

The Church at Matthew's House

by Jason Evans

I was tired of the church, as I knew it. It was an event, a building, a program...I wanted to be the church; I wanted my "un-churched" friends to be the church, not become church. I wanted it to be something I lived, rather than something I lived for. I heard of crazy people that met together, ate meals, shared their resources and studied the Scriptures together... in homes and coffee shops of all places! It couldn't be that simple! You were supposed to bring the sofas, the coffee (and the candles if you're real serious) into the sanctuary, but not use them in their common setting! That was ludicrous! It was two years ago that I thought that. Now, I'm one of those crazy people...

My wife and I along with several other couples had a burden, I'm not so sure it was a "vision" but it was definitely a burden. We were certain that the church was simpler than what we had known it to be. We wanted to be a part of something that encouraged spiritual things to evolve in a natural way. We wanted to go where God was rather than build a place for him to reside. We had a desire to invite people into an experience that was informal, yet intentional like the story of Levi throwing a party at his house with Jesus. Not long after that we found ourselves becoming the church to each other. It was a house church I suppose, but we weren't quite sure what to call it.

On a usual Thursday night, we would meet at about 6:30 p.m., eating dinner together, talking about our weeks, sharing high points and low points and getting introduced to a couple of new people that might have just stopped by. At one point, one evening, towards the end of dinner one of the new girls opened up a little. She said that she couldn't believe how welcome she felt. She had always been so "turned off" to religion and had become very skeptical. But she felt more comfortable and loved than she felt normally with her closest friends. This night was already the high point of her week and dinner wasn't even over yet!

And then one night it happened

After dinner, all of us crammed into the family room to carry the conversations further. At the end of a time of reflection, people decided to wrap things up in prayer. And then it happened... without any explanation, no instruction, nor a request, this new girl said, "I don't know you God, but all I know is that I want more of you. I need you to be part of my life, like these people. Jesus, please, I want to know you..." As people kept praying there was this rush of wonder and amazement as those Christians in the room began to realize that one more had come into the Kingdom. To think, this girl hadn't been given a Gospel message, she wasn't told how to become a Christian... she just knew. This was a totally un-evangelical salvation!

We had committed ourselves to no longer putting on a show and just lift God up in our lives. Through that the Holy Spirit got all the credit, we did nothing, He drew someone to the Savior without us tripping things up along the way. Many more young adults were coming and things began to quickly get tight around the dinner table and in the family room. We soon started another church to relieve some of the size limitations in the first group. We didn't know what to do next; all we knew was that God was up to something.

Not long after that my wife and I began opening up our home to the many young people involved in the local punk/ scene and started a church there. The night began with dinner together and then each shared a few chapters of our personal stories. As we talked the conversation moved into what each expected of a group like this. What blew me away was that each of them was saying the same thing. Learning to love God and other people in an authentic way was what each of them wanted.

By the end of the night, this group of young people were bonded together on a journey to learn what it meant to really love God, love their friends, and provide a safe haven for them to come, hang out, and talk about life. They decided that we would come together every week to do this for each other and anyone else who came through the door.

Less than 6 months after that church was born two young men within that group have been called to shepherd that church. Less than a week after we talked with those two young men, all of us were sitting in our house, sharing life together, and the Spirit laid it on my heart to challenge another young person to begin a house church. Once again, we will help him lay the foundation and empower him to guide a church. A few days later, at a concert, some of us were talking to some old friends that live in the next county to the east and they are catching the vision. We now have the opportunity to help them start a movement of simple churches planted by normal people.

Monthly, we have gatherings where all of these simple churches come together to share and celebrate God's work. I had the opportunity to speak with a housewife that is incredibly excited about the church meeting in her home. To my amazement she told me that the group is getting ready to bust at the seams. Therefore, she felt God must be getting ready to call some of them to go and start some new churches where there will be more room for more people!

I sat with a friend to think about these various situations and we could see up to 10 churches being born out of the hearts of people committed to loving others and Jesus in a simpler, honest manner. I don't think I've ever seen a multiplication process happen like this before.

The question many are asking is, "is it really that simple?" In fact, I think it is. Welders, daycare supervisors, housewives, electricians, waitresses and others are gifted to care and guide small, simple churches in their homes, apartments, coffee shops, tattoo parlors, bars and diners across the country. They won't separate the saints from the seekers. They will blur the lines between what we deem secular and what we raise up as sacred. They are gifted to express their creativity in new, unexpected ways and mediums, but not in the walls of our homes and church buildings but out there, in the real world. They are prone to make us uncomfortable and question our methods, which is exactly what Jesus did. They are gifted to teach us through rabbinical-like conversation, rather than monotone dissertations. They are gifted to help us become selfless Christ-followers, rather than selfish commercial-guzzlers. And most importantly they are gifted to take the church into realms us "clergy-types" never could. Who could ask for more?

Can we humble ourselves to set aside the complicated organizations for a simpler organism? Can we humble ourselves to take our gifts, talents and abilities to serve this movement? I believe that it will allow people to come to Christ, flourish in their giftedness and be a part of revolution across our country that we never expected! So... who's in?

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