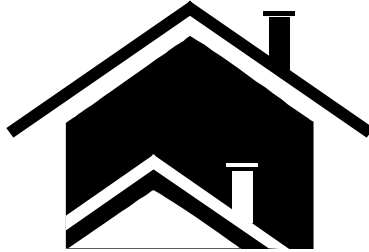


# House Church Planting: Multiplying Colonies of Christ



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*Joseph L. Cartwright*

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## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am indebted to many Brothers and Sisters in the Lord who have poured into my ministry personally and into this practical manual.

I want to take my hat off to the leaders and churches of the Dallas Baptist Association. You have given a place for a radical, young house church planter to push the boundaries of what church planting will look like in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. I am grateful to the Lord for the opportunity to serve with in this capacity.

Thank you to Dr. Gary Hearon for your support of the vision God has given me and for your prayers.

Tim Ahlen, thank you for knocking off some of my rough edges and for your tireless efforts on my behalf. Thank you for reading and rereading this manuscript with a balanced combination of grace and ‘the bleeding pen of correction.’

For those who have read and spoke into this work: Steve Atkerson, Dan Hubbell, Dennis Hampton, Tony and Felicity Dale, Lindsay Cofield, John White, Dean VanDruff, Mike Steele, Tim Pelley, David Watson, and Paul Watson. Your wisdom and encouragement have done much to advance my understanding of the beautiful Bride of Christ and how new colonies of Christ are raised up.

To my parents, Bob and Carol, and my sister Lisa. You taught me what living together as the family of God really looks like.

To Valerie and Elisabeth Joy, my wife and daughter, for teaching me what it means to be a husband and father. Thank you Valerie for listening to me drone on and on about house churches and joining me in planting them to the glory of God.

Jesus, this manual is yours. Use it to engulf the planet with new colonies of believers and to bring glory to your name.

Joseph Cartwright  
Dallas, Texas  
May, 2001

## INTRODUCTION

In John 1:14 we see how Christ came to earth, became flesh, and lived among us. He was the colonist of heaven who was sent to build His church. When He ascended to the Father he left a group of followers who would be the first wave of colonists to venture out into all the world carrying the message that He taught them. They were given the charge that as they were going about their lives they were to disciple the nations, baptize them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, and teach them to obey all He commanded (Matthew 28:19-20). He told them they would be empowered by the Holy Spirit to be His witnesses from Jerusalem to the uttermost parts of the planet (Acts 1:8). These colonists were then scattered throughout the earth, proclaiming Christ as they went (Acts 8:4; 11:19-21). Wherever they went they formed outposts of Christ which met primarily in homes. These intrepid followers of Christ suffered hardship, and even lost their lives, so that the story of Christ could make its way throughout the earth. They were an apostolic people sent out by Christ Himself to make His name known wherever they went.

We are an apostolic people empowered with the same pioneering Holy Spirit who was given on the day of Pentecost. We have been scattered throughout the earth to proclaim the message of Jesus Christ and to start colonies of Christ in our neighborhoods, businesses, families, and wherever we may go. Jesus Christ is building His Church and He has chosen to use everyday, ordinary men and women like you and me. The question that begs to be answered is, “Am I willing to let Jesus use me in this extraordinary endeavor?”

This manual is written with the hope that all who would answer ‘yes’ to the question above would be equipped to start Biblical house churches, or what I affectionately call little colonies of Christ. I pray that through these pages you will sense the encouragement of the Lord that you are truly sent by Him into the world to begin a new outpost of the Kingdom.

One last word – Jesus said, “Peace be with you; as the Father has sent Me, I also send you (John 20:21).” May the peace of Jesus be with you as you are equipped for the task to which you have been called. Our confidence is in Him alone and those whom He calls, He empowers for the task.

### *The Journey Begins...*

Pray-Hear-Obey. This is a simple, reproducible process for planting house churches. It shows us a complete process. Praying to the Lord. Hearing Him speak to us. Obeying what He tells us. Each part of the journey of planting a home church encompasses these three steps. When we are deciding who to share Jesus with we use these three steps. When we are meeting the needs of the lost people God gives us we use these three steps. When we are discovering the best ways to disciple the new believers these steps should be used. When we just don't know what to do next; yep, you guessed it. So, as we continue with the mileposts that we will cross on the journey to plant a colony of Jesus in a home, let us not forget to pray, hear, and obey. Only then can we be assured of the leading of the Holy Spirit.

### ***Milepost #1 Destroying Satan's Works Through Prayer and Fasting (Priority: Soaking the task and everyone involved in prayer)***

Prayer has the power and ability to shatter the works of darkness and scatter the spirits of darkness. We must spend serious time in prayer and fasting (1 Thessalonians 5:17) before we launch out in God's work of birthing a new church. In Acts 1:14 the followers of Christ were in the upper room "continually devoting themselves to prayer." In Acts 2 we see the Holy Spirit coming upon them. The promise of Acts 1:8 is then initiated. Power was given by the Holy Spirit to be witnesses of Christ. It was after this that the great expansion of the gospel began. To initiate the sort of prayer that destroys the works of Satan:

1. Pray for yourself that you might have boldness and power (Acts 4:29-30; Ephesians 6:18-20), creativity, wisdom (James 1:5) and singleness of mind and purpose. Put on the full armor of God (Ephesians 6:13-17). Pray that God will direct your steps in planting a new house church.
2. Pray for the lost to whom you will be sent. Pray that they will be set free from the blindness of Satan that keeps them from seeing the light of the truth of Christ (2 Corinthians 4:3-4). Pray for responsive hearts, ears, and eyes (Matthew 13:15). Pray against the power of the spiritual forces in the lives of the unbelievers God sends you to reach (Ephesians 6:12). Pray that they will be saved (Romans 10:1).
3. Have others pray and fast with you and for you (Matthew 18:19-20; Acts 13:1-4; Colossians 4:1-4).
4. Pray the word of God (Scriptures) and claim His promises (Hebrews 4:12; 2 Peter 3:9).

#### Ideas:

1. Prayerwalking in your neighborhood or workplace for relationships with the lost in those areas.
2. Enlist prayer partners and keep them informed by e-mail requests and updates.
3. Gather weekly with the prayer partners that you enlist locally.

## **Milepost #2 Identifying and Engaging Lost People (Priority: Personal Evangelism)**

We want to find and identify people who do not know Jesus. Then we want to find ways to present Jesus to them.

### 1. Identifying Lost People

- A. Identify lost or unchurched people you already know (Ask the Lord to bring them to remembrance and write them down)
  1. Family
  2. Friends
  3. Co-workers
  4. Neighbors
  5. People in businesses you frequent (Gas station, grocery store, etc.)
- B. Begin new relationships with others who do not know Christ. *It should be stated here that these relationships are to be true friendships, not just contacts for the sake of evangelism. People know the difference!*
  1. Start prayerwalking in your neighborhood and ask the Lord to lead you to neighbors who do not know Jesus. Talk to them when you see them outside.
  2. Find those at work who you don't know and be intentional about meeting them.
  3. Take your family to a local park to play together. Invite families who are there to play games with your family.
  4. Invite neighbors to your house for a grilled hot dog supper. Send them an invitation and ask them to RSVP.
  5. Hang out in a local coffee shop or bookstore. Strike up conversations with those present.
  6. Go to High School or College sports events. Talk to and enjoy the game with those seated around you.
  7. Join the Home Owner's Association in your neighborhood or the PTA chapter at your child's school.
  8. Attend "town hall meetings" at your local courthouse or city hall.
  9. Host "open forums" or discussions on Christianity. These are simply times where you meet with interested people and discuss the teachings of Christ and other issues related to Christianity. These can be held in coffee houses, bookstores, or in your own home.
  10. Basically, we utilize every opportunity we have to build relationships. It is a part of our on-going lifestyle.
- C. Pray for the Lord to raise up a "person of peace" (Luke 10:1-20) –

Dr. Tom Wolf of Golden Gate Baptist Theological Seminary defines this person as “A person sovereignly prepared by God to receive the gospel before you arrive.” (See **Appendix A: Persons of Peace**)

Examples in Scripture: Cornelius (Acts 10), Lydia (Acts 16:11-15), Philippian Jailor (Acts 16:25-34)

Persons of Peace are leaders of friendship or kinship networks. Because of their influence (not necessarily their wealth, good looks, or worldly power) they open doors to other groups of lost people among their family, friends, neighbors, and co-workers. If the church planter can win the “person of peace” to the Lord, then they can work with the new believer to penetrate new niches of lost people. This new believer might also open up their home for a new church to begin as their friends and family are reached. It should be kept in mind that these Persons of Peace aren’t necessarily the rich, affluent, or the “community-leaders”. Be open for the “least of these”.

