Kingdom Communities

Introduction

What will the Kingdom look like when it comes? One of our greatest hindrances is our perceptions that are derived from traditions and history.

The Tyndale English Bible used the word 'congregation' for ***'ekklesia'***. King James changed the word to *'church'* because the Anabaptists and the Puritans used *'congregation'*. *'Church'* and *'kirk'* come from a common root – the Anglo-Saxon *'cirice'*. This in turn was derived from the old Saxon *'kirika'*. This word was probably introduced by the Celtic missionaries into northern Europe. It is thought to be derived from the Greek word *'kurike'*, which is really 'the house of the Lord'.

Another word used in the Latin-speaking part of Europe was *'basilica'*, which originally meant *'a royal palace'*. It too was derived from the Greek. But in the Emperor's time a *basilica* was a large oblong building used as a court of justice and place of public assembly. Constantine handed many of these buildings over to the official church. Whatever the derivation of *'church'*, it is largely used to mean *'a building'*.

Several European languages derive their word for church from ***'ekklesia'*** – French *eglise*, Spanish *iglesia*, Italian *chisa* and Welsh *eglwys*. The word has a background that comes from the Greek city states. In the great classical days of Athens, the ***ekklesia*** was the convened assembly of the citizens of the city. Apart from the laws of the state to which their decisions had to conform, the ***ekklesia*** was responsible for:

- deciding the policies of the city state
- electing and dismissing magistrates
- declaring war, making peace and arranging alliances
- appointing military officers and assigning troops to different campaigns
- raising taxes and allocating funds

It was a true democracy where everyone had equal rights and an equal duty to take part. But this was for men only. Women could never be part of the ***ekklesia*** and neither could slaves. The citizens were *'ek-kletoi'* – 'called out' by a herald to an assembly. The Greek Old Testament (the Septuagint) translates the Hebrew word for 'congregation' as ***'ekklesia'***.

Jesus used the word ***'ekklesia'*** only twice in the Gospels (Mt. 16:18 and 18:17). It doesn't mean a building, but an assembly of 'called out' people. Instead Jesus largely spoke about the Kingdom of God/Heaven – about 110 times in the Gospels.

The Kingdom is not the church. It is very misleading to say that the church is 'the present form of the Kingdom'. A better term to use is **'Kingdom Communities'**. Using an agricultural metaphor, we are seeking to **'germinate Kingdom Communities'**. This is a better term to use than 'church planting'.

The basic characteristic of the Kingdom of God is love and love requires a community or better still, the family of God. In the Bible the Kingdom means firstly the authority and rule of the King.

"The Lord has established His throne in heaven and His Kingdom rules over all." (Ps. 103:19)

The Bible states a number of truths about the Kingdom.

It is brought into existence by a sovereign act of God.

It is God who gives the Kingdom. We only receive the Kingdom like a child. A Kingdom Community is made up of all those who submit to the reign of God over their lives and who live and move in complete dependence on God and in faithful obedience to his Word. If we try to extend the Kingdom in a spirit of self-reliance all is lost.

Prayer and faith are twin characteristics of the Kingdom.

In order to proclaim and demonstrate the Kingdom Jesus spent much time in prayer. He taught us that, ***"We ought always to pray and not to lose heart".*** (Lk. 18:1-7) The second great characteristic of the Kingdom is faith. Since God's 'reign' is His acts in the world, we must continually put our trust in Him and in Him alone if His Kingdom is to come.

How easy it is to pay lip service to the priority of prayer. So often, we are like the people Isaiah described, ***"We have become like those over whom You have never ruled; like those who are not called by Your name"*** (Is. 63:19) and ***"There is no one that calls upon Your name, who rouses himself to take hold of You"*** (Is. 64:7).

So two great characteristics of a Kingdom Community are the priority given to sustained, earnest, believing prayer and the constant acceptance of the Lordship of Jesus and an openness to the power of the Holy Spirit. If God's Kingdom is to come in the world His reign must first come in our lives and then in the Kingdom Community.

The Kingdom is very good news.

The contemporaries of Jesus thought the Kingdom would release God's anger and wrath on the godless. Jews reject Jesus as the Messiah because they believe that He never brought in the Kingdom. In fact, it is the reverse. It is good news for sinners, an offer of forgiveness, peace and joy. It is symbolised by a wedding feast, by an abundant harvest and by a pearl of great price. It is a **free offer** to all who repent and believe in the Lord Jesus.

Jesus assured all those who did repent and believe that they were blessed by God (Lk. 6:20), that Satan's downfall had come (Lk. 10:18) and that God's Kingdom was now in their midst (Lk. 17:20). The Kingdom involved breaking the rule of Satan in producing sin and suffering. No wonder all ***"glorified God"*** when a lame man leapt like an antelope and the dumb sang for joy. (Is. 35:56)

When the presence of the Kingdom comes the poor have very good news. Captives are freed from demonic imprisonment, the blind – physically, intellectually and spiritually – recover their sight and all those oppressed are set free. (Lk. 4:18)

So we need to be very positive in our message and in demonstration of the Kingdom to the world. There should be exuberant and joyful celebration in Kingdom Communities. We have ***"good news of great joy"***!

