full of skill and craftsmanship - not something that is a poor copy of the real thing. We often use words in everyday speech without realising what they really mean.

Take the word Christian. What does this mean? Is it a broad term for one of the world's great religions? Is it a particular set of values or morals common to many first world nations? Is it a person who seeks to follow the teaching of Jesus Christ and live a good life? Is it someone who claims to have a personal relationship with God and His son? It simply isn't enough in 21st century Britain to say, "I'm a Christian," without clarifying what you mean by that.

So why is this important? Well, this is a booklet that explains what we understand by the term "local" church. But before we can begin to explain this, we have to agree about the word church, and there are a range of opinions about what church means.

Here, for example, is the Oxford English Dictionary's definition of church:

noun *a building used for public Christian worship; a particular Christian organisation typically one with its own clergy, buildings, and distinctive doctrines.*

As a definition of what our society understands by the word church it isn't that bad. Most people think a church is a place that you go to in order to worship God or they understand "The Church" to be the Anglican or Roman Catholic organisations and all that they stand for. However, as a family of churches, we have an entirely different understanding. For us, the church is not a place or an organisation, but a *movement of people* called together for a purpose.

What is the church?

The Bible explains the church using the Greek word *ekklesia* (e.g. Matthew 16:18, 1 Corinthians 1:2).

Ekklesia is not a word invented by Christians. It was a common Greek word that could be used to describe a public gathering with a specific purpose. In essence it means 'the called together ones' - those brought together in order to achieve something. For example, in Athens an *ekklesia* met twice a week to discuss civic affairs and in Sparta an *ekklesia* met which was comprised of soldiers from the army. The Senate - a political

decision-making body that came together to discuss and resolve issues of state - was also an *ekklesia*.

Ekklesia became a religious word when the scholars who translated the Old Testament from Hebrew into Greek used it to translate two Hebrew words: *edah* and *qahal*. These were used in the Old Testament to describe any meeting together of God's people whether for worship, politics or the law. For example, when the spies returned from surveying Canaan in Numbers 13 they came to a *qahal* of all the people.

There are some important things about the word *ekklesia* which help us understand what the church should be:

- There are no spectators in an *ekklesia*, it is a gathering of active participants (1 Corinthians 14:26). In the church there should be no watchers, no onlookers, just wholly committed participants throwing their energies into building something that will last forever.
- *Ekklesia* is not a religious event. It is a gathering of people with a common vision, purpose and aim. There is life, dynamism and action in an *ekklesia*.
- An *ekklesia* has connotations of movement and, critically, momentum. In the church's case it is moving people out of darkness and into light; out of 'slavery to sin' and into submission to the righteous rule of Christ. Out of dead religion and into abundant life with Jesus (1 Peter 2:9)
- An *ekklesia* is a living organism. It is not a collection of individuals but a partnership of people joined together. (Acts 2:42-47)
- An *ekklesia* is not about geography - it isn't a building. Outside of the people who come together, the *ekklesia* has no life of its own. Thus it's the people who are crucial and vital - not the place. Peter tells us that the church comprises "living stones" (1 Peter 2:5).

In his book *Vintage Church* the American pastor and author Mark Driscoll gives a helpful and comprehensive definition of what constitutes a genuine New Testament church:

*"The local church is a community of regenerated believers who confess Jesus Christ as Lord. In obedience to Scripture they organize under qualified leadership, gather regularly for preaching and worship, observe the Biblical sacraments of baptism and communion, are unified by the Spirit, are disciplined for holiness and scatter to fulfil the Great Commandment and the Great Commission as missionaries to the world for God's glory and their joy."*¹

Types of church

The word "church" is not defined by its size in New Testament terms. For example, the same word is used to describe *ekklesias* of all sizes:

¹ *Vintage Church*, Mark Driscoll and Gerry Breshears, Crossway Books, 2008

1. Church in a house. (Romans 16:5, 1 Cor 16:19)
2. Church in a city. (1 Corinthians 1:2, 2 Corinthians 1:1, 1 Thessalonians 1:1)
3. Church in a region - Judea, Galilee and Samaria (Acts 9:31)
4. The church in the whole world. (Ephesians 5:25)

The church is always where the people are! From the car park to the shopping centre to the cathedral. In new covenant terms there are no 'sacred places', simply holy people. Where the holy people are, the holiness of God is also. This is why local churches in communities are so essential. They express the rule and life of God in a locality and are thus salt and light to the world.

Even though the same word is used of churches of various sizes in the New Testament, this doesn't mean that every church is the same. Although every church has the same underlying purpose - to manifest the presence of God and demonstrate his life and love in their community by their lifestyle - there are nonetheless different types of church, with specific purposes to which God calls them.

In the New Testament we can see four broad "types" of church, which have varying levels of influence and impact:

1. Churches that moved from house to house (small groups of Christians, meeting in a home, sharing the life of God - E.g. Romans 16:5, 1 Corinthians 16:9).
2. Local churches (called to specific localities or towns E.g. Ephesus, Corinth, Colossae).
3. Resource churches (called to act as hubs that resource other churches, E.g. Antioch).
4. Governmental churches (called to a governmental role in a nation, E.g. Jerusalem).

Strong local churches

It is very important, if you're involved in a church, that you are clear about what type of church God has called you to be or to plant. There's a lot of confusion about this, and it leads to a lack of clarity of purpose and even causes jealousy and mistrust between churches.

The state of the church in our nation (the UK) is generally not good.

"For most people living in England at the start of the 21st century, church is an archaic building on the edge of the town where a tiny minority of the community perform mediaeval acts at unsocial hours."

From the outside it appears largely irrelevant, ineffectual and powerless and riven with division. Within the church there is despondency, despair, ineffectiveness and weariness. Far from being the display of the manifold wisdom of God to the principalities and powers (Ephesians 3:10) it often sends a very different message to the world.

This booklet is written from a conviction that God's plan for the transformation of lives and communities is to plant vibrant local churches across the whole world. Our hope is that the theology and principles we explore here will prove to be a help in achieving that plan and demonstrating God's love and power to our broken world.

Biblical Foundations

*For this reason I, Paul, a prisoner for Christ Jesus on behalf of you Gentiles— assuming that you have heard of the stewardship of God’s grace that was given to me for you, how the mystery was made known to me by revelation, as I have written briefly. When you read this, you can perceive my insight into the mystery of Christ, which was not made known to the sons of men in other generations as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit. This mystery is that the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel. Of this gospel I was made a minister according to the gift of God’s grace, which was given me by the working of his power. To me, though I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, and to bring to light for everyone what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things, so that **through the church** the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places. This was according to the eternal purpose that he has realized in Christ Jesus our Lord, in whom we have boldness and access with confidence through our faith in him. **Ephesians 3:1-12***

To build a biblical foundation for the importance of well-structured, eldership-governed, vibrant local churches we want to examine this passage from Ephesians 3, in which Paul explains the church as the culmination of God’s purposes to have a people for Himself. The Bible is clear that Jesus is passionate about the church. He died for the church (Eph. 5:25), He will return for His church (Eph. 5:27), and He has promised that He will build His church and that the gates of Hell will not prevail against it (Matt. 16:18). God has a great growth plan for the church, a growth plan of infinite increase (Is. 9:7). His intended destiny for the church is that she might be the vessel of His presence from which shines the light of His glory, filling the whole earth (Hab. 2:14).

Our desire is for you to see that having a people for Himself has been God’s passion from the beginning of time. We are not part of a decaying, forgotten, erratic organisation whose life and relevance is diminishing. The church is the central outflow of God’s redemptive plan to display His glory in His people for all eternity. As leaders we need to be very highly motivated about and committed to building the church. The church is the very pinnacle of God’s purposes. We believe that what is required for the success of the church is not revolutionary new ideas, but a rediscovery of a New Testament vision of the church and the outworking of that in life and community.

The Mystery

Four times in these verses Paul uses the word “mystery” (verses 3, 4, 6, and 9). In verse 3 Paul speaks of “...the mystery made known to me by revelation...”; in verse 4 He refers to “...the mystery of Christ...”; in verse 6 he declares that “...this mystery is...” and in verse 9 he pronounces that it is God’s intention that now He might “...make plain to everyone the administration of this mystery...” The word is obviously important.

The mystery to which Paul is referring is not some strange, dark, initiates-only secret. It is something that was hidden, but has now been revealed. The mystery hidden for ages is that *“through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus”* (Ephesians 3:6). Here is the mystery revealed. Paul has spent Ephesians chapter 2 expounding this central truth that it has always been God’s express intention and purpose to make for himself one new man, one new humanity, drawn from both the Jew and the Gentile by abolishing all that divided them.

The abolition that Paul has in mind is twofold: in Christ the barriers between men of different racial backgrounds is abolished (there is neither Jew nor Gentile), but also the barrier between all men and God Himself is abolished. *“His purpose was to create in Himself one new man out of the two, thus making peace, and in this one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross by which He put to death their hostility”* (Eph. 2:15-16). God has abolished all the distinctions that existed, which excluded men from God and from one another. He has reconciled them to Himself through the cross. Note that it is one body that has been reconciled. All mankind was summed up in this new man, and thus all mankind finds its identity only in the reconciliation offered by the cross. The distinction between races is demolished before the cross because the law and commandments have been perfectly fulfilled *“in His flesh”* (Eph. 2:14).

This is the mystery that has been hidden for ages. It was *“not made known to men in other generations as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to God’s holy apostles and prophets”* (Eph. 3:5). The mystery has always existed in seed form. From the Abrahamic covenant of Genesis 12, through Moses and the prophets, there have been glimmers or suggestions that God’s intention was to bless all mankind. But nobody has seen this mystery clearly. It has always been hidden. How and when God will choose to do it has not been disclosed. But now, says Paul, the mystery has been revealed. A divine disclosure has taken place, and it is of the most breathtaking, awe-inspiring nature: God has made it possible for men from every tribe, tongue, language, and people group to be summed up into one new tribe: a people for His own possession.

The mystery has three parts (Ephesians 3:6).

Co-Heirs with Israel

All the inheritance promised to Israel, the glory of being Yahweh’s chosen people, the blessings of covenant relationship with Him, the new heaven and the new earth, and an eternity enjoying God is now made available to Gentiles as well as Jews. The two have become one, and all of the rights of sonship enjoyed by Israel are now made available to the Christian believer. Everything which God has ever promised Israel as a nation, all of those glorious future Old Testament promises pertaining to Israel’s destiny and relationship with God are now applicable to you and I by our union with Christ.