## 2. Engaging Lost People

Ideas:

- A. Pray for the lost people you have identified by name on a daily basis.
  - 1. That their eyes will be opened to the truth of the gospel.
  - 2. That their ears will be receptive to hear the gospel.
  - 3. That their hearts will be good soil for the gospel (Matthew 13:23).
  - 4. That Satan’s power to keep them from Christ would be broken (Matthew 12:22-29; Ephesians 6:12).
- B. Invite them to dinner in your home. This helps deepen the relationship in a non-threatening manner. Natural conversations about Christ can emerge more naturally over a meal. It also helps prepare them for meeting in the home later for house church gathering times.
- C. Meet their needs as they emerge and are shared.

When the lost friend shares a problem, ask if you can pray with them about it. Watch for and ask about the answer to prayer. This provides an awesome opportunity for God to make Himself known in radical, powerful, answered prayer.

When you can, provide help for their need. Ask the Lord if He wants you to intervene. If so, then obey what He tells you to do. Be willing to give of your time, financial resources, and abilities to meet their needs. God can then use you in tangible and powerful ways to bring them closer to Christ through servant evangelism.

Be especially aware of meeting needs when major change comes to their lives i.e. birth of baby, sickness, loss of loved one, loss of job, etc....

Do not be fearful to pray for supernatural miracles of the Lord. God is well able to use them to get the attention of those who do not know Him. Jesus demonstrated this often in His own ministry.

D. Spend time with them on common points of interest i.e. hobbies, sports, neighborhood crime watch, etc...

E. Invite them into your home to experience the love of Jesus alive in the Body in the weekly gathering time. Jesus told us that our love for one another would impact those who don't know Him. In fact our love for one another is a distinguishing characteristic of showing we are His disciples (John 13:34-35). See also 1 Corinthians 14:23-25

F. Pray for and brainstorm about other creative ways to engage the people God has given you to evangelize:

-Invite them to your child's birthday party.

-Go with them and their family to a park for a 'Family Fun Day'.

-Ask them to help you with a weekend project around your home.

### 3. Presenting the Gospel -

Praying for and building relationships with lost people is of utmost importance. However, these things are not adequate in and of themselves to bring them into the Kingdom. We must present to them the claims of Christ and call them to make a decision to follow Him. Here are helpful insights/ideas for bringing about this transition to sharing the claims of Christ:

- A. Share your testimony of what Christ has done and is doing in your life. John 9 gives a good illustration of this way of witnessing to the salvation of the Lord. The blind man simply shared what Jesus had done. Mark 5:1-20 is another wonderful example. The demoniac was sent back to his people by Jesus to give testimony to what He had done.
- B. Invite some of them to your home (or go to one of their homes) for a showing of the Jesus film. This will give the story and claims of Christ in a clear and visual way. After the film is over, ask if any of those present would be interested in continuing to study through the Book of Luke (on which the film is based) for a four week period. If any agree, then proceed in this manner:
  1. Have them read a chapter of Luke each day until the first of the weekly meetings. That would be chapters 1-6. Have them record an insight or two from each chapter that they might want to share in the first weekly meeting. Meet on the night of the 7<sup>th</sup> day to discuss the insights.
  2. Have them read chapters 7-12, record insights from each chapter, and be ready to share during the second meeting time. Meet on the 14<sup>th</sup> night to discuss the insights.
  3. Have them read chapters 13-18, record insights from each chapter, and be ready to share during the third meeting time. Meet on the night of the 21<sup>st</sup> day to discuss the insights.
  4. Have them read chapters 19-24, record insights, and be ready to share during the meeting time. Meet on the night of the 28<sup>th</sup> day.

5. After the sharing part of the 4<sup>th</sup> meeting time:
    - A. Share your testimony.
    - B. Share a brief gospel presentation.
    - C. Ask if some desire to follow Christ as Savior and Lord.
    - D. Close by praying with all who desire to know the Lord.
  6. Continue meeting in a home with those who accept the Lord (and those who aren't ready, but desire to continue meeting).
- C. Invite your lost friends to read a book that gives a clear gospel presentation. Meet with them over coffee to talk about the book. See if they are interested in discovering more about Christ and invite them to your home for Bible Study.
  - D. Invite them to an evangelistic event that you know will be happening soon. Debrief with them afterwards about what was shared. Be sensitive to the leading of the Holy Spirit to see if they are ready to commit to follow Christ.
  - E. Pray to the Lord for other creative and powerful ways to share the message of Christ and call for a decision to follow Him.

Endnotes:

The idea of using the Jesus film and book of Luke came from Dennis Hampton at the Kansas-Nebraska Convention of Southern Baptists.

Resources:

See [www.servantevangelism.com](http://www.servantevangelism.com) for ideas

***Milepost #3 Growing Those Who Come to the Lord (Priority: Making Disciples of Christ/Teaching Them To Observe All Christ Taught)***

Those who have decided to follow Christ need to know Him deeper. It is important that they enter into a process of discipleship that will cause them to grow in their knowledge and experience of Him. This discipling should always be done in the context of relationships. There are various areas of study and practice that the new believers need to have in place:

1. A study of the Book of John is a good beginning. This will help them grow in their understanding of the life and teachings of Christ Himself. This could be done one-on-one or in a small group. This study might also be good in the weekly house church meetings that will now begin with the new converts. It can be done in a participative format that allows room for discussion, discovery, and application of the Scriptures to real life situations.
2. Foundational Teachings (**See Appendix B: Foundational Teachings**) These teachings should also be put in place in the life of each new convert.

Those who come to Christ also need to follow Christ in Scriptural water baptism. This is their first step of obedience and evidence of their commitment to follow Christ and participate in the Body of Christ. This act of obedience can be done by any believer and can take place in a pond, pool, or any other body of water. In the Baptist tradition, baptism is an ordinance of the church. Any church, no matter how young or how small, has the authority to baptize those who come to Christ.

Remember, the process of discipleship is just beginning and will be a life-long journey. Don't rush! Disciple the new converts with patience, love, and, by all means, enjoy it!

Work alongside the converts to win their friends, family, and others to the Lord. This way they will learn early to reproduce themselves through evangelism. Herein lie the relationships that will help form new home churches in the future.

When they begin to win people, they can then reproduce the process of discipleship that they have already begun. They can disciple those who are newer in the faith.

It is possible that other Christians will want to join with you in the planting of the new house church. Make sure they are grounded in the foundational teachings as found in Appendix B. Never assume that just because someone knows Christ that they have been taught and disciplined in the basics of the Christian faith. It is important for all the believers in the church to have this proper foundation in place so all can move into maturity together.

(Are you Praying-Hearing-Obeying all along the way in this journey of the birth of a new house church? Remember we talked about how important this was at the beginning of this journey.)

***Milepost #4 Meeting in Homes and Other Places Throughout the Week (Priority: Forming Genuine Christian Community)***

It is important to remember at this point that ‘having church’ occurs anytime Christians are in community together (Matthew 18:20). It is not just a once a week time. There should be multiple times in a week where the believers gather, talk on the phone, and/or email each other. These contacts help community life to emerge more naturally. The gathering together for the ‘meeting’ in the home each week should be an overflow of the relationships that have been continued throughout the week.

A few thoughts on forming true community:

- A. True Christian community can’t be programmed. Relationships are the basis for all the church does.
- B. It doesn’t just happen. It is formed out of struggle, transparency, and relating to one another.
- C. It involves unity of mind, love, spirit, purpose and humility (Philippians 2:1-4)
- D. Community begins first in the individual homes. Parents and children need to study the Bible, pray, and worship together so that they can be unified. When this occurs in individual families, all will learn how to share with the Body of Christ as an extended family.
- E. Conflict will come. Matthew 18:15-35 can help us respond properly to one another. We should seek reconciliation in all beaches of the unity that God desires to establish.

