

# **+greenchurch**

**...gathering to give our lives for the  
Kingdom's cause**



[www.greenchurch.info](http://www.greenchurch.info)

- **Infectiously connecting a group of overlooked friends**
- **As the heart, hands, voice, and compassion of the Body of Christ**
- **In an essentials-only church that gathers right where they live**

## **Nine brief chapters share our story & ideas**

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**Christ-followers of ONE who acts in love & power!!!**

**+The most life-changing ministry we can humanly provide a group of overlooked friends is a simple Body of Christ, a Church, planted among them, to be His Hands, His Heart, His Voice, His Compassion in their circle of relationships+**

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*I gratefully acknowledge that **God's Spirit** can over-rule, highlight, or reshape anything I write, in order to make it mesh with what HE has built into your faith & what HE wants to do through your life...I trust HIM!*

*This is intended to be true to the Bible, but not an academic theological treatise. It is my imperfect journey into the best experience of church-life I have ever known!*

## 1. What do you mean by “green” church?

“GREEN” is the best word to describe the group-sized, suburban, middle class, parking-lot church I have been part of for the last ten years. This group of Christ-followers is all about God and relationships. They dress “Saturday” casual and share easily in their gently guided faithlife together. Intentional, but always relaxed about things like “time” and “personal input” they flow through worship, sharing, prayer support, “good Samaritan” celebrations, serving others, and personal growth in obedience-based discipleship...often in a different sequence each time they gather. Then, they continue living as the Body of Christ wherever they are all week.

But that’s all they do. They are efficient and effective. No time or spiritual energy is spent, or wasted, on lesser things. Some, usually pairs, get together during the week (or just are together...it’s not a special meeting) and they may pray for others, or help someone, or gather food for a needy family, but there are no committee meetings, no programs to plan, and no events to promote.

They are “green.” They have learned three basic essentials about being the Body of Christ together, though they have only learned these things in their hearts, by doing each one....it’s just how they think of church life now.

1. They ARE the church ...not the building, not the name, not the leaders, not the location, and not the ‘worship service.’ They are the Body of Christ as they gather, AND parts of His Body wherever they are individually each day. They leave no physical trace of their gathering each week (pretty good evidence that the church is ‘in’ the persons, not ‘in’ the place.)

2. They radically focus on loving God and loving persons wherever they have an opportunity to do either one. These two essentials get 100% of their time and energy as the Body of Christ. Living-out these two priorities is so life-changing, for them and for others, they won't settle for less purposeful church involvements!

3. They give everything away every week or month. Each time they gather they bring groceries and toiletries to fill a box and ask anyone to take it who has a friend, neighbor, or acquaintance in need (lost job, house burned, spouse left, etc.) At the end of the month they also divide up their total financial offering between persons in need, missions initiatives, and church planting efforts...and the participants deliver the money personally to the persons they know.

**For this group being “green” means maximizing their relational and spiritual influence as Christ’s Body without waste or negative ‘by-products.’**

Issues like church burn-out, consumer Christianity, spectator faith, or building & program drained budgets don't exist for them.

Their hearts, time, and resources are spent on God and people...that's all.

## **2. “Kim” ...Christ-formed in a twenty-dollar experiment**

Kim came to the “green” church as one who had trusted Christ in childhood, heard lots of sermons, and went to many Bible classes. She found herself at mid-life with so many responsibilities that church and vibrant Christian living had been crowded out by daily demands (or at least pushed to the edges of her life). Kim was genuinely a Christian, but had not connected with the nurturing or practical opportunities she needed to fully live-out her faith-life.

As soon as she started participating in the parking lot gathering, she started bringing food for the give-away box, and she brought good stuff. Almost as quickly, she began bringing her toddler grandchildren, who learned to go get food out of her kitchen and put it in a grocery bag whenever it was time to go to church. (Isn't it interesting that this was their first perception of why people went to church!)

But mostly Kim began to grow in her personal prayer-life. She prayed not only about herself and her widely extended in-laws and “outlaws,” but she also prayed for co-workers and patients in her nursing career. She turned into the nurse everyone called on when they had a big problem or a dying patient, and she found great value in helping others.

More and more of her family noticed the “richness” in her life and began to turn to her in a new way. Many began coming with her to the “green” church.

Then she stuck her neck out. One Sunday the church gave everyone a sealed envelope and encouraged them to seek God's guidance to someone they could help with the contents of that envelope. She did pray, and she

noticed a maid at her hospital eating only crackers for lunch. Without opening the envelope or knowing what was inside, she told the maid that she had something to give her “as a reminder that God loved her,” and handed her the envelope! (Man, that took faith, because Kim didn’t know if money, or a scripture verse, or a paper cross was inside...only when she came back to church the next week did she learn that every envelope had \$20 in it.)

Kim was hooked on noticing the people around her and how she might be “Jesus with skin on” in their lives.

Within two weeks, she found herself at a grocery store, on vacation, 300 miles from home. She had her “Christ-like” radar for helping others turned on, and she noticed a lady filling her cart with 3 gallons of milk and then frowning while she added up the cost. One mom knew another mom’s plight...buying food for kids without quite enough money to get all that was needed. So Kim, pulled out her own twenty dollar bill and said, “I don’t want to be intrusive, but I’m a mom too and just wanted to pass this on to help with your grocery shopping today...and to remind you that God cares about you.” Neither mom will ever forget that encounter, or God’s presence in that brief exchange!