Co-Members of One Body

Lest anyone should object that it might be possible for someone outside of the family circle to inherit, Paul clarifies further the nature of this one new man. We are fellow-members of one body. There is only one family, and we are all members of it. There is only one church, only one chosen people, only one people after God's own heart, whom He has purposed to have for Himself, and we are all members of that one body! God's dealings with mankind are no longer on the basis of racial background. Any man who comes to Him now must come through Christ who has come to be the inaugurator of a new humanity. We are "born of the Spirit" and on the basis of that familial definition of our identity that we stand before God.

Co-Sharers of the Promise

Full and total salvation is ours. We are not partial players in the game. Neither, as some through history have suggested, are we an afterthought, tacked on by God when the Israel idea failed to work. We are inheritors of the promise in every way and to the fullest extent. Hidden for ages, but now revealed, this is God's master plan for the future of creation and humanity. The promise of an eternity having grace lavished upon us by God (Eph. 1:8; 2:7) is ours, we are those who have obtained it and hold on to it – it is ours by right now.

The Foundation: Jesus Christ

All of these glorious blessings are made possible *"in Christ Jesus"*. It is in Christ that this entire blessing is procured for us. He is *"our peace who has made the two one and destroyed the barrier"* (Eph. 2:14) and it is Jesus in whom *"we are made alive"* (Eph. 2:5). We have been organically united with Christ, and reconciled to God by His perfect redeeming work. All the old ways of striving to please God through rituals, observances, and legislation has been done away with forever. The grace of God has *"appeared* (an epiphany has occurred)" (Tit. 2:11) and shone into our hearts. We have been lit up from the inside rather than trying to conform on the outside. And it's all because of Christ, and His work, and His grace, and His power, and His perfection, *"not by works so that no one should boast."* (Eph. 2:9)

The church is founded on Jesus. He is the cornerstone that holds the whole building together (Eph. 2:20, 1 Peter 2:6-7). He is our guarantee of future success and it is His glory that we are working for. Jesus must remain central in all that we do.

The Master-Plan (Eph. 3:10)

What Paul is trying to help people understand is that it has always been God's intention to have a people for Himself, and that the fulfilment of that original desire is found in the church. The church are his *called out ones* who have received salvation and forgiveness and now as a new community they live out the life of God on the Earth.

What has been God's purpose in this planning and working through all the ages? Why has he revealed this mystery? Why has He sent Paul on this mission to proclaim the incomparable riches of Christ? Is it simply in order that individuals can be saved? Is it merely so that a personal salvation of individuals can be preached and proclaimed? No!

The church is God's supreme end in His saving work. She is not an afterthought, or a sideline, or a temporary interruption of history. On the contrary, it was God's express intention from before the foundation of the world that *"the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known through the church."* (Eph. 3:10)

The word Paul uses to describe this wisdom of God is *polupoikilos*, which means many, coloured, or variegated. The same root word is used of Joseph's colourful coat in Genesis. But here Paul adds another prefix to the word so that it becomes *multi*-coloured, a word used to describe flowers, crowns, cloth, and carpets. The wisdom of God is like a diamond - multifaceted; whichever way you turn to look at it some new beauty shines forth. In whatever light it is found, from the mountaintop to the valley, God's wisdom always has new depths to show us.

In this context, Paul tells us that the church is the display of God's wisdom. How is this so? As we have seen God's purpose has been revealed to include the salvation of peoples from every nation, tribe, tongue, language, and people-group. This multi-racial, multi-ethnic, multi-coloured society is a reflection of the very wisdom of God Himself. In times past the wisdom of God was mysterious, and aloof – His ways higher than our ways and His thoughts deeper than our own. In many ways there is still a mystery about the wisdom of God, but in one crucial way this mystery has been revealed: God is demonstrating His wisdom in building this new community of believers.

The church is the demonstration of God's wisdom to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places. Spiritual forces of good and evil look on. They see the course of human history but do not know where it is going and with what end in mind. Now this glorious mystery of reconciliation through the seeming defeat of the cross has been revealed. And on the one hand the angels watch and wonder over the infinite mercy and wisdom of God, whilst on the other demonic powers gnash their teeth in impotent fury as God rescues sinner after sinner from their grasp forever.

The Local Church - God's vehicle for transformation

Life-filled local churches are the key to a transformed world. God doesn't have any other plans. As a result of that truth, we have a high calling indeed. As those who lead churches, and shepherd His people, we must never lose sight of the goal. God has called and appointed us to the role of vinedressers to His glorious vine. He has given us the incomparable privilege of preparing a bride for His son and the wedding to end all weddings. We must never stint on our vision of the church restored to New Testament principles, strong, bright, clear, full of the Holy Spirit, resting on the apostles' doctrine and the foundations of Jesus Christ.

There is no shortage of para-church organisations, seeking to do good works outside of the framework of true New Testament church. Many of these organisations have arisen because the church has lacked the courage, equipping and vision to be doing the job herself. Why should there be a need for organisations to disciple our young people? Why should there be a need for societies that exist to send missionaries? Although we honour the pioneering work and sacrifice of those who started many of these organisations, and they have been God's answer to the needs of the world, these tasks should fall within the remit of the church if she is mature and functioning as God intended.

God's Great Commandments to the church are to love Him above all else, and to love one another. His Great Commission to the church is to preach the message of the Kingdom in word and deed through a community of transformed lives. The rest of this booklet is devoted to outlining some of the principles that we have learned which aid us in this task of building great local churches.

Four key Pillars

Understanding the message of the kingdom

And [Jesus] went throughout all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the Kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction among the people.

Matthew 4:23

God is a king, not an elected leader. He's an absolute ruler with absolute authority over all that He has made. It is impossible to read the scriptures in their fullness and not conclude that God is the supreme ruler of the universe.

For the Lord is a great God, and a great King above all gods. **Psalms 95:3**

For all the gods of the peoples are worthless idols, but the Lord made the heavens.

Psalms 96:5

For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities - all things were created through him and for him.

Colossians 1:16

When Jesus came to Earth He came to re-establish the order of God in individual lives and across the nations of the world. When Adam sinned, the perfection of the Garden of Eden, where Jesus was king and humankind lived in happiness under His rule, was lost. Adam rebelled against the kingship and order of God. When he and Eve took the fruit of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil they were effectively saying, "We're in charge, not you, God. We'll live life our way, not yours." All the sin and misery of the world that has followed has flowed from that act of rebellion. God's perfect order has been lost and instead we see chaos and disorder in every sphere of human life.

The message Jesus proclaimed on Earth was that God's order, His rule and His reign, were going to be restored. Before that could happen it was necessary to deal with the problem of human sin and the separation from God that it caused. Our sinful natures needed to be dealt with and Jesus' death on the cross and His resurrection from the grave made that possible. The power, penalty, partition and pollution of sin have all been broken in our lives as a result of Jesus' sacrifice on the cross. The cross is where Christianity begins and it's where worship starts: without the cross there would be no Christians and no restored kingdom.

However, there is a real sense in which the cross was a means to an end, and not an end in itself. Dealing with the power and rule of sin in our lives was a necessary first step in seeing God's kingdom restored in our lives and in the nations of the world. Without the cross, kingdom-restoration is impossible, but the wonder of the cross is diminished if it becomes an end in itself. The purpose of the cross was to bring us back into a place where the Kingdom of God can be re-established and extended.

This message - that God's rule and order were to be restored - was what Jesus proclaimed, and it's the message that He calls us to proclaim on His behalf.

And this gospel of the Kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.

Matthew 24:14

Alignment

As we have seen, God's kingdom is a place of order. Where His rule and reign are established we find peace and security. An essential element of God's order coming is that godly alignment is evident in people and churches.

"God alone is the authority in all things; all the authorities of the earth are instituted by God. Authority is a tremendous thing in the universe – nothing overshadows it"

Watchman Nee, Spiritual Authority

God operates His authority through people - delegates - to whom He gives legitimate authority for different spheres of life (e.g. parents, teachers, managers, politicians, police officers). Each of these individuals is a representative of God's authority and they carry that authority in their relevant sphere. For example, a teacher has God's delegated authority in the classroom. In that area of life their word is God's word and their pupils need to learn to respect and honour that authority.

Submission to authority - the correct alignment of oneself under God's delegated authority - is a critical spiritual principle for both individuals and churches. Most church indiscipline and brokenness is caused through a faulty understanding of authority on the part of either leaders, or followers, or both.

Submission to authority

God's people are enjoined to submit to their leaders and to God.

Obey your leaders and submit to their authority. They keep watch over you as men who must give an account. Obey them so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no advantage to you. **Hebrews 13:17**

Now we ask you, brothers, to respect those who work hard among you, who are over you in the Lord and who admonish you. Hold them in the highest regard in love because of their work. Live in peace with each other. **1 Thessalonians 5:12-13**

The Greek word for submission is *hupotasso*. It literally means to "arrange oneself under". I.e. it implies a conscious decision to place one's life under the authority of the one submitted to and to see their guidance and direction as to what is good and right for our lives. The origins of the word are military - soldiers that submit to a commander. You can't make someone submit to you, it has to be their choice. Likewise, we must choose to submit ourselves to those whom God places in our lives.

This truth applies to both individuals and churches. The members of our churches need

to submit themselves to those whom God has appointed to lead them. The elders of the local church need people who will arrange themselves under their authority and then work with them to fulfil the vision that God has imparted.

However, it's also true that churches need to arrange themselves under godly authority. One of the primary reasons that churches are weak and ineffective is that they do not relate properly to apostolic authority that can help to shape and guide them. We believe strongly that fivefold gift ministries (Eph. 4:11ff), based in resource churches, are given to equip the church for her work. Local churches should choose to align themselves with such godly authority and from that relationship blessing will flow. We have written more about this subject in the booklet *The Vital Key of the Resource Church*, available from our website www.jubilee.co

Submission in practice - taking wise counsel

In practice, our submission to authority is tested by our willingness to both seek and take wise counsel from those that lead us. It is here that our independent spirits and selfishness are tested and exposed. Submission is only submission when you don't want to do what's required of you! It's at this point that we find rebellion or individualism rearing their heads.

The book of Proverbs is full of wise and pithy sayings on this subject, that cause us to think carefully about our attitude and submission to authority.

Where there is no guidance, a people falls, but in an abundance of counsellors there is safety. **Proverbs 11:14**

The way of a fool is right in his own eyes, but a wise man listens to advice.

Proverbs 12:15

A rebuke goes deeper into a man of understanding than a hundred blows into a fool.

Proverbs 17:10

Do you see a man who is wise in his own eyes? There is more hope for a fool than for him.