What do we do when we meet together? Here are some Scriptures that help clarify:

Acts 2:42-47 – This passage gives us some clues as to what happens in house church gatherings.

- A. Devote yourselves to the apostle’s teaching (Vs 42) – Study the Bible together. This is best through Interactive Bible Study. Robert Fitts gives some pointers in his book *The Church in the House: A Return to Simplicity*:

- Begin with prayer that all would be edified.
- It is not essential for all to have a Bible, since everyone can share the same Bible. (*Ideally everyone should have their own Bible.*)
- Appoint a leader, but not a teacher (*though directive teaching by someone with that gift needs to happen at times*).
- Read around the circle. Those who don’t want to read can pass their turn on to another.
- Read without trying to provoke discussion.
- Invite interruptions for comments and questions.
- Keep on track. Discuss the passage being read.

- Do not let one person dominate the discussion.
- Be sensitive about when to conclude.
- End with a time of prayer and praise.

(Pg. 99, italics mine)

B. Fellowship (Vs 42) – Enjoy each other’s company, play together, talk about what the Lord is doing in your lives.

C. Breaking of bread (Vs 42) – Celebrate the Lord’s Supper as a full meal.

D. Prayer (Vs 42) – Pray for each other’s needs. Share answers to prayers. Pray for missions, ministries, and unreached people groups. Pray for miracles to take place (Vs 43). Pray for the sick (James 5:14-16).

Pray, Pray, Pray!

E. Share financial resources (Vs 44-45) – Meet the financial needs of those in the Body. Give money to missions and ministry. Support itinerant workers who come through to equip the Body for ministry and edification.

F. Meet with each other informally throughout the week in various places (Vs 46) – In other church meetings (the temple), in other’s homes (house to house), in restaurants or homes over a meal (taking their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart).

G. Praise God (Vs 47) – have a time of praise and worship with music, testimonies, sharing of spiritual gifts, prayers, poetry, and personal ministry to one another.

H. Essentially each time we gather there should emerge a 1 Corinthians 14:26 meeting. It should be participatory, open to all present to contribute, and spiritual gifts heavy (meaning that all should function according to the gifts the Spirit has given). The Holy Spirit sets the agenda in this type of meeting. Though certain elements may be pre-planned, there is freedom to follow the Holy Spirit if He changes those plans. “But let all things be done properly and in an orderly manner.” (1 Corinthians 14:40) Read 1 Corinthians 14.

House churches have some distinct characteristics that are helpful to understand. **(See Appendix C: House Church Distinctives).**

Practice the traditions that were passed down by the apostles as found in the Scriptures **(See Appendix D: New Testament Apostolic Traditions).**

Each type of church has its strengths and weaknesses. Larger, traditional churches do. Cell churches do. House churches as well. All are composed of members of the Bride of Christ. All of God’s people, no matter what type of church they are a part of, are beautiful in the eyes of the Lord. Embrace all types of churches in fellowship, but seek to retain your character as a house church.

The house churches that are planted should have relationships with other churches. The independent mindedness of many house church proponents has put a ‘black-eye’ on the movement of the Lord in homes. It is advantageous to gather with larger bodies of believers in the citywide church. This can be through house church gatherings on a monthly or quarterly basis where multiple house churches unite for

celebrative worship, retreats, and/or other times of equipping with the apostolic equipping ministries of the apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers. It may include going on mission trips with other, larger churches. The possibilities are endless. The key is that a single church does not become isolationist. Fellowshiping with other believers outside of the individual house church reminds each one that the Body of Christ encompasses a worldwide movement and that it takes all parts of the Body to reach our planet before the return of Christ.

Endnote:

1. Fitts, Robert. The Church in the House A Return to Simplicity (Salem, OR: Preparing the Way Publishers), 2001.

Resources:

1. Barrett, Lois. Building the House Church (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press), 1986.
2. Lea, Thomas D. The New Testament: Its Background and Message. (Nashville: Broadman and Holman Publishers), 1996.

**Milepost #5: Identifying and Training Emerging Leaders (Priority: Leadership Development)**

At this milepost it is important to include the equipping ministries of Ephesians 4:11-12. These ministries, especially apostles and prophets, can help the church in its infant stages. They help establish the church on Christ the Foundation (**See Appendix E: Christ the Foundation or Radical Christocentrism**). Of course, their ministry is needed, and should be utilized, throughout the maturing stages and seasons of the church. They can help in recognizing and training leadership in the churches (including elders/overseers/pastors and deacons). (**See Appendix F: House Church Leadership**)

As the new believers are disciplined and begin reproducing themselves in evangelism, discipleship and ministry, God will begin to identify those who He is setting apart for leadership roles. Here are a number of thoughts on emerging leadership:

1. All leaders are servants (Mark 10:42-45). Jesus believed this, taught this, and embodied this in His own life.
2. 2 Timothy 2:2 – “And the things that you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, these entrust to faithful men, who will be able to teach others also.” All leaders are to be faithful men and women who are reproducing themselves in others.
3. Elders/overseers/pastors and deacons will meet the qualifications set out in Scripture. They should not be appointed merely because it will make them feel better, give them a boost in self-esteem, or because they won a popularity contest. The qualifications are clearly set out in the Bible.
4. Pray for wisdom in recognizing those who God is raising up. We shouldn’t place someone in leadership too hastily.
5. Leaders are identified by how they are functioning already. If God has gifted them to function in a certain way, then they will naturally function according to that gifting. In other words, it will be part of their spiritual DNA. The church needs to recognize their leadership that is already taking shape and encourage them to continue in it.

Ideas for training leaders:

1. Study the leadership style of Jesus and Paul as found in the Scriptures. Find helpful resources to supplement the Scripture portions.
2. Let them lead in a ‘hands on’ environment. Use this process:
  - A. Show them the task.
  - B. Let them help you do the task.
  - C. Let them lead while you help them.
  - D. Let them lead by themselves.
3. Take them through a book on Christian leadership.  
*Spiritual Leadership* by J. Oswald Sanders  
*The Making of a Leader* by Frank Damazio

***Milepost #6: Fruit Bearing More Fruit (Priority: Reproduction of disciples, leaders, and churches.)***

John 15 gives a wonderful teaching of Jesus on fruit bearing. When we are in Christ (the True Vine) we (the branches) will bear fruit. We will go through times of pruning (hardship, discipline by the father) to produce more fruit (Verse 1 and 2). We must abide (remain in, draw our spiritual life from) in Christ to bear fruit (Verse 3-7). Any fruit that comes from us (in our human striving) won't last. The Father is glorified when we bear fruit. Why? Spiritual fruit is a sign that we are disciples of Christ (Verse 9). Jesus desires that the fruit we bear remain or last (Verse 16). Jesus is serious about us producing fruit!

We are to produce (or reproduce) fruit on various levels:

1. In our own lives -
  - A. Fruit that shows or demonstrates repentance (Matthew 3:8; Acts 26:20)
  - B. Fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23)
2. In the lives of others –
  - A. Evangelism (Acts 8:4; 11:19-21)
  - B. Making new disciples (Matthew 28:18-20).
  - C. Investing in leaders (Ephesians 4:11-12; 2 Timothy 2:2)
3. In the world -
  - A. Planting new churches
  - B. Meeting peoples needs

To see a new church birthed we have to do more than just apply a formula. Being intentional is essential, which is why we build church planting into the DNA of every house church. Reproducing new colonies of Christ is injected into the life of each believer, leader, and new church.

The basic way to plant a new church out of the existing church follows much of the same journey mileposts as we have shown above.

1. Ask the Lord to raise up those leaders who have the desire and call to be sent out from the house church to penetrate a new area of relationships.
2. They should be reproducing believers who can evangelize lost people and disciple those who come to Jesus.
3. The apostolic church planter should walk with them in the journey past each of the mileposts that signify the birth of a new house church.
4. Use the parts of this manual that are helpful.
5. More importantly, teach them to Pray-Hear-Obey every step of the journey. The Holy Spirit will guide them in all they need. Jesus said in John 14:26, "But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you."