The Kingdom is a completely new worldview

The contemporaries of Jesus thought the Kingdom was political liberation from a foreign military power. But the Kingdom doesn't fit into any worldview because it is not of this world! (Jn. 18:36; Lk. 23:42) In this world the Kingdom is marked by poverty, generosity and suffering. (Mk. 10:35-45) The reign of God is a complete reversal of the aims, ambitions, values and standards of this world. Jesus called for a revolutionary lifestyle that knew no half measures and no compromise in terms of commitment.

The choice is clear! We must choose between the reign of God and the reign of the world. It is radical discipleship or nothing at all! The Kingdom includes every area of life because God is

God and God's salvation is for the **whole** man. Nothing is excluded. This is what will transform both individuals and societies so the Kingdom Community is visible to all.

Kingdom Communities are:

Called <u>out</u>

The Kingdom Community belongs to God, has come from God and owes every good gift that it enjoys to God. The Community is 'God's called out ones' – called out of the Kingdom of Darkness (this world) into the Kingdom of God – called out of bondage into freedom.

Although we often see "the Community" with all its weaknesses, follies and crimes (we are still a community of sinners) yet God's grace shines through the gloom of our imperfections. Seeing it as a Kingdom Community is a comfort when things are tough and disappointing, for the Kingdom is God's and the Lord reigns! It is His work, His grace and His power that really counts. Never look at size or strength. It is always God's sovereign grace that counts. ***"It is because the Lord loves you".*** (Deut. 7:6-8)

Called <u>for</u>

The Kingdom Community is called for a relationship with God. This is the basis of all God's covenants. Jesus called His disciples ***'My friends'***. We are ***"Called*** (by God) ***in the fellowship of His Son Jesus Christ our Lord"*** (1 Cor. 1:9)

It is significant that when Jesus called the Twelve, He called them ***"to be with Him"***. It was from this model of a Kingdom Community that they were sent out to preach and teach. The Community must never become a company for good works! At the heart of it is a corporate relationship with God.

Called <u>together</u>

The call of God is not simply a private affair. We are in one great family. God speaks to us all as His sons/daughters and as "the Community" or He refers to us as brothers and sisters. So a Kingdom Community of believers sometimes has "gatherings", but it lives as a true community seven days a week. Relationships are built up in love. Personal needs are met by the sharing of gifts and practical help. The Community shouldn't be confused with simply activity. There are many groups with activity, but with little in the way of relationships. We must re-learn the sense of community. The effectiveness of our ministry depends on the fervency of our love for one another.

Called <u>to</u>

The Kingdom Community is called to a journey. Paul urged Timothy to ***"Take hold of eternal life to which you were called"***. (1 Tim. 6:12) Now we have just the first instalments of our promised inheritance. This isn't an easy journey. ***"After you have suffered a while, the God of all grace, who has call you to His eternal glory in Christ, will Himself restore, establish and strengthen you."*** (1 Pet. 5:10)

The setting forth – the outline – of the great inheritance that awaits us must figure prominently in our teaching. When the Kingdom Community has a vivid picture of the goal ahead <u>then</u> they can say, ***"The sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us"***. (Rom. 8:15-18) So we are called to an inheritance and as a Kingdom Community we aim to claim it. The Kingdom Community is on the move. It is dynamic! It moves with the cloud and the fire of God's presence. It can't look back or stay as it is.

The community must learn to move and to be relevant. Leslie Newbigin said, "The church is the pilgrim people of God. It is on the move – hastening to the ends of the earth to beseech all men to be reconciled to God, hastening to the end of time to meet its Lord, who will gather all men into one."

Two models of Kingdom Communities

The static Kingdom Community

In the first century most people didn't travel more than 100 miles from their home town/village in their lifetime. This was true of most people in the world until the 20th century. So a Kingdom Community in a village or town was **static**. These local communities could be networked geographically.

The mobile Kingdom Community

As a Kingdom Community, the Lord Jesus had disciples who travelled with Him. Both models of community can have a 'fluid' membership, but clearly the mobile model is more fluid than the static model. It was largely the mobile Kingdom Communities that helped network static communities. It was largely the mobile communities that led to the geographic spread of the Kingdom.

In Acts 8:4 the community in Jerusalem was scattered. How big was the community by then? Some estimate 10,000 - 20,000 believers. So they were scattered going wherever they could find jobs. This led to a huge spread of the Gospel. The local community became mobile and this created many new local communities. The apostles stayed in Jerusalem and took the heat of the persecution. But the network was maintained for in Acts in 11:29 it says, ***"So the disciples*** (who had been scattered) ***determined, everyone according to his ability, to send relief to the brothers living in Judea".***

The great New Testament example of a very mobile community was Paul's group. He followed the instruction of Jesus in going out two by two. But this community of two had grown to several by the time Paul arrived in Ephesus.

Ephesus was a huge city maybe as large as 300,000 people. Even after Paul himself left, some of the community stayed and later it was said, ***"All in*** (the Roman province of) ***Asia heard the Gospel"*** (Acts 19:10) by a combination of static and mobile communities.