Proverbs 26:12

Listen to advice and accept instruction, that you may gain wisdom in the future.

Proverbs 19:20

As a church we strongly encourage our people to walk in accountability and to align themselves under God's leaders in their lives. In practice, however, that decision is entirely up to an individual. We cannot, and do not, make people submit. We don't interfere in people's lives. We don't control others. Rather, as people voluntarily seek counsel and advice, as they ask for help with their lives, we speak into their situations and walk with them on their path. The initiative in submission has to come from the individual who is submitting, and not from their leader. When this goes wrong then manipulation and control develop and these run counter to the heart of God.

At a practical level, we are not talking about "having to run every decision past the elders". Rather, we're saying, "when I have a decision to make in my life, I want to ask the advice of those whom God has given me, so that I get that decision right and

walk in God's blessing." In areas such as marriage, business pioneering, major financial commitments, or changes of location we encourage our people to walk in open relationship with their leaders, and we see God's blessing as a result.

How do churches relate to authority?

We believe strongly in the need for churches, and in particular their leadership teams, to relate well to authority. Just as individuals need help, advice and fathering to grow and mature, so do church leadership teams. We believe that God's model for this is correct relating of local churches to resource churches that can provide this level of support to them.

We have explained the concept of resource church more fully in our booklet *The Vital Key of the Resource Church*, but essentially a resource church is equipped and mandated by God to act as a conduit for those ministries that build the church: prophets, apostles, evangelists, pastors and teachers.

In practice we see three levels of relationship between a local church and a resource church:

- **Apostolic blessing (primarily receiving the gift).** This occurs when those with an apostolic or prophetic gift visit a local church to provide encouragement and impartation. Because such gift-ministries carry the favour of God there will be blessing from having them visit. However, at this stage there's no input into the foundations of the church.
- **Apostolic influence (a deepening relationship of trust).** Sometimes a local church eldership team will ask to meet with a fivefold team from a resource church to talk through issues that they're facing, or receive some equipping in a particular area of local church life. When this happens there is influence, because the thinking of that eldership team is being shaped, but there is no governmental role being played by the fivefold ministry team. No fundamental changes are occurring in the church - no foundations are being affected.
- **Apostolic government (alignment and governance).** This occurs when a local church eldership chooses, on the basis of relationship and connection, to align themselves under the oversight of a resource church. When this happens, government is flowing into the church. The fivefold team are being asked to speak into and shape the foundations and DNA of the local church to work with the eldership team to see the church strengthened and transitioned where necessary.

In every one of these cases it is the local church who are the primary drivers for the relationship: not the resource church team. We believe very strongly that local church government resides with the eldership team of that church - even when apostolic government is exercised it is still the local church eldership who make the decisions for change and carry through those changes. Apostolic government rules over a church, but it does not over-rule them. This is a basic principle of submission: a choice by the one submitting and not something forced on them by another.

Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching. 1 Timothy 5:17 (ESV)

The power of good leadership

A picture of the local church

A nationally syndicated columnist with the Washington Post recently wrote about the plight of the white rhinoceros in Pilanesberg Park, a South African game preserve. At least 39 of these endangered rhinos had been found slaughtered in their native habitat, and it was assumed that poachers were the killers of the remarkable beasts. However, upon closer inspection it was discovered that all of the rhinos' valuable horns remained among the carcasses. In an effort to catch the killers, the game wardens decided to tranquilize some of the remaining animals to electronically tag and track them. Hidden video cameras were also set in strategic locations to record the evidence.

The game wardens were amazed to discover that young bull elephants were harassing the rhinos without provocation. Although unnatural for them, these teenaged elephants were chasing these white rhinos for long distances, throwing sticks at them and stomping them to death. Why were these elephants acting so violently? The answer would be found in a decision made 20 years earlier.

Because the Kruger National Park was unable to support a continuously increasing population of elephants, park officials had decided to transport some of them to the Pilanesberg Preserve. The elephants too large to transport were killed, including a significant number of mature bulls. As a result, the elephants that were guilty of killing the rhinos matured without the influence and presence of mature males. Park rangers and scientists discovered that without the older presence of mature bulls, these young male elephants were suffering from excessive testosterone and becoming increasingly violent.

To preserve the white rhino population, park officials killed five of the most aggressive young bull elephants while determining to find a suitable answer for this aberration of nature. Park rangers decided to import older bulls in order to view their influence on the remaining young males. The young bulls learned quickly that they were no match for the more mature elephants. The older bulls began to assume their place among the herd as fathers and disciplinarians.

The younger, aggressive bulls could no longer impose their unchallenged, immature bullying. Eventually the young bulls began following the older ones. It became apparent that they enjoyed these new relationships with the older, more mature males. The former lawbreakers yielded to the new discipline and returned to normal patterns of elephant behaviour. There has not been a report of any dead rhinos since the arrival of the more mature elephants,

This is a parable of life in the church. The absence of mature leadership in the church results in similar consequences. When mature Christian men and women do not assume their responsibility, the younger, more energetic and yet immature ones take their places. These leaders are not equipped for the task that lies before them.

The cry for Spiritual Fathers and Mothers – Larry Kreider

Leadership is vital

"Everything rises or falls on leadership." John Maxwell

Leadership is essential to the success of any venture, and the church is not excluded from that. Sadly, as a result of centuries of poor examples, bad theology, and inadequate equipping the church is often very under-resourced in terms of leaders. We honestly believe that churches are designed to be led by qualified, well-equipped elders who carry the mantle of government and leadership, who hear from God, and who are able to execute His strategic plan for their community.

It is in the context of alignment - kingdom authority delegated to men and women on God's behalf - that we must understand eldership. Elders are those to whom God has delegated His authority to lead His church. This is a high and holy calling. Elders are those through whom the rule of God comes to the lives of people. Elders represent the Father to His flock. They are responsible for fathering the people under their care to see them loved, nurtured, edified and disciplined so that the character and maturity of Christ might be formed in them. Our booklet "Biblical Eldership" talks in more detail about the character and work of elders.

Although space does not permit an extensive discussion on every aspect of leadership, we have highlighted here some key principles that we believe are essential in a local church.

Leaders are fathers

The essential nature of the church as a family means that leadership in the church is primarily about fathering and mothering, not management. The church is made up of people - we're not a business or a commercial organisation. That doesn't mean we don't make hard choices and confront difficult issues and failing ventures, but it does mean that the way in which we handle these situations, and crucially our attitude towards the people in our care, are radically different.

The Bible often uses the illustration of children growing up to adulthood as a metaphor for growth in the Christian life. For example, the writer of Hebrews upbraids the church because, *"[although] we have much to say, it is hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing. For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the basic principles of the oracles of God. You need milk, not solid food, for everyone who lives on milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, since he is a child. But solid food is for the mature, for those who have their powers of discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil."* (Hebrews 5:11-14).

As Christians we are exhorted to grow to a place of being mature, fully grown, complete, lacking nothing. The leaders whom God places in our life are there to facilitate this process and as those who lead it is our responsibility to bring people to a place of maturity. The scriptures tell us that, *"the creation waits with eager longing for the sons of God to be revealed."* (Romans 8:19). The world is literally waiting for the true sons and daughters of God - those who have grown to maturity and stature as a result of being fathered and disciplined.

So leadership is firstly about fathering those in our care to see them come to maturity.

Leaders and followers

In order for the maturing process to happen in a person's life they need to be a follower. This may seem obvious, but in our culture this is actually very unusual. Our culture teaches us that we are the masters and mistresses of our own destiny - that we should bow to no man. So when people become Christians and join our churches it is very rare for them to understand how to follow! As we discussed above in the section about alignment, submission is a choice to place oneself under God's delegated authority in order to see His blessing flow in our lives.

The people in our churches need to be taught how to follow. They need to understand the principles of alignment and authority; they need to see the blessings of following; they need to see their own need of maturity, correction, discipline, and fathering. We must both teach and model these things because otherwise we will simply reproduce what the Western church has had for centuries: churches full of individuals who are largely self-serving rather than kingdom-serving.

Leaders are intentionally trained

Leaders do not pop, fully-formed, into the world. Even those with natural gifts of leadership and charisma need to be properly trained and developed before they are fit for the task. The problem for many churches is that they have no properly equipped leaders, but this is usually because they do not invest any time or energy in training and developing people to lead. We have discussed this in some depth in our booklet on Biblical Eldership. In summary, as churches we must create a culture of leadership development at every level of church - from cell groups to eldership.

At Jubilee this means that the phrase, "reproduce yourself" is important for every leader, in every context. In our children's work, teenagers and young people are trained to help those younger than they are. In our youth team, older teenagers and young adults are equipped to lead and bring guidance to those in their early-teens. In our cell groups, we are looking to identify cell-interns who can be trained up to lead a cell themselves through a process of discipleship and equipping. Experienced cell-leaders are raised up to oversee groups of cells or whole zones. Our eldership has grown over the years as a result of long-term investment in leadership training and development. Those who lead the church are mature, they've been refined by fire, and they've had their character proven and shaped so that they are ready to carry government in the church.

We have a large number of excellent leaders at Jubilee, but this has not happened by accident. It's been a foundational tenet for us since the resource church was planted in 2000 and the principles of multiplication and growth have meant that we now have many qualified people leading across the body.

Leaders bring direction

By definition, leaders bring direction to any enterprise. "If you don't know where you're going, any road will take you there." Leaders bring direction in a variety of ways:

- **By setting clear vision.** Leaders need to present their people with a clear picture of the future that produces passion. Where are you headed, what is required to get there, how will this be achieved?

- **By setting clear ethos.** Leaders are responsible for setting the DNA of their church - the essential values and principles by which you operate. This includes things like creating a culture of leadership development, and building a sense of family and fun.
- **By bringing correction.** Many churches fail to correct ungodly behaviour and attitudes. But one of the ways in which we maintain clear direction and ethos is by challenging those who are undermining it with selfishness and immaturity. We bring correction in order to ensure that the purity of our vision and ethos is maintained.

Leadership is critical to the success of any church. Poorly equipped, ill-trained leaders are the primary reason for much of the decay, disunity and devastation we see in local churches. We need to embrace the call to lead, and then train those in our churches to follow and ultimately become leaders themselves if we are to see God's purposes for our communities come to pass.

Maturity and unity

Throughout history unity has been the church's biggest challenge. The one thing that Jesus' prayed for more than anything before He left us has been the area where the most attack and trouble has occurred. Jesus knew that unity was a vital key to the success of a church. If the people in our local body are disunited and not of one accord then our church will be weak and ineffective - it's as simple as that.