## APPENDIX A

### *Persons of Peace*

From a transcript of a session with Asian Strategy Coordinators of the International Mission Board by Dr. Tom Wolf, Missions Professor at Golden Gate Baptist Theological Seminary

**PERSON of PEACE** – A person sovereignly prepared by God to receive the Gospel, before you arrive.

#### *1. LUKE 10:6 – They are a person of receptivity.*

Our mentality has always been “sow, sow, sow, and then harvest”  
Jesus teaches and demonstrates that you “harvest first” and then sow (especially in the *oikos* (family, friends, co-workers, neighbors) of the harvested one(s)).

So – make careful plans and strategy, but hold these lightly in your hand so that the Spirit of God can be your director.

- The principle is well illustrated by the Conversion of Cornelius
- The principle is well illustrated by the Conversion of Lydia
- The principle is well illustrated by the Conversion of the Jailer

These three show that the “harvest” is first and then the sowing within their “household” and beyond. It is ALL of God. There was NO “sowing” first with any of these.

#### *2. They might be a person of reputation.*

They are people of a known reputation, either good or bad.

Mark 5 – Jesus lands at Gadara and is greeted by a demoniac who is violent, naked, in broken chains, and has a horrible reputation, BUT God has sovereignly placed him there - ready for the Gospel. He is not one that we would normally see as a “Person of Peace” but he became that.

This man, after release and conversion, *begs/entreats* Jesus to permit him to go with them.

Jesus sent him back to Decapolis to “tell”.

In Mark 7, Jesus returns to Decapolis and now the people *beg/entreat* Jesus to stay and touch their sick, paralyzed, etc.

The demoniac’s “*oikos*” had seen a changed man . He was now a Godly “man of peace” proclaiming Jesus {and notice - -he probably had only a few minutes of discipling}

## APPENDIX B

### Foundational Teachings

When beginning a new church, there are various foundational teachings that should be in place to help ensure that the believers are grounded in the basic teachings of the Christian life. There are many approaches to imparting these basics. I will simply give one way of doing so that would be effective in meeting the needs of the members of a house church.

The approach that I advocate for laying foundational teachings is two-fold: it is the impartation of information (instruction) and of a lifestyle (modeling). Just studying books, reading the Bible, and giving lectures is not adequate for grounding believers. There must be intentional effort given to modeling and living out these truths in everyday life.

These were a part of how Jesus taught his disciples. Mark 3:14 says, “And He appointed twelve, that they might be *with Him*, and that He might send them out to preach.” He desired for them to be with him so he could model and impart to them what He desired them to learn. Jesus also took numerous opportunities to take them aside to share with them instruction. Their instruction and learning was very experiential and practical. John wrote of this experiential learning under Christ,

“What was from the beginning, what we have *heard*, what we have *seen with our eyes*, what we *beheld* and *our hands handled*, concerning the Word of life-and the life was manifested, and we have *seen* and bear witness and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and *was manifested to us*-what we have *seen* and *heard* we proclaim to you also, that you also may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ.”  
1 John 1:1-3

John and the other disciples heard, saw, touched and experienced Jesus, the Word of life. Jesus imparted Himself to them.

Paul, the apostle, also modeled this type of impartation. He wrote in 1 Thessalonians 1:8, “Having thus a fond affection for you, we were well-pleased to impart to you *not only the gospel of God* (information) *but also our own lives* (modeling, being with them in example), because you had become very dear to us.”

Following the examples of Jesus and Paul, our model of laying foundational teachings must include imparting our example of Christlikeness to new believers, and to those not properly grounded in the basic truths, as well as imparting instruction or information.

What are the foundational teachings that each believer needs to have in place? This question is pregnant with difficulty. Basically, the answer is everything that is taught and modeled in Scripture. The key is to begin to identify broad concepts that are to be fleshed out in life and learning. Here are some of the broad concepts:

1. **Basic Practices** – All believers need to know and do the basic practices. First, illustrate these in the lives of Christ and the leaders of the early church by using the Scriptures. Second, show them by modeling these practices in your own life. These practices include, but are not necessarily limited to:

- Bible Study, Meditation, Memorization, Application
- Prayer and Fasting
- Worship of God in all of the Aspects of Life
- Fellowship – Living in Community With the Saints (Building Up the Body)
- Reproduction – Evangelism, Discipleship, Missions, and Church Planting
- Stewardship – Time, Money, Resources, Relationships
- Silence and Solitude
- Serving – The World and the Saints (Spiritual Gifts)

## 2. **Character Virtues** –

*Fruit of the Spirit* (Galatians 5:22-23) - Love, Joy, Peace, Patience, Kindness, Goodness, Faithfulness, Gentleness, and Self-Control.

*Sermon on the Mount* (Matthew 5:3-12) – Poor in Spirit, Mourners, Meek or Humble, Hunger and Thirst After Righteousness, Merciful, Pure in Heart, Peacemakers, Persecuted For Righteousness, and Spoken Evil of for Christ.

*2 Peter 1:5-8* – Moral excellence, Knowledge, Self-Control, Perseverance, Godliness, Brotherly Kindness, Love.

*Others* – Integrity, Obedience, Sincerity, Zeal, Wisdom, Courtesy, and Steadfastness.

3. **Basic Doctrines:** We should teach these doctrines from the Scriptures, not from books written by men, though they are helpful as supplements for study.

Doctrines:

- The Bible and Revelation

- God – The Trinity

- A. God the Father

- B. God the Son

- C. God the Holy Spirit

- Humankind and Sin

- Salvation (Atonement) –

- A. God's Action In Christ

- B. Man's Response

- C. God's Response

- D. Assurance and Eternal Security

- The Church – Nature and Practices (Include Lord's Supper and Water Baptism)

- Satan, Angels, and Demons

- Last Things – Second Coming of Christ, Judgment, Eternal Life (Heaven), Eternal Death (Hell)

These three areas make up what should be the basics that every believer needs to be grounded in their faith and walk with the Lord. When we do not ground believers in these things, we leave them open to all manner of doctrinal errors, ungodly practices, character flaws, and frustration in the daily living out of their life in Christ. As apostolic church planters, we should feel the deep responsibility of laying these foundational teachings. Knowing that we are building upon the foundation of Christ Himself, we should long to build up believers with materials that will stand the trial by fire (gold, silver, precious stones), not materials that will be burned up (wood, hay, straw). God will test the work we have done by fire. Read 1 Corinthians 3:10-15.

### **Application**

1. Are you as the church planter willing to impart your life, as well as instruction or teaching, to those who God gives you to plant the new church? Think for a moment about the costs involved: lots of time and effort, your life will be an open book to be read by those who follow, you will receive a stricter judgment (James 3:1).
2. Spend time fleshing out the outline of basic doctrines with some key Scriptures related to the various areas.
3. Do a self-check on the basic practices or disciplines of the Christian life. If there are some that you are weak in or are not practicing, then work on them. Remember you are an example to those God gives you to lead.
4. Check for the fruit of the Spirit and the attitudes of the Sermon on the Mount in your own life. Ask the Lord to help you increase in the character qualities of Christ.

#### Resources:

1. Barna, George. Growing True Disciples. (Colorado Springs, CO: Waterbrook Press), 2001.
2. Eims, Leroy. The Lost Art of Disciple Making. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House), 1978.