It was in the static communities that layers of administration were developed. In Acts 16:15 it says of Lydia, ***"After she was baptised and her household as well …."*** Who was Lydia? She was ***"a seller of purple goods"***. The purple goods were fabric. The purple dye was made from rare molluscs found in the sea on the eastern Aegean coast. It was rare and so very expensive. The Roman Emperor took it on himself to set up a monopoly on this trade so that only Imperial officials used the 'purple fabric'.

Philippi was a Roman colony. Lydia was probably the "trade name" of this woman for Thyatira was formerly in the Kingdom of Lydia. So she was probably the Macedonian agent for the "Lydian Purple Dye Guild" for which she would have needed a licence from the Emperor. She was clearly a rich and important woman. She probably held the licence in the name of her dead husband.

So who would have made up her *"oikos"*? This is the second baptism of an *"oikos"* that Luke records. The first is Cornelius in Acts 10:33. So Lydia's *"oikos"* would have included her children, her servants, employees and slaves. It may have included some who were clients in purchasing the fabric.

So a community of people entered as a community to become a Kingdom Community. It was probably a fairly static community. Note: community life wasn't a "religious meeting". It was what the community was doing all the time. There was no secular/spiritual divide. It was holistic/integrated.

So small mobile communities can germinate static communities. Please note: God is a Gardener. Every culture reflects something of the character of God. Persian cultures specially love gardens.

Since the industrial revolution of the last 200 years in the West the focus has been on buildings and structures.

It is interesting that there are two models of "germination" in church history.

The Peterine Model

This allowed a greater diversity in planting different flowers together. Hence the diversity of Orthodox churches, Coptic, Greek, Syrian, the Church of the East, the Ethiopian, Russian etc. The model is: "Let a thousand flowers bloom".

The Pauline Model

This was more like a garden nursery. All the plants in "the nursery" are of the same kind. In Holland you get multiple fields of tulips all the same colour! The Romans' love of order, discipline and administration led to the uniformity of Romanism. This didn't change at the Reformation and in Protestantism it led to uniformity in different denominations.

So our western view is that God loves nurseries, but this is not true! God loves diversity. The "Gardens of God" are a bit chaotic, but very diffuse – the tropical jungle versus the palm oil plantations. But in the "Gardens of God" the spectrum of communities depends on the nature of the soil. Some plants thrive in one type of soil and not in another. We are a wonderfully profuse garden with many different plants all displaying the glory and the wisdom of the Gardener. (Eph. 3:10)

What are our soils? Well, we are to 'germinate Kingdom Communities' in different cultures, Even within a culture there are considerable differences between urban and rural, between illiterate and well educated, between the powerful political elite and the 'majority powerless poor'. There are kinship communities. There are tribes and there are people groups and nations. Then there are special groups like professional footballers etc.

So a good diversity of soils should produce many different sorts of Kingdom Communities. God doesn't like uniformity – no carbon copies! In nature, God allows for mutations to occur in the DNA structure!

Some foundational concepts of a Kingdom Community

- **God is a community**. There is a Trinitarian basis to Kingdom Communities. It is 'us' not 'me'! (Gen. 1:26).
- The "First Commission" was ***"Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth …"***. (Gen. 1:28). We are plural beings. The first time it says, ***"It is not good"*** after a whole lot of, ***"And God saw that it was good"***. Is when God saw man's aloneness. How can Adam on his own be the image-bearer of "the community God"?

  [Individualism is rooted in Greek philosophy. The Bible insists on community. Sin produces aloneness – see Gen. 3.]
- **Marriage is a model for community** as a reflection of how close and intimate the community should be.
- Clearly, the Garden of Eden originally only covered a very small area of the earth. The rest of earth was in chaos. (Gen. 1:2) The plan was that people (in an unfallen state) would slowly fill the earth and turn the 'chaotic' into 'Gardens' of beauty – an extension of Eden. This was to be done by families! The authority to accomplish this was given to Adam and Eve. Very sadly they gave away this authority to Satan and the world remained chaotic. This authority (the title deed of all creation) is now in the hands of the Lord Jesus. (Rev. 5:5) He won it by the triumph of the Cross.

- So the basic building block of the community is **the family –** the extended family. God is a family God (Eph. 3:15). The good news is that the 'spirit of adoption' enables us to call God 'Father'. (Rom. 8:15)

  Jesus answered them, ***"Truly, truly I say to you, everyone who commits sin is a slave to sin. The slave doesn't remain in the house forever. The Son remains forever. So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed"***. (Jn. 8:34-36) So diversity is good!

If we agree on this, it takes a lot of 'heat' out of the contextualisation debate. There may be some soils where C^5 Communities will thrive. Other soils will require a C^2 or C^3 type of Community. A church like Saddleback Community Church in the US is thriving among a sort of post-modern Christianised people. But this plant is unlikely to thrive in the Muslim World!

What is a Kingdom Community?

Fellowship (koinonia) is from the Greek word *'koinos'* meaning shared or common. So the community shares a great deal in common. They share:

- **Life:** Adam and Eve certainly shared life (a common rib). So the community needs to be good friends with one another. Organisation doesn't need to be prominent and only a little administration is needed.
- **A common Father:** the father is the source of power and authority in a typical Middle Eastern family.
- **Values**
- **A purpose**

So the "meeting" was only a small part of their life together. An iceberg is meant to have only about 10% of its ice above the water – i.e. that is seen.