The Apostle Paul expanded on the theme of unity in his letter to the Ephesians. In chapter 4 he strongly allied the idea of unity with that of maturity: it is as people grow to maturity in Christ that they are able to evidence unity. Immature people are disunited; mature people are of one mind.

And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love. **Ephesians 4:11-16**

The work of the equipping ministries is to bring people to maturity, and a key element of that is *"the unity of the faith...speaking the truth in love."*

We can see this relationship between maturity and unity illustrated in our children. One of the first words that my toddlers learnt was "Mine!" When they were small, everything centred around themselves and what they wanted. They had little interest in other people's needs or wants and were focused on their own desires. As they've grown up we've had to teach them how to respect and think of others (which is no mean feat with

teenagers!) Our adult children now have a much greater awareness of other people, and are even beginning to invest in the next generation themselves through their careers and life choices. Maturity has led to unity - and that's how God intended things to work.

Immature believers

Immaturity wrecks lives and churches. If we could point to one issue above all others that lies at the root of most of the problems that face the church in our nation it would be this: believers have not grown up to maturity and continue to behave like spoiled children. Church history is littered with splits, disagreements and divisions that have caused untold damage through the centuries. And even within local church bodies there is division and discord.

Gossip, slander, backbiting, and offence are common. There will be few church leaders reading this booklet who have not experienced members of their flock walking out in disagreement or disunity, taking offence over some issue or another. Insecurity, jealousy and comparison often abound among leaders, resulting in hurt people and damaged lives among those being led. Again, many of us will have heard of or experienced leaders whose behaviour has caused brokenness and division in the lives of their people.

The Bible is full of instructions to steer away from such behaviour.

*Therefore, rid yourselves of all malice and all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander of every kind. **1 Peter 2:1***

The one who conceals hatred has lying lips, and whoever utters slander is a fool.

Proverbs 10:18

*Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamour and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. **Ephesians 4:31***

*For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander. **Matthew 15:19***

*Do not speak evil against one another, brothers. The one who speaks against a brother or judges his brother, speaks evil against the law and judges the law. But if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law but a judge. **James 4:11***

Exhortations to maturity

As leaders we have to teach our people that such behaviour is wrong, to confront it when it occurs, and then to lead people into new ways of thinking and behaviour that line up with scripture.

*When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I gave up childish ways. **1 Corinthians 13:11***

*Brothers, do not be children in your thinking. Be infants in evil, but in your thinking be mature. **1 Corinthians 14:20***

For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the basic principles of the oracles of God. You need milk, not solid food, for everyone who lives on milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, since he is a child. But solid food is for

*the mature, for those who have their powers of discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil. **Hebrews 5:12-15***

*Let those of us who are mature think this way, and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal that also to you. **Philippians 3:15***

*Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ. **Colossians 1:28***

Equipping the saints in these areas is a mixture of both teaching and addressing behaviour. We teach people these truths, but we also deal with immaturity and disunity when we see it. Theory alone is inadequate - we have to also discipline people and shepherd people so that their behaviour changes.

We have adopted a zero-tolerance approach to disunity between believers at Jubilee Church. If we hear any kind of negative talking about others or leaders we confront it immediately. On more than one occasion, when a member of the body has begun complaining to a leader about another person, the leader has phoned that other individual on the spot, and asked them to come over, and then faced both parties up with the offence straight away. It's amazing how quickly that kind of discipline begins to deal with people's attitudes and their preparedness to gossip or slander others!

The blessing of unity

*Behold, how good and pleasant it is when brothers dwell in unity! It is like the precious oil on the head, running down on the beard, on the beard of Aaron, running down on the collar of his robes! It is like the dew of Hermon, which falls on the mountains of Zion! For there the Lord has commanded the blessing, life forevermore. **Psalms 133:1-3***

Maturity is evidenced by kingdom order in our lives, families, churches, cities and nations. Unless church leaders are prepared to address immaturity in their own lives and the lives of their people they will never see the blessing that God wants to pour out, because their people will be unable to handle the responsibility of that blessing on God's behalf. When God's blessing flows into churches they become powerhouses for the redemption and transformation of their local community. However, if the members of that church are not mature they will be unable to handle that level of responsibility and the blessing of God will be wasted because it will not result in long-term change.

The Psalmist says that it is where brothers dwell in unity that blessing comes. It is where the family of God live out their lives in kingdom community and commitment that the blessing of God flows and communities are changed with the gospel of the Kingdom. Making mature disciples, through a process of teaching, training, refinement and testing, is essential if we are to be the agents of change that God wants us to be.

Unity is born from maturity and destroyed by immaturity, so as church leaders our route to unity is to grow mature disciples that can handle responsibility well.

Four roles of a local church

In order to help understand how a healthy local church functions it is useful to use four illustrations demonstrating the different roles the church performs. Each of these roles is important, and in our view when any of these is either neglected or over-emphasised the church is weakened. Each of the four must be kept in balance and complement the others.



Family

As Christians, our primary means of relationship with God is as Father. Jesus modelled life for us as a son, and continually made reference to His relationship with His Father in Heaven. The new covenant has broken down the barriers of division that lay between us and the Father, so that we now walk not only in newness of life, but also in a new relationship with Him: as sons.

Paul tells the Romans that, "you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, "Abba! Father!" The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God," (Romans 8:15-16).

God's intention is that children should grow up and become mature in a family. The rise of the single-parent family, where one parent leaves, and the damage done to the traditional understanding of family in the world at large is a demonic assault on God's character and nature - it does not reflect His heart.

When it comes to raising mature Christians (huios - the mature sons of God) the same principle is true. God's intention is that the raising and releasing of sons and daughters takes place in a family: a household. On several occasions in the New Testament the church is referred to using the Greek words oikos or oikēios which means the household of God, literally the wider family, and everything that pertains to it.

*I hope to come to you soon, but I am writing these things to you so that, if I delay, you may know how one ought to behave in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, a pillar and buttress of the truth. **1 Timothy 3:14-15***

*For it is time for judgment to begin at the household of God; and if it begins with us, what will be the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God? **1 Peter 4:17***

*So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith. **Galatians 6:10***

*So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, **Ephesians 2:19***

This apparently simple thought is possibly one of the most transformational principles of building a strong local church. Understanding church as the family of God leads to change at every level of church and it builds a sense of community within the body that attracts and keeps people like nothing else.

Family provides belonging

People are desperate to belong. In an increasingly broken world, many people live as individuals, without any strong relationships. As a result, they are lonely and disconnected - both facets of the Fall. The Bible says that God is the one who "sets the lonely in families" (Psalm 68:5-6). His intention has always been that people are rightly connected to one another.

The church is his vehicle for meeting this deep-seated need in people. We are meant to be His family, welcoming, inviting, encouraging and supporting those who become a part of us. Family is messy but wonderful - people are at varying stages of development and maturity but that's part of the delight. Babies and small children can be chaotic and disruptive, but their innocence and laughter are a joy to behold. Teenagers can be stropky and argumentative, but there is something powerful about seeing a boy become a young man, a girl become a woman. Seeing older members of the flock caring for and passing on their wisdom to younger people is a precious thing. These illustrations are not about our physical age, but our spiritual maturity. An old person can be a babe in Christ, and a young adult can be a mature believer.

The family provides a safe place for people to grow and mature. Their acceptance is not in doubt, but their character is shaped and moulded on the journey so that they become mature and responsible, able themselves to support other members of the family.

Family encourages and affirms one another

Families members breathe life to one another. They speak words of life, hope, encouragement and build one another up. Negativity destroys family life. Family should be a safe place where you are secure, covered and protected. Harsh words wound the family.

I encourage my children to encourage one another. It's been interesting as our children have grown older to see how the younger members of the family have stayed in touch with our eldest daughter when she is away at university. They're always Skyping or Facebooking, sending letters or even going to visit her. They want to go to one another's performances or school productions; they want to be involved in one another's lives and ensure that each member of the family is doing well. My youngest son is full of enthusiasm, and he is a hug-monster. Whenever I return home from work, even though he is a teenager, I receive a huge welcome home hug which is a source of great encouragement to me.

Never underestimate the power of encouragement - people will only grow in a loving environment and a safe atmosphere.

Family are united in heart and mind

The gospel is about harmony and peace. There is power in standing together in agreement with one another - it makes us a formidable force. Our physical families should be united, and so should our spiritual families. The devil is always seeking ways to divide us and separate us, so working at unity is critically important.

In my family, one member is missed when they are away, whether it's myself travelling abroad, my daughter at university, or my son on a school visit. The same should be true of our church family. You should be missed when you're not there. Unity does not just happen when you are under the same roof - if we are truly united as family we will still remember one another when out of sight. For example, Michael is often away but people keep in touch by text and email. Unity is not geographical, it is in our hearts.

Disunity sits like a barrier between us and creates atmosphere. When there's a problem we need to resolve things quickly and get on the same page.

Family celebrates together

When our family celebrates together there is no sense of 'have to' about it. We reserve the 'Right to be ridiculous' as family, and trust me, we often are! When we then mix it with my sisters' families it only gets even more ridiculous! Add to that mix our close church friends and family and the volume only increases. We celebrate birthdays – but we also celebrate just because we need to! It's part of what keeps us alive!

Building great memories is one of the best things we can give our children. Jesus came to give us life in abundance – to the full. If you walk as part of the family at Jubilee you will already have some great memories. Building times of 'doing life together' builds community.

*"The thief's purpose is to steal and kill and destroy. My purpose is to give them a rich and satisfying life." **John 10:10 (NLT)***

This "doing life" is worked out in our close relationships – at cell level within the basic church family unit - and at our Sunday celebrations, where we often say, 'we are here today to be family together'. Learn the art of having fun! Has the thief stolen our ability to live life to the full? Jesus wants to give us a rich and satisfying life.

Family grows and matures together

A healthy family needs to progress through the stages of sonship from baby to mature son and father.

My children are all at different stages of life. And I thank God that I don't have four children in nappies! Each one is in a different season – and we celebrate that season, but they need to be moving forward or there is an unhealthy strain that develops in the family dynamic. With each stage comes a new measure of responsibility and if the family do not carry their responsibility some else has to take the strain.