## APPENDIX C

### House Church Distinctives

House churches have a number of distinctives that make them appealing. This list may not be limited exclusively to house churches, but will capture some of the major differences that typically exist. Nor do all house churches reflect all of these distinctives. Each house church should determine under the Lordship of Christ what distinctives it will seek to espouse. This is a partial list:

1. *No Special Buildings.* House churches meet in ordinary homes or other places that are free from rent or payments. The upkeep and overhead related to a church building are eliminated.
2. *No Clergy or 'Professionals' Are Necessary.* Though house churches need godly, mature leadership, they do not require seminary-trained, professional types to function effectively. New Testament theology recognizes no clergy/laity distinction. Those who are seminary or Bible school-trained can be assets to house churches, but don't have to be present for house churches to have legitimacy or theological understanding.
3. *Church Planting Is More Spontaneous.* If a house church is healthy, then it will reproduce itself. The idea is when a church body gets too large to meet in the average-sized living room, they ask the Lord to send out from their midst a small group to begin another church in another home. Splitting the group in half is not recommended.
4. *They Are Relational In All Aspects.* The primary foundation for evangelism, discipleship, teaching, congregating, equipping, and ministry is personal relationships – not programs or institutional approaches.
5. *Inter-generational.* House churches incorporate children and youth into the life of the community of faith at all levels. Home churches seek to unite the family by integrating much of what is done in the gathering time with all ages. There are special times when children and/or youth need teaching, activities, or ministry that is geared specifically for them. Each house church should be sensitive to this and act accordingly. It is helpful for multiple house churches in an area to plan times where youth and children can be together for worship and other activities that relate specifically to them.
6. *100% of the monetary giving is collected for ministry and missions.* Because no money is spent on clergy salaries or buildings, the money is freed up for the harvest. This means that the financial resources can be used to support itinerant workers (those involved in equipping ministries), missions, and for meeting the practical needs of the members, the poor, or widows and orphans.
7. *Seeks to Stay Intimate.* The idea behind home churches is not to grow one church larger, but to keep the church intimate while reproducing other intimate fellowships in other locales. Many New Testament church practices cannot function effectively in

large, impersonal groups. Home churches seek to form communities of believers who know each other in all aspects of life and seek to share their spiritual gifts to edify the body. Authentic Christianity has a greater chance of emerging in the lives of individuals and families because intimacy and accountability are built into the church. The key here is not to become ingrown. Each church should reproduce other new churches. Each church should also relate to other churches in the city. If a home church becomes isolated from the rest of the Body of Christ then it is more likely to be ingrown and unhealthy.

8. *Gather Under the Banner of Jesus Christ Alone.* Though a house church may be relationally tied to a denomination, group, parachurch ministry, or theological school of thought, those ties should never be the rallying point for their existence. Jesus Christ alone is to be exalted. This means that all other loyalties are secondary to meeting under Christ.

9. *Open, Participatory Meetings Are the Norm.* A home church allows each member to contribute to the meeting time as is taught in 1 Corinthians 14:26 and other places in Scripture. Each person has been given spiritual gifts that are needed for the building up of the Body. The small gathering allows people to function, grow, and even fail in using the gifts that the Holy Spirit has given them. This can be done in an atmosphere of love, acceptance, and nurture.

### **Application**

1. Think through each of the distinctives in this appendix. Think how each one of these will affect how the church that you plant will function.
2. Write down how you will seek to implement each of these nine distinctives on a practical level.
3. Ask the Lord to give you practical wisdom in implementing these distinctives.

Endnote:

1. Simson, Wolfgang Houses That Change The World (Carlisle, Cumbria UK: OM Publishing), 1998. This book is a must read for all who would seek to understand the house church movement on a visionary and worldwide scale. It is #1 on my list of books to read on house churches.

## APPENDIX D

### New Testament Apostolic Traditions

What are New Testament apostolic traditions? The simple answer is that they are those traditions that were handed down from the apostles as found in the Scriptures. These traditions flow from the example and teaching that the apostles received from Christ Himself. These traditions are contrasted in Scripture with the traditions of the elders. Let's look for a moment at some Scriptures related to these two traditions:

#### **TRADITIONS OF THE ELDERS**

##### **Mark 7:1-13 (See also Isaiah 29:13; Matthew 15:1-9)**

1) And the Pharisees and some of the scribes gathered together around Him when they had come from Jerusalem,

2) and had seen that some of His disciples were eating their bread with impure hands, that is, unwashed.

3) For the Pharisees and all the Jews do not eat unless they carefully wash their hands, thus observing **the traditions of the elders**;

4) and when they come from the marketplace, they do not eat unless they cleanse themselves; and there are many other things which they have received in order to observe, such as the washing of cups and pitchers and copper pots.

5) And the Pharisees and the scribes asked Him, "Why do your disciples not walk according to **the tradition of the elders**, but eat their bread with impure hands?"

6) And He said to them, "Rightly did Isaiah prophesy to you hypocrites, as it is written, 'This people honors Me with their lips, but their heart is far away from Me.

7) But in vain do they worship Me, **teaching as doctrines the precepts of men.**'

8) "**Neglecting the commandment of God, you hold to the tradition of men.**"

9) He was also saying to them, "**You nicely set aside the commandment of God in order to keep your tradition.**"

10) "For Moses said, 'Honor your father and your mother'; and, 'He who speaks evil of father or mother, let him be put to death';

11) but you say, 'If a man says to his father or his mother, anything of mine you might have been helped by is Corban (that is to say, given to God),'

12) you no longer permit him to do anything for his father or his mother;

13) thus **invalidating the word of God by your tradition which you have handed down**; and you do many things such as that."

The word that is used in Greek for invalidating is based on the root word *akuroo*. It means *to make of no effect*, or *to make void*. In other words, the traditions of the elders (of men) made the revealed will of God, His commands, impotent or void of their authority and power.

Henry Halley wrote, speaking of the words of Jesus in this text that, "His words apply directly to many of the practices that through the centuries have crept into the church. It is amazing with what cunning and ingenuity many church leaders strive to

make their forms and practices, known to be of purely human origin, conform to God's word." *Halley's Bible Handbook* p. 474

### **TRADITIONS OF THE APOSTLES**

#### **1 Corinthians 11:1-2**

- 1) Be imitators of me, just as I also am of Christ.
- 2) Now I praise you because you remember me in everything, **and hold firmly to the traditions**, just as I delivered them to you.

Paul had been faithful to deliver to the Corinthians the apostolic traditions for church theology and practice. He encourages them because they have held to the teachings as he delivered them. Have we been faithful to "hold firmly to the traditions?" In many ways we have not.

#### **Colossians 2:8**

"See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception, according to **the tradition of men**, according to the elementary principles of the world, rather than according to Christ."

We are warned here by Paul to make sure that we are not captured by the vain knowledge or wisdom of men. We are to be captured by the principles and teachings of Christ, not the deceptive teachings of men and the world.

#### **2 Thessalonians 2:15**

"So then, brethren, stand firm and **hold to the traditions which you were taught**, whether by word of mouth or by letter from us."

(See also **Matthew 28:20; 1 Corinthians 11:16, 23a; 15:3a; 2 Thessalonians 3:6, 2 Peter 3:15-16**)

What we see in these verses is a contrast between two traditions (*Gr. paradosis*). One type of tradition is the "tradition of the elders" or teachings of the rabbis. These were the collection of the oral interpretations by the rabbis of the Old Testament law. These traditions replaced the teachings of God as found in the Scriptures. Jesus condemned these traditions. The second type of tradition is apostolic tradition. These teachings originated with Christ and were passed down to the church by the apostles. It is the second type of tradition that Christ intended the church to pass down until His return. These traditions are patterns that all churches, regardless of culture, language, or time in history, were to teach and practice. Every church in the New Testament record functioned, or should have functioned, according to these traditions.

In the church of North America, we have been guilty of exalting the traditions, doctrines, and practices of the elders above the tradition of God in Christ as handed down by the apostles. We have replaced the teaching of God with our own teachings. We are guilty of "invalidating the word of God by our tradition which we have handed down." Do you see the serious implications of what these verses teach? We have often chosen

our own human tradition over the tradition of God. In so doing, we have negated the teachings of Christ.

Let's look at some of these apostolic traditions as found in the New Testament:

1. *Plurality of Leaders*- This involved having multiple, co-equal leaders (elders) as compared with the single-pastor model. Acts 14:23; Acts 20:17,28; Philippians 1:1; Titus 1:5; James 5:14; 1 Peter 5:1-4

2. *Open, Participative Meetings*- Each member of the Body was encouraged to contribute to the meeting for the building up of the Body. Having one preacher, teacher, or worship leader dominate the meeting was not the norm in the New Testament. This doesn't mean that there were not times of directive teaching by those so gifted, but all believers were able to contribute their gifts to the meeting for the edification and building up of the body. The size of these meetings was small. 1 Corinthians 12, 14:26; Ephesians 4:15-16; 1 Peter 4:10-11

3. *Lord's Supper as a Meal*- The Lord's Supper was a celebration (Acts 2:46) which consisted of a full meal (Acts 2:46; 1 Corinthians 11: 20-26). It was a time of remembrance of what Christ did at the cross to bring salvation and a looking forward to his second coming when they would enjoy the marriage feast of the Lamb. This is different from the typical Lord's Supper celebration of most Western churches.