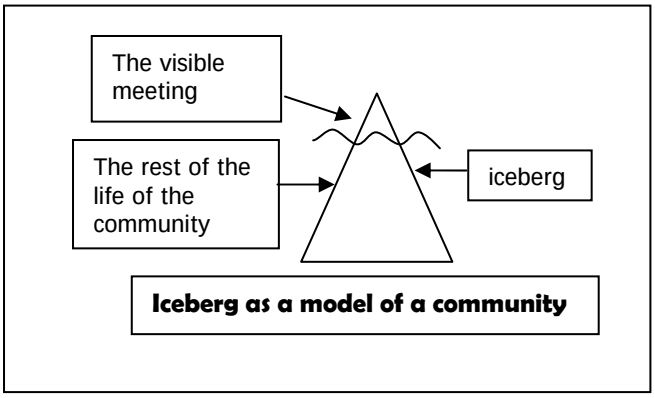
The result of western churches is that they "tip over"! The problem of "church" is that we don't see each other living out life together. Fellowship is rather shallow. In the late 60s and early 70s several churches in the West moved into community living. They found it really hard to sustain and many communities disbanded after just a few years. The difficulty was the deep-seated individualism of the average Western believer. At the same time in our present society there is a growing sense of isolation and the often depressing destruction of meaningful relationships.

"Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering. For He who promised is faithful and let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together … but encouraging one another and all the more as you see the day drawing near." (Heb. 10:23-25)

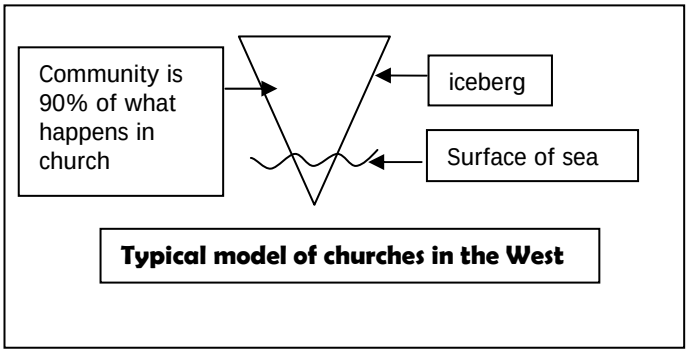
"Stir" is a strong word. It has the sense of kicking one another with a sharp object. Kingdom Communities are not meant to be comfortable. There needs to be an accountability of **doing** and not just learning. The measure of a real community is how it weathers a fierce storm of persecution. If Satan can destroy the community, he has won.

The Fall in the Garden led to shame, guilt and fear. This was the result of wrong choices and wrong choices led to a fragmentation of relationships. So train new believers to make the right choices! Teach them to ***"Put to death whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed which is idolatry."*** (Col. 3:5)

In Col. 3:8-10 Paul gives us a list of what we must put away, ***"Rid yourselves of … anger, rage, malice, slander and filthy language …. Do not lie to each other since you have taken off your old self with its practices and have put on the new self which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator"***.



Iceberg as a model of a community



Typical model of churches in the West

In Col. 3:12 Paul tells the believers what they should ***"put on"***. It isn't good enough not to sin! So for community living we need to, ***"Put on compassion, kindness, humility, meekness and patience – bearing with one another … and above all these put on love which binds everything together".***

The only way to experience real and lasting transformation in our personal lives is to live in community. And it is a transformed community that will transform society. In this way we will begin to see the Kingdom of God demonstrated on the earth now

The extended family – the "oikos" is a good basis for a Kingdom Community.

In Deut. 6:4-9 the instruction ***"to love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might"*** was to be taught to the children in the family – when the family sat down and when the family was on the move.

In most of the cultures where we work it is the extended family that needs to be the basic building block of the Kingdom Community and the 'community' needs to suit the people involved. To some extent allow the culture to shape the community.

There appear to be some basic "rules" for community living:

Identified leadership

The community isn't a democracy. Plurality of leadership is essential but the leaders are finally responsible for decisions and for the well-being of the community. These leaders must lead primarily by example rather than just by word. But discipline is needed and must be exercised gently, but with firmness.

It is good for a community to have an outside "consultant". The pressures of living in a community can sometimes skew discernment as to the causes of problems. Objectivity can be lost. Someone from a "mobile community" can often assess various tense situations from an objective standpoint so they can be more readily resolved.

An integration of prayer and work

Daily regular group prayer should be the basis of community life together. It is only the life of the Lord Jesus imparted to us by the Holy Spirit that can keep us together. You have to **depend** on the Holy Spirit to keep the community together. Practical work together is also essential. There should be careful planning so some don't come under greater pressure than others.