We need to train and equip our children if we want them to grow and mature. It doesn't just happen – mums and dads have to be willing to equip and train

*"When I was a child, I spoke and thought and reasoned as a child. But when I grew up, I put away childish things!" **1 Corinthians 13:11***

The cost of being a family

- To belong to family you have to let down the barriers and be vulnerable. Honesty and transparency are not easy.
- To encourage and affirm one another we have to think beyond ourselves. Put a guard over your mouth. Be kind. Go the extra mile.
- To be united in heart and mind involves laying aside personal preferences, agendas and desires for the sake of the bigger picture. Being quick to forgive and resolve conflict.

- To celebrate as family we have to be building 'life-centred' community. You have to plan fun into your world – it doesn't always 'just happen!' It means giving up time to embrace it. Prioritize fun in your life! For you to come in to a fun filled cell or celebration means others have given of themselves – they've made the effort to think creatively.
- To grow and mature as family we need to be willing to take up new responsibility at each stage. Refuse to become too comfortable and ensure you are moving forward. Face the obstacles knowing it is one step closer to maturity.

There is a price to pay – but the rewards are eternal. Learn what it means to sacrifice for a greater purpose. To be a healthy family comes at a price – it takes time, commitment, and a willingness to quickly forgive – but the benefits far outweigh the cost!

The importance of hospitality

One of the crucial aspects of practically building family is to ensure our churches have a strong understanding of hospitality. The Bible is clear that as God's people we are to have open homes and open lives that reach out to others.

Contribute to the needs of the saints and seek to show hospitality. **Romans 12:13**

For an overseer, as God's steward, must be above reproach. He must not be arrogant or quick-tempered or a drunkard or violent or greedy for gain, but hospitable, a lover of good, self-controlled, upright, holy, and disciplined. **Titus 1:7-8**

Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares. **Hebrews 13:2**

It's important to notice that these instructions are not only to women - although one of them might only be to men! It's not a woman's role to show hospitality or have an open home, it's the role of every person in the church to share their lives with others.

Although hospitality is not only confined to food, it often does involve a meal. Showing hospitality is about caring for the needs of another, and those needs often include food and drink. The ancients knew how to be hospitable in this way to travellers and relations (Gen 18:3-8; 19:2-3; 24:31).

However, although such things are important hospitality is more about an attitude of the heart than an excellence in catering! It's about loving others and showing God's kindness to them through sharing our lives and homes with them. When Jesus invited himself to Zaccheus' house, we're told that Zacchaeus came down from the tree and "received Him joyfully" (Luke 19:6). It wasn't a chore but a delight to have Jesus to tea!

Peter encourages us to show hospitality to one another in a very practical way:

Above all, keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins. Show hospitality to one another without grumbling. **1 Peter 4:8-9**

Love is critical - we need to have the love of God in our hearts for others. However, he also encourages us to do it without grumbling. Why is that? Hospitality has a cost. We have to invest our time, give up our privacy, share our resources and perhaps put up with a squashed living room for a time! However, God's heart is to show love to people and to welcome them into our lives. Cultivating an atmosphere of hospitality in our churches is so important.

It's important that everybody feels that can play a part in being hospitable. Three-course dinner parties are not the only way to be hospitable, especially if time and space don't permit. It's not about proving our cooking skills, but about sharing our lives with others. So a loving coffee and cake with one person, is much more valuable in God's sight than a professionally executed but cold and clinical dinner party for twelve. Hospitality is about loving Jesus and loving people, not impressing others.

The next generation

Lastly, and importantly, the family nature of church reminds us that we do not exist only for ourselves, but also for those who will follow in our footsteps. The images of families, and fathers and mothers implies one important thing: the presence of children - another generation who are following on behind. As parents we have a responsibility to our children, both spiritual and physical, to raise them well and leave a legacy and inheritance after us.

As a church we are committed to building for the next generation and not simply ensuring that our own generation know the blessings of God. We are investing in properties, in resources, in long-term programmes and strategies that will outlive us and which can be passed on to the next generation so that they can go further than us.

For example, some of the buildings and facilities that we own as a church are mortgaged. But our intention is that we pay off those mortgages, so that the next generation can benefit from the facilities without having to pay the cost of them. We are absolutely committed to raising up leaders from the next generation, and our whole church's philosophy of ministry is built around that. Our young people, even at age 11 and 12, are beginning to help serve in children's ministry. Our older teenagers are leading younger kids, being trained and mentored in leadership, and getting equipped to serve the church that they may one day lead. We have invested heavily in a conference for young people in their twenties and thirties so that they might be inspired and envisioned and motivated for the work of God.

If our churches are structured only for the here and now, then in thirty or forty years' time they will fade and fall away. If we intentionally build for the next generation, we will see the church's mission extended and strengthened for decades and even centuries to come.

Army

Although the church is a family, a place of love, acceptance and growth, it is also an army - a place of war, breakthrough and hard work. These two aspects are one of the Bible's "binary truths" - truths which seem to be opposites, but when held in tension with one another provide a perfect picture. It's the same as the Bible describing God as Father and King or Jesus as the Alpha and the Omega, the Lion and the Lamb.

In the Christian life there are different seasons - times of training, times of battle, times of being family. We need to learn to discern the season and like the men of Issachar we need to understand the times (1 Chronicles 12:32).

There are many scriptures about being in a battle:

*Although we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world... **2 Corinthians 10:3-5***

Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. Put on the whole armour of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. Therefore take up the whole armour of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm. Stand therefore, having fastened on the belt of truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and, as shoes for your feet, having put on the readiness given by the gospel of peace. In all circumstances take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one; and take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God,

Ephesians 6:10-17

*Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. **1 Peter 5:8***

In Ezekiel's prophecy (Ezek. 37:1-14) he sees a vast valley of dry bones become a mighty army as the Spirit of the Lord breathes upon them. This is a picture of the church: as Christ makes us alive in Him, and joins us to one another as family, so we become a mighty army with Him.

When the church operates as an army she takes a stand against the evil one's work and begins to reclaim ground that he has taken from her. She begins to speak out against injustice, to tackle social problems and ills, to take up influence for the kingdom in her town or city. This is God's purpose - that His church should be strong and powerful - too powerful for the gates of Hell to withstand her.

There are a range of characteristics of the church as an army.

She listens to the voice of the commander

In a battle, it's the voice of the commander that matters the most. As His church, unless we hear the Master's voice above the tumult and the sound of fighting all around us, we will be blind, uncertain as to the next steps and the right way ahead. If

we're daydreaming, or listening to other voices, we will not be able to distinguish His command and engage with His purpose. When the trumpet sounds or the lion roars, we had better be ready!

As an army, there are also God's delegated commanders in the form of elders and leaders to whom God gives strategy and revelation for the battles we face. We need to hear their voice, and submit ourselves to their authority, so that we can overcome in the battle.

Although it can be scary being in the midst of a battle there is a real sense of security and comfort knowing there is a whole army fighting alongside us. Additionally, as we submit ourselves to godly leadership, we are covered and protected - the pressure is taken off of us as individuals.

She is tried and tested

When special forces soldiers train for battle they are put under incredible pressure and placed under enormous physical and mental stress. This highly pressurised training regime is designed to produce in them an instant obedience to their commander and to expose and deal with any character or physical weaknesses that might undermine them in the heat of battle.

The same is true of God's people, the church. We need people who have been tested by fire and come through that process refined and mature. One of the biggest lessons we have learnt in church planting through the years is to make sure that the team has been tested. Good leadership is much more than a charismatic personality - we need to know for sure how people will respond under pressure.

The scriptures are full of God's testing:

- God tested Job – he endured unimaginable hardships – but at the end of that process Job had a greater revelation of who God is.
- God tested Abraham – he endured years of waiting and had to be prepared to sacrifice the very thing that he had waited all that time for – but He became Father of Israel, described as righteous
- God tested David – he lived in daily fear of his life and hid in caves and holes in the ground for many years - but God gave him a promise of victory and he was one of Israel's most successful kings.

Testing reveals strengths and weaknesses so that they can be honed and removed prior to the battle in which God wants us to win victories for Him.

She learns discipline

Warfare is not about convenience or desire. In the army, we learn to make personal sacrifices and there are often casualties, sometimes fatalities.

Discipline demands that we respond immediately. Immediately is a common word in the Bible. My children have a range of ways in which they delay obedience: "I just need to..." or "in a minute" or "when I feel like it". But delayed obedience is disobedience.

Immediately:

- James and John left the boat and followed Jesus (Matthew 4:20)
- her bleeding stopped (Mark 5:29)
- he was cleansed from his leprosy (Mark 1:42)
- Jesus made the disciples get into the boat after feeding 5000. they didn't sit around patting themselves on the back – there was an even greater testing ahead (Jesus walking on water - Mark 6:45ff)

A disciplined person understands both order and timing.

Although the church operates as a family, that does not mean there is no order. Order and structure are essential if the job is to get done. So God appoints leaders whose direction we are to follow; He gives strategies, plans, structures and programmes for us to adhere to in order to fulfil the vision and achieve the purpose he has planned.

As the writer of Ecclesiastes points out there is a time for everything (Eccl. 3:1-8). A time to laugh and a time to cry; a time to kill and a time to heal; a time to stay silent and a time to speak. Discipline teaches us timing - it helps us understand what needs to happen when, and to respond quickly when we need to.

Personal discipline leads to corporate discipline. The people in our churches need to learn personal discipline in such areas as:

- Reading the Word – not about whether you feel like it or not...enemy knows our weaknesses and will target these areas. The Word is the only offensive weapon in the list of spiritual armour in Ephesians 6.
- Praying – growing in intimacy / praying for others
- Pursuing God's will for our lives.
- Commitment & Building family relationships – biological / church / cell
- Pursuing godly friendships & accountable relationships
- Dealing with apathy and passivity

She walks in unity

When soldiers are trained to march on the parade ground they learn to move as one. When they first begin the process, they are a scrappy bunch of individuals who can't keep in step and are frequently out of time with one another. In contrast, by the end of their basic training, at their passing out parade, they march in perfect unison past their commanding officer, everyone in absolute time.

The church needs to learn the unity of marching as one body. When we need to operate as an army it's not a time for discussion or voicing your opinion or preferences (we can do this when we are being family). In the heat of battle, that sense of working as a well-oiled machine, united in our purpose to protect our people and destroy the enemy, is critically important.

Unity is what the enemy most wants to destroy. Jesus' last prayer on earth (John 17) was for us as His people and specifically it was that His followers would be one.

- protect them that they might be one, just as we are one... (v11)
- protect them from the evil one... (v15)
- that they may be one just as we are one...so that they may be brought to complete unity... (v 22–23)

If Satan can't create disunity within a church body (and sadly, let's face it, he usually can) then he will seek to create disunity between churches in a town or region. Disagreements or offences can often fester for years, causing generations of zero-impact. Repentance and forgiveness need to be our weapons of warfare to ensure the enemy does not win the day in our towns and cities. This can only be achieved as leaders become mature themselves, and lay down their insecurity, competition and comparison for the greater good of their town and region.