4. *Believer's Baptism*- Baptism by immersion is clearly pictured in Scripture for those who have believed. These believers were baptized as soon as possible after their conversion. There was no need for baptism classes, catechisms, or other such things. Their commitment to follow Christ was sufficient to warrant baptism. Matthew 28:19-20; Acts 2:41; 10:44-48; 18:8

5. *Meeting from House to House* - Constructing special buildings for the meetings of the Body together was unheard of in the early New Testament church. They met primarily in ordinary homes for their weekly meetings. It appears that they also met in larger gatherings at times for teaching, discussion of theological matters, and other times of mutual encouragement and worship. Acts 2:46-47; 8:3; 12:12; 16:40; 20:20; Romans 16:3-5; Colossians 4:15; Philemon 2; 2 John 9-11

6. *No Difference Between the Clergy and Laity* – Within the church, there was differentiation based on gifts, not status. Ordination of people to the 'ministry' or to some office of the church as it is meant today is not supported by Scriptural teaching. All believers have been set apart by Christ to service in His Kingdom. The consecration and recognition of believers for specific tasks is recognized in Scripture, but not to some place of ministry above the other saints. 1 Peter 2:5,9; Revelation 1:6

7. *Decision Making By Consensus* – This tradition is different from other forms of decision-making (i.e. democratic/majority rule, elder rule). The multiple, co-equal leaders lead by persuasion, teaching, and lifestyle, not by ruling over the flock. Therefore, the house church was leader-led, not leader-ruled. Likewise, all church members had a place in the decision-making process and worked diligently to achieve consensus (unanimous agreement) versus just letting the majority make the decision. We are one Body under Christ. We are to live together in unity. Acts 6:2-6; 15:22; Romans 12:4,5; 1 Corinthians 12:12-27; Ephesians 4:11-16

### Application

1. It is to be understood that many of these Biblical teachings are an indictment against our modern day church government and practice. As such, there will be those who will speak out against them. Are you willing to accept ridicule on behalf of what the Bible teaches?
2. Though these Biblical teachings show many of our current church practices to be out of line with the apostolic tradition, there is never cause to speak evil of the Bride of Christ. It may be necessary for you to go through a time of repentance for your negative attitude, words, or actions against the church tradition in which you grew up. All expressions of the Bride of Christ have value and worth in the eyes of Jesus.
3. You may find yourself in a place of bewilderment or confusion. If this is the case, then ask the Lord to bring further clarity and understanding of this appendix. Study the Scriptures diligently “to see whether these things are so.” (Acts 17:11) God will reveal, through the Holy Spirit, that there is truth contained in what has been written.

*Author’s Note: I freely admit that God is still teaching me these things. I am still in the process of discovery and putting these things into practice in my own thoughts, life and ministry. I write these things as a man with incomplete understanding, but knowing that I am walking in the light that Jesus has given up to this moment.*

#### Endnotes:

1. Atkerson, Steve. The Practice of the Early Church: A Theological Workbook (Atlanta, GA: The New Testament Restoration Foundation), 2001. Steve gives wonderful support and teachings on the Apostolic Traditions in this workbook. It is highly recommended. See his website at [www.ntrf.org](http://www.ntrf.org).
2. Halley, Henry H. Halley’s Bible Handbook. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House), 1965. This quote was too good to pass up.
3. Job, Beresford. From the “Traditions” tape series. Beresford does a masterful job of contrasting the two traditions. The tapes can be obtained from [www.ntrf.org](http://www.ntrf.org).
4. Viola, Frank. Rethinking the Wineskin: The Practice of the New Testament Church (Brandon, FL: Present Testimony Ministries), 1998. This is a scholarly, and thoroughly readable, book on the practice of the early church as found in the New Testament.

## APPENDIX E

### Christ the Foundation or Radical Christocentrism

Millard J. Erickson defines Christocentric as, “Pertaining to any system of thought or practice in which Christ has the central or dominant place.”

*Concise Dictionary of Christian Theology*, pg. 31

I am advocating a radical Christocentrism in starting a new house church. Everything we say, do, and teach should be connected to Christ. In beginning a new church, Christ Himself must be the foundation that the church planter seeks to lay. A church cannot be built on anything less or it will fail. Remember a wise man builds his house on the rock or a sure foundation (Luke 6:46-49). All things Christ and Christ in all things!

#### Scriptures Related to Christ the Foundation:

**Matthew 16:18** – *“And I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church; and the gates of Hades shall not overpower it.”*

Here we see Christ pointing to Himself as the foundation stone or *petra*. Peter was to be a brick or ‘chip off the old block’ (*petros*). Jesus is the foundation and Peter would be part of laying the foundation of the church.

**Romans 15:20** – *“And thus I aspired to preach the gospel, not where Christ was already named, that I might not build upon another man’s foundation.”*

Paul desired to go where Christ had not yet been preached. If he went where Christ had been preached and received, then he would be relaying a foundation that had already been laid, namely Christ.

**1 Corinthians 2:2** – *“For I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified.”*

Paul, a foundation layer, preached only Christ and the cross. Should we seek to preach any other topic or seek to lay any other foundational teaching to those who do not know Him?

**1 Corinthians 3:10-11** – *“According to the grace of God which was given to me, as a wise master builder I laid a foundation, and another is building upon it. But let each man be careful how he builds upon it. For no man can lay a foundation other than the one which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.”*

Paul knew that a wise builder only built upon a sure foundation that could hold what was built upon it. His foundation was only Christ. Any other foundation is faulty.

**Ephesians 2:19-20** – “So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God’s household, having been built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus being the cornerstone, in whom the whole building, being fitted together is growing into a holy temple in the Lord; in whom you also are being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit.”

Here we have beautiful imagery of God building for Himself a dwelling place, a household made up of His people. The foundation that was laid is not made up of the apostles and prophets themselves, but they were the foundation layers. Jesus is both the foundation upon which these builders built and the cornerstone which ties God’s household of saints together.

(See also Psalm 118:22; Isaiah 8:14; 28:16; Romans 9:33; 1 Corinthians 10:4; 1 Peter 2:4-10; 2 Timothy 2:19)

These verses should help us as we seek to properly lay the foundation for a new church. Nothing other than Christ is adequate to build upon. Therefore, we must not substitute any denominational program, the latest church planting fad, or ourselves as the foundation. Remember, the wise builder understands that he must build upon the sure foundation. All other foundations will doom the new church to collapse in upon itself in a grand destructive heap.

### **Application**

1. Think for a moment about your own life. Are you radically Christ-centered? Is Christ exhibited in everything you say and do? Take a moment to refocus and reorient yourself to Christ.
2. Think about the church you desire to plant. Are you willing to build solely upon Christ and nothing else? This will involve dying to self. This may involve ridicule from others. This cannot be done by taking the easy way out or short cuts. Pray that Christ will give you courage, wisdom, and perseverance to plant His church.
3. Spend a month reading, studying, and rediscovering the life and teachings of Christ as found in the Gospels.
4. Prepare 21 participative Bible studies based on each of the 21 chapters of the book of John. These 21 studies will be used in the early stages of the church plant to begin laying Christ as the foundation on which you will build.

Endnote:

1. Erickson, Millard J. Concise Dictionary of Christian Theology (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House), 1994. This is a simple theological dictionary. I suggest it to all who desire to understand theological terms in a ‘nutshell’.

Resource:

1. Tinsley, William. Upon This Rock: Dimensions of Church Planting (Atlanta, GA: Home Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention), 1985. Chapter 1 is worth owning the book.