Defined aims

There are also broader aims like, **"May God be glorified in all things"** or **"Redeeming the whole of life** (personal and communal) **for God so that everyone might become more fully human".**

Then there are more **specific aims**:

1. In a network of semi-autonomous Kingdom Communities, each community might decide to **specifically support a ministry** – i.e. a community centre where meals, clothes, books and craft etc. help gather the larger non-Christian community together. Another community could focus on the homeless or the disabled. Each Kingdom Community needs a clear idea of what its specific aims are. One of the key aims is to repeatedly reproduce itself.
2. A second aim might be to **support the needs of the children** in the Kingdom Community helping with play, sports, education, acquiring employment skills etc. Children must never be "second-class" citizens in the community. Each child is a complete, although immature, person made in God's own image. Each child needs to be encouraged to discover his or her potential as God has made them and to see their gifts and abilities developed.
3. A third aim should be **the support of each member of the community**. Everyone has problems. Some of them are very deep-seated. These problems must always be dealt with. The community should accept people as they are, not as we wish them to be. The aim is to bear with one another in a spirit of forgiveness, love and patience – encouraging people to face up to the problems and not to run away from them.

Developing the depth of relationships

No relationship can be taken forgranted. It must be worked at with much prayer and patience. It is the **quality** of the time together that is important rather than just the **quantity**. We need to learn to be open with each other – to make ourselves vulnerable. We will often be humbled and need to repent.

We must resist a polite wall being built up between us. Atomisation of individuals destroys a Kingdom Community. If the life of the Spirit is to flow in the community there must be constant openness to each other. All need to be open. It seems that God often reveals the really good ideas to less mature believers to demonstrate to leaders that they really need to listen carefully to everyone.

In each community there must be a willingness to crucify ambitious and individualistic talents for the benefit of the whole. This will allow the life of Jesus to be seen in the community.

"Culture shock" is quite common in coming into a Kingdom Community. There is usually an initial 'honeymoon period' followed by nightmare irritations, frustrations and the loss of independence. This can lead to traumas until we begin to pull out as we consciously accept each other 'warts and all' and begin to rely completely on the grace of God to hold the community together.

Impacting the wider community

Corporate action will nearly always make a bigger impact on the wider society than individual action. Corporate action needs to happen in two spheres:

- With other Kingdom Communities and even churches. Unity of action on special projects and events is much more effective than the sum of the communities/churches each doing their own thing.
- Within the non-believing world in transformational ministry

Avoiding buildings – Why?

Hundreds of thousands of church buildings have been built all over the world. Has this been helpful in seeing Kingdom Communities come into being? Jesus taught us in John 4 that true worshippers would worship in Spirit and in truth.

Buildings had no real relevance. It is probably true that a return to buildings and institutions always diminishes spiritual life and power. Buildings often become monuments of religion. The

church/community is never a place, but always people; never a fold but always a flock; never a temple or 'house of God', but always an assembly of believers.

Church buildings are a witness to:

- **Our immobility** – but we are called to be a mobile people. The Gospel says, **"Go"**! A church building says, **"Stay"**! The Gospel says, **"Seek the lost"**! Our churches say, **"Let the lost seek the church"**.
- **Our inflexibility –** The structure, the PA system etc. hinder direct participation by most. Church buildings are a witness to our **lack of fellowship**. They are usually unfriendly places, uncomfortable and impersonal. Church buildings are not made for fellowship. Homes are much better places for getting to know one another.
- **Our pride** – big, beautiful and expensive. But remember, the Gospel is a treasure in an earthen pot – a diamond wrapped up in tinfoil.
- **Class divisions** – Look at the building and the facilities and you can predict, with some accuracy, the education, the income, occupation and social position of the members. The New Testament says, in James, that it should not be so.

The Process of Germinating Kingdom Communities

The Lord Jesus is our model for all apostolic ministry. Germinating Kingdom Communities is the heart of apostolic ministry. Jesus began to plant seeds in the lives of His followers not by asking them to believe, but by asking them just to be with Him. Jesus began by doing a mixture of individual evangelism and what could be called "community evangelism" – i.e. calling a small community of professional fishermen to follow Him.

We should follow His example. 'Yes' to individual one-on-one evangelism, but better get into a small community and call them to be with you and do what you do. So what starts as a "worldly community" ends up as a "Kingdom community".

Clearly there can be problems with this approach, for in a worldly community you have a diverse mixture of people – both good and bad. Even the mother of the sons of Zebedee had a very confused understanding of what the Kingdom was **really** all about. (See Mt. 20:20-28) Jesus dealt with the problems and misunderstandings of the community of 'the followers' and in the community of disciples following Jesus there were, ***"Many of His disciples*** (who) ***turned back and no longer walked with Him."*** (Jn. 6:66)

Jesus spent a great deal of time **training** the apostolic community in the principles of life in the Kingdom. They saw and noted that what caused the signs and wonders, the healings and deliverances was the **compassion** of Jesus. They saw Him preach the Kingdom and they saw people come into the benefits of the Kingdom – living in peace and wholeness. Then He sent His disciples out – first the 12 and then the 72 – to do what He did. At first they went out just two-by-two and then as a community of five. (See Mt. 10:5-42)

Consider the implications of Lk. 10:6, ***"And if a son of peace is there, your peace will rest upon him."*** Middle Eastern towns and villages are a conglomeration of social networks. The leaders of these social networks **may be** 'sons of peace'. As western believers we are often brought up in a culture of strong egalitarianism – treating all with equal honour. So we have to learn to give honour to leaders – to 'sons of peace'. The Greek word *'doxa'* (that we translate 'glory') has the sense of **weight**. A 'son of peace' has weight in his social network. So learn how to go to the leader in the community and give him honour in an appropriate way. Leaders like this have influence and take responsibility and care for their community.