Hospital

When a person becomes a Christian, and is added to the church, they do not instantly lose all connection with their past habits, problems and hurts. At that moment of salvation they are born again as a babe in Christ, but there is then a process of growth and change that needs to take place in their life before they are mature and complete sons, lacking nothing and ready to be released to the world. It is here that the church needs to act as a hospital - a place of healing, bringing wholeness, helping people to get rid of the baggage of the past and order their lives under God's authority.

When people are not whole, they tend to have a negative impact on others rather than a positive one. "Hurt people hurt people," as the saying goes. When we have unresolved areas of weakness in our lives then we are a liability - we cannot be reliably sent and we cannot reliably reflect the heart of the Father to others.

Wholeness is about having all of the different parts of our lives in the right place and functioning well. A "whole" person - a mature Christian - will have the following characteristics:

- they will be spiritually mature - sound in the Word and the Spirit
- they will be emotionally mature - able to control their emotions rather than being mastered by them
- they will be mentally mature - able to think clearly and biblically, winning the battle for the mind
- they will recognise the importance of accountability
- they will recognise the importance of submission to leadership
- they will walk in forgiveness - free from the prison of unforgiveness
- they will have a soft, pliable, humble, repentant heart
- they will deal swiftly with sin in their life
- they will have a sense of vision for themselves and for others
- they will walk in integrity - doing what they say they'll do, not pretending or putting on an act to impress others
- they will have a teachable heart, not a proud spirit

Wholeness results in the fruit of the kingdom: righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit (Romans 14:17). A lack of wholeness is one of the key reasons that many Christians are immature and weak, because they have never faced up to the issues in their past that haunt them and worked those issues through with the help of others.

Wholeness is the first step to maturity. People will never become mature sons and daughters unless they are whole and healed from the hurts of the past. We see a three stage process happening in people's lives as they journey towards greater maturity:

- **Reflect.** As wholeness comes to a person's life they begin to develop Christlike character and reflect Him and His kingdom. Their behaviour begins to line up with their calling.
- **Represent.** As a person matures, they become a trustworthy representative of the Kingdom and the church of which they are a part. They are able to be sent as part of a team and begin to share what they have learned with others.
- **Reproduce.** As a person becomes mature (Greek teleios - fully formed, complete, lacking nothing) they begin to disciple others and a process of reproduction occurs: what has taken place in their life now takes place through them in the lives of others.

Practically speaking, at Jubilee the hospital aspect of church is fulfilled in a number of different ways.

Cells - the basic unit of care

Cell groups are the basic building block of church life. Every member of Jubilee is a part of a cell and expected to play their part in cell family life. It is here that many wholeness issues are picked up and dealt with. Cell leaders are encouraged to take responsibility for the development and growth of their people and to that end they are encouraged to meet with them regularly, pray with and for them, and generally help them to work through issues of hurt and damage in their lives.

Cell life is where character weaknesses tend to become obvious. As people relax and become themselves it becomes harder for them to maintain pretence - but that's a good thing! Jesus wants to bring things into the light so that they can be dealt with and overcome, not so that we can be exposed to ridicule or disapproval. We encourage cell leaders to confront issues in people's lives and to walk through the process of healing necessary to bring wholeness in that area.

The fathering and mentoring that happen in cell are the primary means of bringing maturity. "Doing life together", coupled with fathering, results in growth in people's lives.

Freedom in Christ

As a church we regularly run Freedom in Christ courses. This programme, developed by Dr. Neil Anderson, is a thoroughly biblical approach to wholeness in all of the areas of our lives. It encourages people to think through the different areas of their life, to assess where there is perhaps bondage or unrepented sin, and then to pray that through and replace lies with truth.

Many wholeness issues are a result of believing lies about ourselves or others. Perhaps we've been told that we're useless or ugly, or we've declared ourselves failures because of past disappointments. Alternatively, we may have been involved in areas of sin that bring bondage and long-term consequences to our lives, such as alcohol abuse, pornography or promiscuity, or freemasonry.

The Freedom in Christ course is open to the whole body and run a couple of times a year. It consists of a series of weekly sessions of teaching followed by opportunities to pray through any issues raised with a trained prayer partner with a view to replacing lies with truth. It's an excellent and biblical tool in helping bring wholeness to people's lives. The materials are internationally available through their website:www.ficm.org.uk

Family Life Centre

Some people's wholeness issues are more complex and potentially difficult to work through. In these situations it is important that as a church we can support people to work through those issues with properly trained and equipped people that are specialists.

At Jubilee, the Family Life Centre provides access to a range of courses and care programmes for specific issues, such as debt and divorce care. It also has a number of trained and experienced counsellors who can work through longer term issues with complex effects on people's lives such as serious sexual abuse or childhood abandonment.

In many churches, the recourse to counselling is perhaps the only step in bringing wholeness to people's lives. In our experience, most people find wholeness through being a part of cell life and working out those issues in the family context. This means that our counselling team are focused on helping those people who have the greatest need rather than being overwhelmed with needy people from across the body.

Equipping centre

The final aspect of church life that needs to be in place for people to be effective is that of equipping - ensuring that people are trained and prepared for the work of God in the world. Many churches have little or no equipping and as a result their people are weak and ineffective. The church needs to grasp its responsibility to train and equip people so that they can be successful in reaching out to others.

And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ,

Ephesians 4:11-12

Many churches are fed a continual diet of bible teaching but much of it fails to make a difference in the lives of its people. When Paul wrote to the Ephesians he told them that the purpose of the ministry gifts, including that of the teacher, was to “equip the saints for the work of the ministry” (Ephesians 4:12). The Greek word for “equip” in that verse (katartismos) is built from the root word that is used in Matthew 4:21 of mending the nets. James and John were in the boat, with their father Zebedee, mending their nets, getting ready to go fishing. So they were correctly aligned - in the boat and under the authority of their father, and they were properly prepared - putting everything in place to ensure that when they went out to do the task (fishing) they would see success because they would not be working with unmended and ineffective nets. Equipping the saints is a matter of ensuring they are fit for purpose - correctly aligned and properly prepared - not ‘fishing’ with unmended nets.

Equipping is a combination of teaching and practical instruction that makes them fit to serve. Of course it’s important that we instruct people - we do much of that at Jubilee. Our intensive Leadership Training School runs every night of the week for three weeks each October to instruct our people in the basic principles of fathering, sonship, and the Kingdom. We offer numerous in-depth courses to study God’s word and unpack all that He has for us.

However, in addition to these teaching opportunities we also use a range of practical training and equipping techniques. We take people on outdoor adventures, we get people involved in serving others, we refurbish and caretake all of our own facilities, we take people with us on ministry trips to serve and observe, we encourage people out of their comfort zones by playing games and enjoying life together, we fast, pray and worship together as a church. In doing these things we make sure that the DNA we’re trying to reproduce is caught as well as taught. For us, “doing life together” is one of the most critical equipping techniques we use because it allows us to see how people are really doing and helps them to fully understand what we are trying to impart.

Equipping people is a three stage process, which we can see in the life of Jesus and His disciples.

- **You watch, I do.** At this stage we are equipping by allowing others to watch our approach and see how we go about the task. We are allowing them to learn how the job should be done. Jesus' disciples watched Him minister and preach on a number of occasions.
- **You do, I watch.** Here, we allow people to operate under our supervision. We let them take responsibility but we watch them closely and supervise them well. We are watching to see how they do, and giving them feedback on how things went. That feedback can then be incorporated next time to ensure improvement. Jesus allowed the disciples to operate and make mistakes (e.g. Mark 9:14-29)
- **You go and do.** When we see that people are ready, we can send them on their own. Jesus sent the disciples out on His behalf to do His work, and when they returned they rejoiced in the successes they'd seen (e.g. Luke 10:17-20). Jesus rejoiced with them, but He also used the opportunity to debrief and re-equip them - correcting errors or bringing further insight that would help them in the future.

The result of this commitment to equipping is a church that has many mature people who are able to handle leadership responsibility and carry the vision forwards.

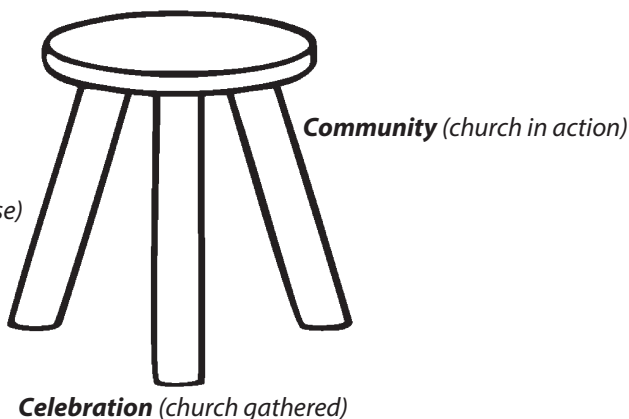
Building a solid local church

One of the great challenges of building local church is developing a functional structure that provides stability. In our experience churches can tend towards being “single-issue” or specialists and this often means that they become unstable or unbalanced. When Paul described the church as a body in 1 Corinthians 12 he pointed out that all of the different parts need to be functioning correctly in order for the body to be healthy. If one part of the body dominates then the body is unhealthy.

For example, a church might become particularly focused on social action and helping the poor. But if that important aspect of church begins to outweigh others, then the church will become unhealthy and is likely to degenerate into a charity, which does good, but has lost its connection with God’s mission. Additionally, churches like this often attract many broken or hurting people, but don’t have the means to bring them to a place of wholeness and maturity or see transformation in their lives.

Alternatively, a church might become renown for its excellent Sunday meetings and preaching, and this will attract a crowd of people. But if this is all that the church comprises, then it will fail in its mission to disciple individuals and help them grow up into mature sons and daughters. It will simply be a cognitive preaching centre and not a family.

In this important area of structuring church life we liken the church to a three-legged stool. A three-legged stool or a tripod is a very stable structure. It is able to support weight in each direction without collapsing or falling over. In this context the three legs of the church are three vital elements of church life that need to be present in order to provide stability. They are church in cell (from house to house), church in celebration (gathered together) and church in the community (reaching out to touch the world). It is vital that each of the legs are of equal length and equal strength.