## APPENDIX F

### House Church Leadership

New Testament leadership is often misunderstood. We often interpret what the Bible says about Biblical leaders through our culture, history, faith tradition and /or experience. We must try to position ourselves in such a way as to let the Bible speak clearly to us without these filters in place. Walk with me for a while into the world of Biblical house church leadership.

I would like to begin with the leadership principle that says, “All members of the Body of Christ are leaders, because all are ministers.” The difference in the types of leaders is related to a number of characteristics: maturity in the Lord, level of responsibility, influence with the saints, spiritual gifting, character, and others. All members have a place in the Body and should serve the Lord as ministers to the assembly of the saints and the lost world.

We do see particular leadership roles laid out in Scripture that certain believers will fill. We often call these offices or positions. I would like to call them servant roles or ministries with varying degrees of responsibility. Contrary to what we have often been taught and seen modeled in our modern day churches, leadership is not hierarchical or top-down. The structure is much flatter; it is not a pyramid with a ‘senior-minister’ at the top. Therefore, leadership is not positional, but functional. Leadership is not authoritarian, but by influence and servanthood. Men and women who lead are to be understood in relation to their function, gifting, and influential servant spirit than by their position, ability and authority.

Our first thought on leadership should be that Jesus is the only Head of the church (Ephesians 1:22-23; 5:23; Colossians 1:18). He leads the Body of Christ. That means that all leaders are under the leadership of the Holy Spirit. We can easily agree with this idea in principle and yet we deny it often with our practice of leadership. Wolfgang Simson, an expert on house churches, said at a conference in Austin that I attended, “If Jesus is number one, then the rest of us are all number twos.” If Jesus is truly the Head of His Body, then all the rest of us are under His headship. Another way to say this is, “If Jesus is the Shepherd, then all of the rest of us are sheep.” Even when we are leaders in the church we must never forget that we are sheep under a Shepherd.

Secondly, there are various types of leaders that we need to recognize and define. Let us begin with the servant-leader role of **‘elder’**, **‘overseer’ (bishop)**, and **‘pastor/shepherd’**. Steve Atkerson gives us wonderful insight into this local church leadership role. I will duplicate what he has written in his *The Practice of the Early Church (A Theological Workbook)*.

**What does ‘elder’ mean?** From *presbuteros* (Strong’s #4245), which can mean ‘an old man’ or the ‘older’ of any two people or the older generation in contrast to the younger generation; another usage of *presbuteros* is as the designation of an official (the Latin ‘senator’ [‘senior’] parallels this).... This title thus refers to the maturity of character which helps make a person a leader.

**What does ‘overseer’ (or ‘bishop’) mean?** From *episkopos* (Strong’s #1985); *epi* means ‘upon’ or ‘over’ and *skopos* refers to a ‘watchman’. Thus, the translation ‘overseer’. It refers to a definite function or fixed office within a group, i.e., that of ‘superintendent, guardian’.... This title thus indicates the nature of a leader’s work – overseeing, guarding, influencing, prompting the church.

**What does ‘pastor’ mean?** From *poimen* (Strong’s #4166), ‘shepherd, sheep-herder’ (literally). Figuratively, it refers to the leaders of humans; the noun form is used with reference to church leaders only one time in the entire New Testament (Eph. 4:11). This title thus further points to a leader’s work – guiding, feeding, protecting the church.

**SUMMARY:** Each title emphasizes a different aspect of the same person’s function: ‘elder’ emphasizes spiritual maturity, ‘shepherd’ emphasized the feeding and care role of the leader, and ‘overseer’ emphasizes the guardian role of the leader. (From *The Practice of the Early Church: A Theological Workbook*, pg 9)

Building on Steve’s insights, let’s look at some key Scriptures related to this leadership role that help us understand it more clearly:

1. Scriptures related to the three terms above being the same leader but different aspects of the role: Acts 20:28; 1 Peter 2:25 (speaking of Jesus); 1 Peter 5:1-3.

2. Scriptures related to having a plurality of elders: Acts 14:23; 20:17,28; Philippians 1:1; Titus 1:5; James 5:14; 1 Peter 5:1-4. We know that the churches in the New Testament appear to have existed on two levels: the church in the homes (Acts 2:46-47; 8:3; 12:12; 16:40; 20:20; Romans 16:3-5; Colossians 4:15; Philemon 2; 2 John 9-11) and the church of the city that was made up of the individual home churches within a city (Acts 8:1; 1 Corinthians 1:2; 1 Thessalonians 1:1). Therefore, the elders may be plural in the individual home churches and/or in the city church. Either way, the plurality of elders is shown versus the single-pastor model of local church leadership.

3. Scriptures related to the qualifications of elders/overseers/shepherds: 1 Timothy 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9; 1 Peter 5:1-4

4. Scriptures related to the tasks or functions of the elders/overseers/shepherds: Acts 20:28-31; Ephesians 4:11-13; 1 Timothy 3:4-5; 5:17; 2 Timothy 2:2,15; 3:16-17; 4:2; Titus 1:9; Hebrews 13:17; James 5:14; 1 Peter 5:1-4

Now having looked at the ministry role of elder/overseer/shepherd, we can move on to look at the ministry role of **deacons**. The Greek term for deacon is *diakonos*. It means a servant, minister, or attendant. Some Scriptures related to deacons and their ministry are found in Acts 6:1-6; Romans 16:1-2; Philippians 1:1; and 1 Timothy 3:8-13. Their role seems to be one of ministering to the needy, poor, and suffering within the fellowship of the believers. It is a role of mercy and compassion. This role could be the key to assure that home churches are ministering to the hungry, thirsty, homeless, naked, sick, to the prisoners, widows, and orphans (Matthew 25:31-46; Acts 6:1; James 1:27).

The ministry roles of the elder/overseer/shepherd and the deacon are in place to help lead and guide the saints in ministry and edification.

There are also **the five equipping ministries** of the Body.

**Ephesians 4:11-13** – And He gave some as **apostles**, and some as **prophets**, and some as **evangelists**, and some as **pastors** and **teachers**, for the **equipping of the saints** for the work of service, to the building up of the Body of Christ; until we

all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ. See also 1 Corinthians 12:28.

Jesus is the original Apostle (John 17:3; Hebrews 3:1), Prophet (Luke 24:19; John 4:19; 6:14; Acts 7:37), Evangelist (Matthew 9:35; Galatians 1:11-12), Pastor/Shepherd (John 10:11,14; Hebrew 13:20-21; 1 Peter 2:25; 1 Peter 5:4), and Teacher (Matthew 23:8; John 3:2). He embodied all five of these equipping ministries. When he ascended he gave gifts unto men. These five gifts were distributed to the Body for the equipping of the saints for ministry and building up the Body.

The equipping ministers are most often itinerant workers who move among a number of home churches to equip the saints for ministry and service. It is often practical for these equippers to form teams that can function together in the equipping roles from house to house. They are to be mature in their gifting and in their walk with the Lord. Let us begin looking at the equippers by defining each of the five listed in the text:

1. **Apostles** – def. “one sent forth”, “an ambassador”. We often call these people missionaries or church planters. These words are helpful, but do not capture the fullness and significance of this equipping ministry. The job description of an apostle will be given below.

Today’s apostles should be distinguished from the original twelve (Matthew 10:2-4). These are often called the apostles of the Lamb (Revelation 21:14). Some would also include Paul with the original twelve because of his encounter with Christ on the road to Damascus and his authority by Christ to write inspired Scripture. There are no more apostles in the sense of the original twelve apostles. We do have apostles in the Body of Christ today, though they are somewhat different in function from the original twelve and Paul.

Job description:

1. Apostles are sent out by Christ, by witness of the Holy Spirit, from a local church with a specific purpose or mission (Acts 13:1-4; 2 Corinthians 8:23).
2. They are sent out to establish new churches (1 Corinthians 3:4-15).
  - A. By preaching the gospel among the lost (Romans 15:18-21; 1 Corinthians 1:23; 9:16; 2 Timothy 4:5). In this sense they are pioneers taking the gospel to the unreached. They also keep the vision of extending the Kingdom of God to the nations (Matthew 28:18-20; Acts 1:8) before the churches that they establish.
  - B. As a wise master builder they lay a proper foundation, Christ Himself, to build upon (1 Corinthians 3:9-11).
  - C. Ground the churches in foundational teachings and doctrine (1 Timothy 1:3-4; 4:13; 2 Timothy 4:1-4; Hebrews 6:1-2).
  - D. Set things in order and recognize the elders the Holy Spirit has raised up (Titus 1:5)

3. They are disciplers (and examples) for new believers and leaders in the churches they establish (1 Corinthians 4:14-15; 1 Thessalonians 2:8-12; 2 Timothy 2:2). They equip God's people for apostolic ministry and spot and train young apostles.