Some leaders are scandalous – like the Samaritan woman – but Jesus honoured her! Remember your aim is to get communities/networks of the social world to become a Kingdom Community. Matthew was in the "scandalous category" for he was a tax collector. Jesus honoured him.

Matthew gathered his community/network and had a feast with ***"tax collectors and sinners"***. (Mt. 9:10-13) Jesus was there among them. This shocked the Pharisees. So the principle is to sow "the seeds of Kingdom life" into communities as well as into individuals.

Do all Kingdom communities have to look the same?

In Acts 16 you have the conversion in Philippi of two different *'oikos'* – Lydia's community and the jailer's community. Were they the same? Let us look at the two groups.

Lydia's group

Lydia was a wealthy trader with the monopoly for an area given to her (or maybe to her husband who had subsequently died) by the Roman Emperor. So she was probably a widow with considerable influence in the business community. Together with some others, she was a "worshipper of God" – i.e. a monotheist. She had a household/community of relatives, friends, clients and slaves. When Lydia believed, they all believed with her. She was baptised and so were the rest of the community. Paul and his small team **stayed** with them.

What was this "Kingdom Community" like? They probably met in a relatively big house. Some of them were wealthy. They had established relationships. When they ate together they probably ate lavish food (but no pork or blood). They were probably dressed well. We would characterise them as an 'upper middle-class' community (although there were some ex-slaves among them) with a strong Jewish influence.

The jailer's group

Philippi was a Roman colony started by ex-soldiers. The jailer was probably an ex-soldier and his friends and community were what we call 'blue collar workers' – other ex-soldiers. He wouldn't get much of a salary for it would be expected that he would 'graft' – take money from the prisoners for their food and other comforts at extortionate prices.

So the jailer's community were rough, rather smelly old soldiers with somewhat healed wounds, who would eat almost anything and who would despise any trappings of Jewish culture.

So we see two Kingdom Communities – one with a very "Roman soldier culture" and the other with a refined wealthy Jewish proselyte culture. It was to such diverse Kingdom Communities that Paul wrote in Ephesus. (Eph. 2:11-22) Some were Gentiles from a Jewish background, but now they were all ***"one in Christ"***. Different communities **can** be networked together.

Now this is what "contextualization" is really all about. It doesn't fit into the C_1–C_5 range. Learn to embrace some cultural forms, adapt others and reject some because they are polluted by the occult. This gives us freedom in methodology.

Sowing the seeds into different communities will, if you like, give you different "flowers", but they will all be equally beautiful and equally able to reproduce themselves.

The need to present an Accurate Gospel

"To be saved" should mean being transferred from one Kingdom to another – from the Kingdom of Satan into the Kingdom of God's dear Son. In the Gospel there is no emphasis that "getting saved" means "you get to go to heaven".

Before you start with what is 'Good News'. You need to have done research about what the local people consider to be 'bad news' in their culture. They may think of poverty, the misery caused by corrupt officials, bondage to demonic powers etc. Remember you are thinking at a **community level**, not just at an **individual level** (their personal sin). It could be unstable marriages, feuds between families etc.

Ultimately, the 'Good News' for a community is that if you live like the 'Mandate of the Kingdom of God' given by Jesus in Mt. 5-7, if you come under the authority of the King, then the King will

take responsibility for the transformation of individual lives and for the transformation of whole communities.

Many are **hopeless**. It is not that people want too much! It is that they hope for so little! Jesus came to give abundant life. The team and especially the Kingdom Community must demonstrate and live out that abundance.

Changing lives in the community

Don't be too concerned if the "raw material" doesn't look too good. Focus on healing and mending the "brokenness". Often there is too little faith that God can really change people. God doesn't want to "cover our sin" – as in the Old Testament – until we get to heaven. He wants to deliver us from sin now. Remember the "raw material" of the Church in Corinth (1 Cor. 6:9-11). They were sexually immoral, idolaters, adulterers, homosexuals, thieves, greedy, drunks, revilers and swindlers. **But they were washed clean**. They were sanctified and justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of God.

Titus was directed to find elders in the churches in Crete. Paul gives a list of qualifications for elders and he also describes the 'soil' from which these elders would come, ***"Cretans are always liars, evil beasts and lazy gluttons"***. (Titus 1:12) Paul clearly expected some to be transformed (metamorphosis – Rom. 12:3) and to move from one stage of glory to another. (2 Cor. 3:18) Is it possible to get saved and to remain unchanged? I don't think so.

In the community everyone needs to be either a brick or to be mortar. Some people are gifted to be the mortar binding the bricks together. Bricks are individuals with their specific gifts and abilities. Leadership is usually a 'mortar-type' thing. Note that many women are gifted to be mortar binding the community together.