Cell (church from house to house)

Healthy small groups (we call them cells, others call them home groups or life groups) are essential to the proper functioning of the church and the growth of its people. They provide a context where people can be known personally, encouraged, exhorted and corrected, and they are the basic building block of family. The agenda of these groups is doing life together, not simply bible study.

We do not believe it is possible to fulfil the Great Commission, and make mature disciples in and of the nations, without well-functioning and dynamic small groups. This is where the life of the body is generated. It's where the momentum of church life is built - in the everyday sharing of life and relationship between the people in the body.

Additionally, as a church grows it is not possible to properly exercise spiritual gifts and the contribution that every member has to make in a large gathering on Sundays. Small groups provide the context for this "body ministry" to take place, and a safe context in which people can develop and grow.

The book of Acts paints a picture of the dynamic and intimate fellowship that formed a part of the early church's life.

*And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. And all who believed were together and had all things in common. And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved. **Acts 2:42-47***

This passage highlights four areas of devotion that the early cell groups excelled in.

The Apostles' Teaching

There's a great need today for the application of scripture, rather than just the hearing of it. Although the preaching of God's word is a vital part of church life, unless that word is made flesh in our experience and day to day life it counts for nothing. Small groups are the place where we can take the taught word and make it the caught word - help it become reality in people's lives.

*Our perception of God determines the kind of people we are. Many things could shape our view of God but primarily scripture must shape it. The only single tool for the church, which has survived the centuries beyond schemes, organisations, structures, and programmes, is God's inspired word. "All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work." **2 Timothy 3:16-17***

Sound doctrine is the great need of our lives. Paul wrote to Timothy that "the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather

around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear" (2 Tim 4:3). We need to help people build their lives around the solid foundations of God's word. We need to allow His word to challenge unacceptable behaviour.

Having said that, we do not believe that cell groups should become home bible studies. Our cell leaders are not expected to preach and teach in the groups. Rather, they are expected to be able to take what is being taught in the body generally (often the Sunday morning preaching series) and connect that with people and where they are at - bringing edification. So we often spend time reiterating what was preached, exploring its implications and bringing correction where necessary. For example, following a recent bout of unacceptable behaviour in one of our cells, the leaders opened the scriptures and showed the cell group that what they were doing was wrong and needed to stop. The people received this biblical correction with joy, so that their lives could be built on scripture and not popular opinion.

The Fellowship (building family)

The church is about people – not buildings (1 Cor. 12:1-27). Genuine relationships between individuals are at the core of our faith. Church is not a religious, meeting oriented occurrence; rather it is a dynamic network of people related by their Father. The phrase "one another" is used 33 times in the New Testament. It is by implication a relational exercise! For example you can't "*Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling*" (1 Peter 4:9) whilst sitting in lines staring at a preacher.

John Wimber once remarked that "People come to church for many reasons, but they stay for only one: they make friends." This is an aspect of church that is easy to overlook because it is not structured – we can't do it sitting in meetings. And the level of sharing and fellowship encouraged by Jesus and the apostles is quite radical. For example "*[they] had everything in common. Selling their possessions and goods they gave to anyone as he had need... No one claimed that any of his possessions was his own, but they shared everything they had... There were no needy persons among them.*" (Acts 2:44-45; 4:32, 34).

The word used in Acts 2:42 for fellowship is *koinonia*. It literally means "sharing in common" or "partnership." Their whole lives were devoted to one another in service, communion, sharing, and lifestyle.

The primary thrust of our cells is to build family. We want every person that is a part of Jubilee Church to know that they are a highly valued part of God's family. To that end, the largest proportion of our cell meetings is comprised of activity that builds family. We eat together often, we play silly games, we laugh together, we go out together, we engage in activities together. We find opportunities to bless one another in the cell and to stay in contact week by week.

This particular aspect of church is probably the one that makes the biggest impact on outsiders and unbelievers. As Jesus promised, "by this will all men know that you are my disciples, if you love one another," John 13:35. For example, when a mother in our church family gives birth, the cell groups in her zone will ensure that the family is provided with meals, with house-cleaning, with whatever other support is needed in those stressful

early weeks of the baby's life. It's a tremendous testimony to the love that God has for people, and something that speaks volumes to those outside the family.

The Breaking of Bread

Rituals, as a means of remembrance, are an important part of community and family life. Breaking Bread (Luke 22:19ff, 1 Cor. 11:23ff) is one of only two rituals (the other is baptism, Matt. 28:19-20) that Jesus instituted for us and commanded us to keep. He promised that His work would restore the intimacy of food and friendship. *"Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me."* (Rev 3:20) We sit down and eat with our friends and close family. Eating is a social occasion. So the offer of eating with God is one to be welcomed with both awe and delight.

Under the new covenant the once-for-all sacrifice of Jesus for our sins ensures that we can enter into His presence free from guilt and shame. More than that, He promises to sit and eat with us and enjoy fellowship with us. So the eating of this meal is a communion – a fellowship or participation – with Christ Himself. God is present in the person of His son by the Holy Spirit when we eat bread and drink wine together.

This ritual serves as a reminder to us. We look back to the single most important event in the history of the universe, the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, and we remember all that this means for us. Salvation, forgiveness, and sanctification are all ours only because of this wonderful act. Whatever happens around us: cultural change, personal suffering, or worldly uncertainty, the sacrifice of Christ for us is the core and root of what we're about and what unites us.

We encourage our cells to regularly remember Jesus through breaking bread and eating together. There is something special about eating together. The original context of the first "Communion" in Matthew 26:26-29 was a celebratory meal with friends, not a religious service. There's a reverence that's required when we break bread because we're remembering the death and resurrection of Jesus, but at the same time it's a celebration with friends - a moment of rejoicing and thankfulness.

Prayer

The New Testament church is saturated in prayer. The word pray appears 33 times in Acts, and 58 times in Paul's letters to the churches. The early church devoted themselves – gave themselves completely over – to the things mentioned in Acts 2:42, and nowhere more so than in respect of prayer. This is an immense challenge to us. Many of us are simply "too busy" to even contemplate praying for very long, and yet the truth of the matter is that no great work of God is ever accomplished by any other means than prayer.

Prayer connects us with the Father and puts our lives into their proper perspective.

We encourage our cells to be praying communities. Praying for one another, for the world and for the greater work of the church family. It's during these times that we can see people encountering the Father, operating in the gifts of the Holy Spirit, and deepening their sense of family through ministering to one another.

Other resources

As a church we have devoted a lot of energy to developing resources for training and implementing great cell groups. You can get hold of these through our web site, www.jubilee.co in the resources section.

Community (church in action)

The second crucial “leg” of a healthy church is that of Church in the Community - reaching out to touch and change the world around us. This is where an understanding of the gospel of the Kingdom really becomes important. If we see our mission as simply to preach a message of salvation to the unsaved, then community action will be low on our priority list. However, if we see our mission as preaching the gospel of God’s rule and order, and the discipling of nations, then engaging with our communities will be a key objective for us.

*But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare. **Jeremiah 29:7***

God wants to transform and change our communities, our cities and our nations. The way in which He wants to do this is through His people becoming influencers - salt and light (Matthew 5:13-16) - in every sphere of society, from education and politics, through media and the arts to business, the family and religion. Fully understanding the scope of this call radically changes the way we see the church’s mission. Rather than existing to gather as many people as possible into a building on a Sunday morning, the church exists as the vehicle through which the message of the Kingdom becomes a reality in the world.

Reaching out to our communities is more than simply running an Alpha course. Although that kind of outreach is important, we also need to see transformation come through more widespread and strategic initiatives that engage with the fabric of our community and its local government. God’s Kingdom is one of order, and we are seeking to bring His order - His peace and righteousness - to every area of our communities, from the playground to the boardroom, the council chamber to the social housing project.

Community engagement has both a practical and a strategic direction. Strategically we need to be engaging with the men and women of influence and power in our communities and cities, those in government, business and commerce. Although we would ultimately love to see them know salvation, our primary means of engagement with them is wanting to see our town blessed and transformed. We are happy to engage in and initiate projects that fulfil this purpose.

At a practical day to day level we are involved in literally dozens of different initiatives that aim to touch and transform our communities - the Kingdom of God is like a great tree, grown from a small seed (Matthew 13:31-32). Examples include:

- Mother and baby groups
- Business mentoring
- Food programmes for needy families

- House refurbishments
- Finance and debt advice
- Planning to open a mainstream school
- Education programmes for troubled teenagers
- Dance groups for local children
- Linking local churches and businesses

In all of these cases we are working to see transformation come through the influence of the Kingdom in our town. As we reach out to bless others so the love of God touches their lives and people are drawn to Him.

God's heart for the poor and marginalised

Unpalatable though it may seem, the Bible is clear that the poor hold a special place in the heart of God, and that oppression of or a closing of the eyes towards the poor is one of the most serious offences towards Him. The Old Testament Law was designed so that even though misfortune befell people they never became beggars or slaves. Offerings for the poor were legislated and the concept of jubilee was instituted.

Consider some passages of God's wrath from the Old Testament that indicate the strength of His feeling towards the underdog and the disadvantaged.

*"Hear this word, you cows of Bashan on Mount Samaria, you women who **oppress the poor and crush the needy** and say to your husbands, "Bring us some drinks!" The Sovereign LORD has sworn by his holiness: "The time will surely come when you will be taken away with hooks, the last of you with fish-hooks" **Amos 4:1-2***

*"This is what the LORD Almighty, the God of Israel, says: Reform your ways and your actions, and I will let you live in this place. Do not trust in deceptive words and say, "This is the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD!" If you really change your ways and your actions and deal with each other justly, if you do not **oppress the alien, the fatherless or the widow** and do not shed innocent blood in this place, and if you do not follow other gods to your own harm, then I will let you live in this place, in the land I gave to your forefathers for ever and ever" **Jeremiah 7:3-7***

*"Now this was the sin of your sister Sodom: She and her daughters were **arrogant, overfed and unconcerned; they did not help the poor and needy**. They were haughty and did detestable things before me. Therefore I did away with them as you have seen" **Ezekiel 16:49-50***

*"Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen: to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to **set the oppressed free** and break every yoke? Is it not to **share your food with the hungry** and to **provide the poor wanderer with shelter**-- when you see the naked, to clothe him, and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood? Then your light will break forth like the dawn, and your healing will quickly appear; then your righteousness will go before you, and the glory of the LORD will be your rear guard.*

Then you will call, and the LORD will answer; you will cry for help, and he will say: Here am I. "If you do away with the yoke of oppression, with the pointing finger and malicious talk, and if you spend yourselves on behalf of the hungry and satisfy the needs of the oppressed, then your light will rise in the darkness, and your night will become like the noonday"

Isaiah 58:6-10

Perhaps you are challenged by the thought that in God's eyes the sin of Sodom was not simply homosexual practices, which are easy to turn our noses up at, but the oppression of the poor and needy. The message gets no easier when we arrive with Jesus in the New Testament. His exhortation to us, and that of the apostles is just as strong. The marginalized and excluded are to be embraced and included in God's caring community.