4. They are interested in building the Kingdom of God and not building their own kingdom (1 Corinthians 1:12-13; 3:4-7; 3:21-23)

5. Some marks of their ministry:

- A. Affirmation by large segments of the Body of Christ.
- B. Proven faithfulness in the establishment of churches.
- C. Widespread, translocal authority.
- D. Miracles may also be present. (2 Corinthians 12:12)

6. We must be careful to distinguish between today's apostles and the original twelve and Paul (1 Corinthians 15:5,7). There are certain things that only the twelve and Paul were commissioned to do by the Lord and those things are concluded i.e. writing Scripture. We have the Scriptures to instruct us about Christ and His teachings. When the Scriptures were completed the need for the full ministry of the original twelve and Paul was completed. But, just because the Scriptures are complete does not mean that other aspects of apostolic ministry have passed away.

***Author's Note:** I recognize and understand the difficulty that many Christians have with the subject of 'prophets'. I have attempted to deal with the Scriptures related to this ministry to the Body rather than make conjectures. I readily admit that I am navigating the waters of learning about this ministry and how it is to function in the equipping of the saints for ministry.*

**2. Prophets** – Prophets are those who sense and know the heart of God for the specific moment. They speak forth the Word of the Lord. This word can be predictive (foretelling) as the ministry of Agabus shows when he foretells a famine and warns Paul (Acts 11:27, 28; Acts 21:10,11). This word can also be instructive in discerning God's will as shown by the Holy Spirit's work in setting Barnabas and Saul apart for their ministry (Acts 13:1-4). 1 Corinthians 14 gives explicit instruction on the use of prophecy in the local assembly. Prophecy always edifies and builds up the Body. This might be through edification (encouragement), exhortation (correction or rebuke), and/or consolation (comfort) according to 1 Corinthians 14:3. Judas and Silas functioned in this gift when they went to Antioch (Acts 15:32). It might also be used to reveal the secrets of a man's heart, convict of sin, and cause men to worship God (1 Corinthians 14:24-25).

Prophecy seeks to speak forth the heart, mind, and counsel of God to His people. It is a revelation prompted by the Holy Spirit. It might be related to the past, present, or future. It will never contradict the clear teachings of Scripture.

Though this gift has often been misused, we are not to despise it (2 Thessalonians 5:20) and are to desire to function in it (1 Corinthians 14:39).

Those who are mature in the prophetic gifting spot and train others whom God has set apart for prophetic ministry within the churches. They are to equip the Body to hear God's voice so that the Body can receive clear direction from the Holy Spirit each time they meet.

3. **Evangelists** – def. “one who proclaims the gospel”. The evangelist has one burning desire: that people will meet Jesus. Everything within them seeks to win people to Jesus. Paul encouraged young Timothy to “do the work of an evangelist.” (2 Timothy 4:5) Philip is one of the greatest examples of this ministry gift in operation (Acts 6:5; 8:5-13, 26-40; 21:8). They act as ambassadors of reconciliation to the lost world (2 Corinthians 5:18-21). These are the preachers (heralds) of the good news of Jesus. Evangelists function in an unusually powerful ability to win people to Jesus and should help the Body as a whole to be soul-winners. They are to equip the believers to proclaim the gospel in their everyday lives.

4. **Pastors** – def. “a shepherd” “one who tends herds or flocks”. John 10:1-18 gives Jesus' example of being the good Shepherd. They are not only to feed the word of God to believers, but are to guard or watch over them, to protect them from wolves or false teachers (Acts 20:28-31). Verse 17 of chapter 20 links this ministry to the ministry of the elder. They are to be tender and loving towards the believers. They are the caregivers. They form deep, personal relationships with the saints and are available for counsel and ministry during times of loss, stress, and pain in the church. They are interested in the long-term protection and growth of each individual believer. They lead the believers to discover how to feed themselves on God's word. By their instruction and example the saints grow and mature. Therefore, these ministers must be able to teach (1 Timothy 3:2), exhort in sound doctrine and refute those who contradict correct teaching (Titus 1:9). 1 and 2 Timothy, Titus, and 1 Peter 5:1-5 give good insight into this ministry. See the above section on elders/overseers/shepherds.

Those who excel and are mature in the ministry of guarding and shepherding a local body of believers should help equip and raise up other elders (in concert with the other equipping ministries) for the new churches that begin. In this sense, they are mentoring pastors to the elders/overseers/shepherds. They also equip the saints to minister in a nurturing way to one another.

5. **Teachers** – def. “an instructor” Teachers are concerned with the truth. They seek to study the Scriptures in such a way as to rightly understand them and share the truths they contain. Then they desire to share these truths with the Body of Christ. They are also interested in teaching others how to discover and teach the truths of God contained in the Bible (2 Timothy 2:2). Teachers are able to mine the deep truths contained in Scripture that others might often miss (Hebrews 5:12). Teachers are judged more strictly because of their vital role of instructing the Body in the things of God (James 3:1). Teaching appears to be different from

preaching (Acts 15:35; 1 Timothy 1:11) though they can be used in tandem (Matthew 4:23; Acts 5:42). Teachers help ensure and bring balance to the ministry of the prophet.

The five equipping ministries of the Body need to be in place so that the Body can be equipped for ministry and built up. These ministries are needed so that we can attain to “the unity of the faith, knowledge of the Son of God, and to the maturity and fullness of Christ.” (Ephesians 4:12-13) They will all use Scripture as their plumbline and tool in their equipping because “All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; that the man of God may be adequate (complete), equipped for every good work.” (2 Timothy 3:16-17)

### Application

1. Do further study on the 7 servant-leadership roles that we have discussed in this chapter. Seek to gain deeper understanding of each one.
2. Think for a moment on this quote by Wolfgang Simson from *Houses That Change The World*:

“A house church is led by elders [overseers, shepherds]. Not every individual house church of 15 people will have their own apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers sitting together in one small room. Those ministries are equipping ministries, going beyond the scope of a local house church, and function translocal, affecting the whole area...” Pg. 50

How does this thinking challenge and change the way we as Baptists have structured the leadership of our churches? Is it time for a change?

3. Pray for God to raise up elders/overseers/shepherds, deacons, apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers in the house churches that God uses you to begin.

#### Endnotes:

1. Atkerson, Steve. The Practice of the Early Church: A Theological Workbook (Atlanta, GA: The New Testament Restoration Foundation), 2001. Especially pertinent is his understanding of the role of elders. See earlier endnote.
2. Conner, Kevin J. The Church in the New Testament (Blackburn, Victoria Australia: Conner Publications), 1982. A foundational work to understand the church and how it is to function. Excellent treatment of the 7 types of leaders that I described in this appendix.
3. Damazio, Frank. The Making of a Leader. (Portland, OR: Bible Temple Publishing), 1988. I especially benefited from Chapter 3. An excellent overall book on leadership in the church.
4. Hubbell, Dan. Various teachings related to the areas dealt with in this appendix. His teachings can be seen at [www.churchrestoration.org](http://www.churchrestoration.org). I have had the privilege of discussing many of these things with Dan over many lunches.
5. Ogden, Greg. The New Reformation: Returning the Ministry to the People of God (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing), 1990. Great understanding of equipping all the saints for ministry.

5. Simson, Wolfgang. Houses That Change The World (Carlisle, Cumbria UK: OM Publishing), 1998. Interesting section on the equipping ministries. Very helpful.
6. Viola, Frank. Who Is Your Covering? A Fresh Look at Leadership, Authority, and Accountability (Brandon, FL: Present Testimony Ministry), 1999. Frank crucifies many of the sacred cows in regards to leadership in the church. A challenging and stimulating read.