Transformational Ministry to germinate a Kingdom Community

Germination is a botanical term for the beginning of growth in the seed – especially after a dormant period. Usually just the right conditions are necessary for seeds to grow – humidity, warmth, the right sort of soil etc. So it is with the Word of God. Sowing is absolutely necessary. Sowing is more effective for the germinating process if the ground has been ploughed up. Seeds often need to be covered up. Rain and sun (warmth) are necessary.

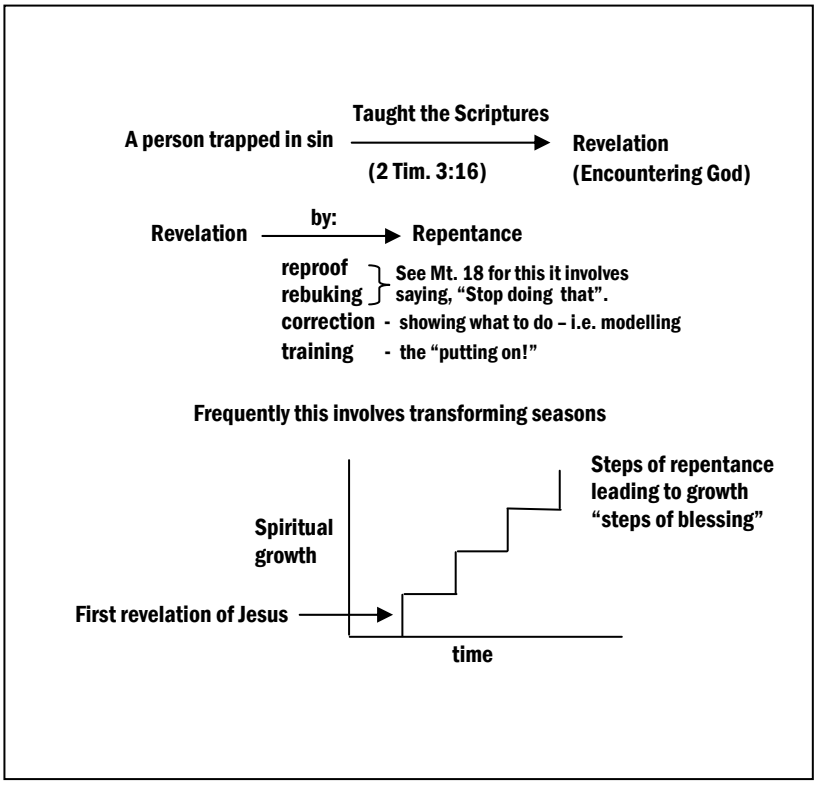
God wants to develop us as people and often God uses other people around us to make this happen. My thesis is that **teams** are best at producing (germinating) Kingdom Communities.

In Acts 26, Paul makes a defence to King Agrippa of the charges brought against him by the Jews. He tells King Agrippa how he met the risen Lord Jesus and the charge he received from Jesus. Paul himself was transformed by this encounter with Jesus. Transformation begins when we encounter the living Lord Jesus. It is this encounter that turns us from darkness to light.

It involves repentance – i.e. turning away from sin. Repentance is not remorse – i.e. just feeling bad about what we have done. We don't need more information or a better theology. Repentance is turning from Satan's control and turning your whole orientation to God. This is transformation.

So the essential **first step** in germinating a Kingdom Community is **revelation**. This leads to **repentance** (first repenting of specific actions, then of behaviour – actions to attitudes and finally at a deeper level to affections).

But this can't be done alone. In developing a Kingdom Community the leaders have to demonstrate what the community looks like. They must teach and correct the community so as to bring about, ***"Repentance, leading to a knowledge of the truth, that they may escape from the snare of the devil after being captured by him to do his will"***. (2 Tim. 2:22-26)



But transformational ministry **to** a community must be done by a transformational community such as a team. At the beginning both a prophetic and a pastoral ministry is needed as well as the work of the Holy Spirit.

There are four stages in team life:

Forming: the honeymoon stage

Storming: with great conflicts

Norming: working well together

Performing: highly reproductive stage

A look at how the transformation of Paul led to transforming communities

1. The first essential step

Paul is going to Damascus to persecute the believers. He needs an encounter with the Lord Jesus. He doesn't need information about Jesus. He is too resistant to change without meeting God. The context is the suffering of the believers. But by giving a revelation to Paul, the chief instigator of the suffering of the believers, God doesn't give relief to the **believers**, but rather to the **workers** in the conflict. Compare Paul with some of our Islamist friends. He came to know that 'Allah' was Jesus! There are two Greek words for 'to know':

'oidos' – something you know by study

'gnosis' – something you know by experience

Paul came to know *(gnosis)* the Lord Jesus. Light blinds him and he hears the voice of the Lord Jesus. For three days he remains in that blinded state.

What were the pricks he felt? Perhaps Stephen's message to the Sanhedrin (Acts 7)! Luke quotes Stephen's speech. He probably got it from Paul. Paul quotes Stephen's speech 14 times in the New Testament. Paul had been trained by Gamaliel. Clearly he had both great intelligence and great energy. God so often meets us in the areas of our strengths.