For example, Luke 4:18 (good news to the poor), Matthew 19:21 (sell your possessions and give to the poor), Luke 14:13-14 (when giving a banquet invite the poor and needy), Luke 19:8-9 (Zaccheus, giving to the poor – salvation has come), Matthew 25:31-46 (sheep and goats), James 1:27 (pure religion – to look after widows and orphans), and James 2:5-6 (God has chosen the poor to be rich in faith).

The church has a special responsibility to the most needy in the world. Even in first-world nations such as the UK and the USA there is much poverty and need. The basic dignity of the individual is something that God places a high priority on, because every person is made in His image. Part of the church's role is to lift the needy from the dust heap and restore their dignity. While we have been writing this booklet Jubilee Church has been involved in a house refurbishment project for a local family whose accommodation was derelict and living conditions very poor. We completely refurbished and redecorated their home for them. The father commented afterwards, "You have restored my family's dignity. We are no longer ashamed to open our door to others." That's church in the community functioning as it should.

Celebration (church gathered)

The last of our three legs is Celebration: the church gathering regularly to celebrate the Father and all that He is doing.

There's an important reason why we've left this leg to last. Many churches only have this leg. They simply move from one Sunday gathering to the next with little life or momentum in between. For us, however, the weekly celebration is just that - it's a cause to gather and celebrate everything that's happening in the other 165 hours of the week. The celebration is meant to be the cherry on the cake, not the cake! It's meant to be the reflection of the life that exists in the body, not a once-a-week opportunity to try and inject some life into the corpse. Our experience is that when cell life and community life are functioning strongly, the weekly celebration explodes with excitement, because it is fuelled by the momentum of all that is happening during the week.

We see the weekly celebration as fulfilling three primary purposes: corporate worship, preaching and teaching, and sustaining family life.

Corporate worship

When we gather to celebrate, we are primarily celebrating all that God has done in us and through us. Peter tells us that we *“are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light”* (1 Peter 2:9). Praise is part of our purpose. We are to be worshippers in lifestyle and in celebration.

When the church gathers worship should lie at the heart of the experience. The Father and the Son are worthy above all others and our praise of them should be loud and exuberant.

True worship

We need an appropriate definition of worship. As a church we often talk about worship as being, “a life given.” This is a good definition, but it misses something perhaps. The word most often used in the Psalms for worship simply means, “to bow down, to prostrate oneself, as a sign of honour and obeisance.” It’s a recognition of our place, a sign of submission and rightful self-assessment.

The key is that it is all about the one whom we are worshipping, rather than about the worshippers. Modern society’s obsession with the individual means that many modern worship songs focus on our feelings rather than God’s greatness. Although it’s appropriate to reflect our feelings in worship (and the Psalms are filled with such expressions) the primary focus of praise and worship is Jesus and exalting Him.

For this reason we need to ensure that the lyrics of songs and the themes they contain are solidly Christ-centred, rather than weak and emotional expressions of feeling. As a church we love many of the modern worship songs and sing them regularly. But there are some which simply don’t meet the criteria for Christ-exalting praise. Many of the old hymns were written in a time when the general population couldn’t read or write. As a result, they provided a way for people to learn the great truths about God by singing them in church each week. This means that they are full of great theology, and always pointing towards the Father. We must make sure that in our enjoyment of new musical styles and expressions we don’t lose the main focus.

Jesus said that true worshippers:

- Worship The Father: it’s relational, reverent, filled with awe and wonder and intimacy
- In Spirit: beyond our flesh - not just expressions of emotionalism, but deep calling to deep
- In Truth: an issue of faith and the Word - sound in theology and thoroughly biblical

Experiential and profound

Although we want to be sound doctrinally in our worship we don’t want to be dry and dreary. True worship is experiential - we are expecting to meet with the living God.

The deficiency of some of the old hymn-singing styles of worship is that there was no experience of God. The words were true, but there was no element of encounter with the Father.

Our corporate worship times at Jubilee are characterised by both high praise - singing, dancing, shouting, and flag-waving as expressions of our joy in the Father - but also by profound worship - dedication, awe, reverence, kneeling and bowing down. We don't simply want to sing about God, but to meet Him in our singing so that we are touched and changed.

Worship and adoration then, are a primary reason for gathering to celebrate each week.

Preaching and teaching

The second essential element of celebration is to preach God's work and impart His truth to people's lives. In an increasingly visual society, where less people read and the culture around us has great power to shape our thinking, it is critical that we preach solid biblical truth for people's lives to be built upon.

Word based

*I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom: preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching. For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths. **2 Timothy 4:1-4***

Paul knew that people's appetite for the truth of God would wane and dwindle. He knew that they would gather around them people who told them what they wanted to hear rather than what they needed to hear. This is the age in which we live. People are largely convinced that they know best, and they are bombarded with "advice" in many forms all of the time.

Sadly, Bible reading is a low priority for many Christians, and as a result they don't know the Word and they don't build their lives upon it. Popular culture and ideas have become far more prevalent than biblical truth.

So it's vital that as the church we "preach the word" - all of the time. Whether things are good or bad, easy or difficult. At Jubilee we pretty much always have a preaching slot on a Sunday morning. We have a range of different speakers with different styles, but we are continually speaking the truth to our people and we encourage cell groups to take hold of those teachings and work through them in the week that follows. We often run a series of related teachings over a period of weeks, on a theme or topic, and we vary these series from very practical to more expository. In all of this our aim is to ensure our people are well-equipped from the Word to to live their lives.

Christ exalting

*To me, though I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, **Ephesians 3:8***

When Paul speaks here about his mission in life, he says that it is to preach the unfathomable riches of Christ and to sound the good news about Christ. We must never be distracted from this central purpose. Christ should be the centre of our preaching. I suggest we live in times of great opportunity and great potential danger in respect of this ministry. The expository preaching of the word of God about Christ is in danger of being marginalized and sidelined. People don't want to hear that stuff any longer; they prefer lighter homiletics, which gently encourage them to be good people in a needy world. Of course we need scripture to be applied to our lives, but a foundational apostolic commission is to preach Christ crucified, and His inexhaustible riches.

The riches of Christ include:

"...resurrection from the death of sin, victorious enthronement with Christ in the heavenlies, reconciliation with God, incorporation with Jewish believers in his new society, the end of hostility and the beginning of peace, access to the Father through Christ and by the Spirit, membership of His kingdom and household, being an integral part of his dwelling place among men, and all this only a foretaste of yet more riches to come, namely the riches of the glory of the inheritance which God will give to all His people on the last day."

John Stott

"The unsearchable riches of Christ suggests the picture of a reservoir so deep that soundings cannot reach the bottom of it. No limit can, therefore, be put to its resources."

C. Leslie Mitton

As we said above, at Jubilee we vary the style and content of preaching. Our experience is that people today are as hungry for expository preaching about Christ and His riches as they are for keys and wisdom for living. Both types of preaching are necessary, and Christ should always be exalted in what we share.

Applied to life

Sadly, for some churches, the expository preaching of scripture comes at the cost of application in our lives. They are able to preach and explain predestination in all its mystery, but unable to teach their people anything that helps them to live a life worthy of the calling that they've received (Phil. 1:27).

The purpose of preaching and teaching is twofold: to enlighten the mind and change the heart. We want people to be sound in understanding, but we also want people to be changed in their behaviour and attitudes. Maturity is a result of both of these things happening in a person's life.

At Jubilee we are often preaching about lifestyle and foundational issues. We speak often about such issues as gossip, relationships, the power of our tongues, sonship, fathering,

the Kingdom of God, and our engagement with the world and our workplaces. We recently finished a series on loving the Lord with all of our heart, soul, mind and strength and focused on each area of life to make sure that we are biblically sound in such things as physical health and wellbeing.

Preaching then, is a primary reason for gathering together and it needs to be both biblically sound and applicable to life.

Sustaining family life

Understanding the church as a family means that a third key reason for gathering is to build family and momentum on our mission together. It's an opportunity for the buzz and vibe of a larger meeting to build excitement in people for all that God is doing. At Jubilee we do this in a variety of ways.

Laughter and joy

Firstly, our celebrations are a place of laughter and joy. We frequently begin our Sunday meetings with an activity, or a game, or a competition that involves everybody. These vary from quizzes to singing competitions, from sharing stories with one another to human pyramid building. The purpose of this is to break down the "Sunday service" mentality - we've come to a meeting. We want people to feel they've gathered with the family rather than that they've come to a religious event. So we intentionally provide lots of relational time in our celebrations to generate laughter and build family with one another.

News and information

Additionally, the celebration is an opportunity to share about what is happening in church life. By this, we don't mean "The Notices," in which a bored person reads a list of activities for the coming week. This element of our celebrations is about building momentum within the body for all that God has called us to do.

As a Resource Church, Jubilee has a huge amount of activity. This means that at our celebrations we have a great deal of information to share - sometimes as much as forty minutes of our celebration can be devoted to sharing what is happening or what has already happened.

In order to make that amount of information palatable it's essential that we are creative in how we share, and that we maintain a high standard of excellence in all that we do. Many of our teams overseeing different ministries and events will put together video feedback or promotions. These are engaging and exciting, and often humorous. Others might decide to dramatise their announcement, with a skit to accompany the information. These different tools and techniques ensure that what we have to share comes across as vibrant and exciting, rather than "just another event or meeting".

The effect of sharing all of this news and information is to inspire people: we're a family and we're an army, we're on a mission together, God is doing great things among us, and so on. Momentum is built and people are inspired.

A final word

In Revelation 21 the Apostle John sees a vision of what is to come. God's people are gathered to be with Him and they dwell together with Him forever. At that time, there will be no need for the church as she exists now, with the structures and programmes and organisation needed to fulfil the commission to preach the gospel of the Kingdom.

In the meantime however, the church on earth is the vehicle God has chosen to gather His bride. It is the means by which people are nurtured, built up, equipped, impacted and transformed so that they can be sent to declare the good news of the Kingdom, and to disciple the nations under the Lordship of Jesus Christ.

Our hope is that this booklet encourages, inspires and equips you to fulfil your part in building solid local churches that change communities for God's glory.