As a result of the Revelation of Jesus, Paul retires to the deserts of Arabia for three years to work out for himself the consequences of law and grace – to think through the issues of Romans chapter 7 (release from the law and the relation of law to sin). It takes time to unpack God's truth and think through the implications. In Romans 7 Paul is dealing with his motives. In 7:7 he mentions a particular sin – covetousness. Paul evidently hungered for fame and power. God began to deal with this – the deepest motivation of his life. Paul was an activist and he had to be changed in this area otherwise it would block Paul's usefulness to God. So everything had to be re-learned, re-thought through because Paul was called to the Gentiles.

2. The second step: the formation of team

So transformation begins with one man. After three years Paul returns to Damascus and then goes to Jerusalem and begins "the forming stage" of his life. In Jerusalem he experiences a negative reception. He has no friends until Barnabas comes into his life. Barnabas, the encourager, is introduced to us in Acts 4:36-37. He had an eye for those of spiritual potential and probably risked his reputation by backing Paul. After a while Paul was sent to Tarsus (Acts 9:30-31) where he spent the next three to five years.

Gentile believers in Antioch needed help. Barnabas arrived and saw the situation there. He remembered that Paul was called to the Gentiles, so he went to Tarsus to fetch Paul to help in Antioch. (Acts 11:25) It was in Antioch that the transformational ministry team was built. Paul and Barnabas had about one year's ministry in Antioch. Then they went down to Jerusalem together. (Acts 12) On their return to Antioch they were both sent out on the "First Missionary Journey". Paul was probably in his late 30s and Barnabas was probably in his mid-40s. They had been together for several years. It takes time to build a team. God is not just involved with us as individuals. He is concerned about our corporate nature. Jesus came ***"to save His people from their sins"***. Jesus came to get a people – a community. We are **"an us"**! But a team is only as strong as its ability to withstand both external opposition **and** internal conflict.

So the team set off from Antioch: Barnabas (the older) and Paul with an apostolic commission, together with John Mark as Barnabas' helper. Perhaps Titus joined them in Galatia as Paul's helper. After a period John Mark bailed out. Why did he leave? Perhaps it was because he didn't want to be part of a dysfunctional team!

Paul was still ambitious, intense, driven and probably very tiring to live with! He had lots of strong opinions and very high standards. His spiritual gifts as an apostle were evident as was his prophetic gift. He was a pushy type 'A' personality. Barnabas, the son of encouragement, was altogether different. His spiritual gift was primarily pastoral.

So their relationship didn't go well. Their gifts conflicted – the pastoral versus the prophetic. God wasn't leading the team because both of them were trying to do so! Don't try and base a transformational ministry team on what happened in Acts 13 and 14. The methodology of the First Missionary Journey was not repeated. The Galatian communities that were planted remained weak. Dysfunctional teams produce dysfunctional communities. So John Mark left!

3. The third step: allow yourself to be transformed by storming

In Acts 15:36-41 there was "the sharp disagreement". What was the cause? Paul uses the word "withdrawal" of the action of John Mark. (v. 38) He left them. The same word is used in Greek for desertion (soldiers who did this were executed). There were sharp words (the prophetic understanding versus the pastoral) and the team **split**. The team wasn't strong enough to withstand internal conflict. 'Storming' isn't fun! Barnabas was right. He was a talent scout and he made much of John Mark. This was a low point in Paul's life.

But Paul clearly learned a great deal from this 'storm'. He must have evaluated what had happened. Mistakes can be redeemed if there is repentance. We can use losses to build better in

the future. What is needed is a very hard look at self in the light of God's character and what we are to become. We have to **own** our responsibility for our part in the 'storm'.

The temptation to Eve in the garden was, in effect, *"You can be like God, without God"*. Perhaps this was Paul's temptation and as he evaluated the situation he saw that he really needed to work alongside others with different giftings.

As Paul starts the Second Missionary Journey he recruits Silas and then Timothy – clearly a man with pastoral gifting – "a smaller Barnabas". Next Luke, the doctor, joins them with his gifts of mercy and faithfulness. So Paul is recruiting to the team those with very different gifting to his own. In his processing of the 'storm', he realises how greatly he needs Barnabas-type people. He realises that a team needs a full range of colours and a community is not all being the same.

When the team arrives in Greece they focus on *'oikos'*. But notice how very different Paul is compared to when he was in Antioch. Later, writing to the community in Thessalonica, Paul says, ***"We were gentle among you, like a nursing mother taking care of her own children. So being affectionately desirous of you, we were ready to share with you not only the Gospel, but also our own selves because you had become very dear to us"***. (1 Thess. 2:7-8)

Paul was a transformed man. He was growing to be more of a Barnabas! So often we don't know what we have, until we have lost it! The 'storm' transformed Paul and he moved on into the 'norming' stage.

But this ability of God to transform us as we reflect on conflict is no excuse for generating conflict. ***"A passer-by who meddles in a quarrel not his own is like one who seizes a dog by the ears."*** (Prov. 26:17)

But with prayer and deep reflection, hurt experienced in a storming period can transform a team into a period of effectiveness.

This is just the beginning of a major a paradigm shift in our understanding. With the beginning of this shift, can we also shift our vocabulary from **"church planting"** to **"germinating Kingdom Communities"**?