Well, Kim continues to pray and help patients spiritually, beyond the duties of a nurse. Her 20-something niece was baptized recently (as the church surrounded her at a backyard pool) and two more young adults in her family are now considering Christ seriously for the first time. Naturally, she keeps her eyes open for God-arranged encounters with anyone who needs her help, and she always carries a twenty dollar bill.

**She is one of the “richest” Christ-followers I know!**

### **3. “Stan”...Christ-formed through a food box**

Stan, a middle-aged medical supply rep, had gone to church some as a kid, but had completely separated himself from it in his teens. He says he was burned and disappointed in some of his experiences with church so he washed his hands of it.

But after 40 years of shunning church he experienced this group, and God used it to begin chipping away at his heart. His wife had started participating in the “green” church on the parking lot. She heard about it through her mother’s participation (who heard about it through her garage door repair man). Her sporadic presence soon became regular and she began to tell Stan about the weekly food box, the monthly cash given to persons in crisis, and the outdoorsy environment. He finally came with her on Mother’s Day, but he was careful to remain aloof. Again at Christmas, Stan was with his wife, but he always sat at the edge of the group and just looked away during prayers or worship. He was polite, but distant.

Then he came one Sunday when there was a particularly touching report from the recipients of the food box the week before. He asked if he could deliver the box to an elderly lady on his medical route during the coming week because he knew she was having trouble financially. According to plan, he loaded the box on his truck Monday morning with the intention of dropping it off about midday. But before he left the warehouse, a supervisor brought a new trainee over to ride with Stan and learn the “job.” As they rode together, and got to know each other, the trainee asked about the box of groceries and Stan told him about the green church and how they gave everything away. After a quiet pause, the

trainee opened up a little deeper...he said he'd been out of work for several months and things were really tight at home...he asked if Stan thought the church would allow him to have the food box in order to feed his three kids. Stan could barely talk by then but okayed that idea wholeheartedly. Immediately the trainee called his wife, welling up with tears, to tell her what he was bringing home to three hungry mouths!

Stan became a Christ-follower soon after that encounter! Not only was he at the gathering every week, he began to share openly during the Bible time about his own journey. He prayed. He sang. He went out of his way to help people in his path during each day. He served others in the gathering. He shared his encouragement and thoughts in this group with a Christ-like wisdom. He began to talk with his grown children about his new way of life (they had already noticed of course), and they began to show up at the gathering.

This green church always depends on God's "giftings" and anointing more than on human selection, and in that environment HE raised up Stan as a true "elder" in the group!

Life transformation became a reality for Stan, without anybody saying those words or planning a complex "strategy" of discipleship.

**The "green" church just lived it out!**

#### **4. “Jay”... Christ-formed through orphans’ shoes.**

Jay first showed up at the “green” church with an old friend who’d been a part of it for years. He was reluctant but searching for something deeper than he had experienced in the past.

A shoes-for-orphans project began just a couple of months after he’d started coming, and it really sparked something inside him. As a police officer he had led many drug abuse prevention assemblies and it gave him a soft spot for struggling kids. This compassion pushed him to shoe store “sales” and discount stores looking for sturdy but reasonably priced merchandise for the orphans. As a matter of fact, he was doing more than anybody else in the church, so they asked him to lead the whole effort. Wow, he took off with new zest once the group expressed that kind of confidence in him. They just followed his example in buying, tying, bagging, and delivering the shoes, and nearly every week he overflowed with personal gratitude about how much it meant to him!

He became passionate about helping others. The next year he not only led the shoe project again, but also wrangled up 1,000 pairs of socks. And, he didn’t just wait for this single endeavor. He started carrying food and toiletries in the trunk of his police car to give needy families he found in serving warrants.

Jay heard about an overlooked foster child sixty miles away and made sure the boy got a basketball for Christmas. He delivered cash from the church to a transplant patient to assist with the heavy medicine costs. When someone was needed to help purchase, bag, load, and deliver 3,000 pounds of rice to refugees in a nearby apartment complex guess who did it.

People began to see him in restaurants and say, “Hey, I’ve heard that you help people, and I want to give some money (or food or clothes) to help.” Even Walmart started giving Jay big boxes of clothes they couldn’t sell.

This man’s inner self was full and overflowing with helping the persons God brought his way. He says, “Nobody ever asked me to be more than a spectator in such endeavors...this has transformed my life!”

Everyone began to see him as a deacon in the green church. **God just made him into “one who serves others eagerly” and a lot of people are grateful!**

## 5. What does a “gathering” look like?

The Parking Lot church is not dependant on any external props, facilities, or permissions. It simply gathers to love God and love persons, without breaking any public rules or relying on any required set of circumstances. As people arrive in their vehicles, or by foot, the first ones there just settle in an open spot on the parking lot. Usually, they get near a shade tree in summer, or in a sunny spot in the winter. When it rains, the park pavilion nearby is always empty (who else would go to a park when it’s raining) so they cluster there. Most bring lawn chairs. A few sit on their vehicle or the curb. The church arrives in their hearts, and leaves in their hearts.

Someone usually brings a box and another brings a boot. As persons arrive they put small bags of groceries in the box, and offerings in the boot while others chat. One lady comes with her battery operated keyboard and guides the group through a few worship songs and scriptures. Or, sometimes she uses just a CD, or a testimony, or “nature” to inspire worship.

The volunteer leader almost always has a “Thank You” note to read from some recipient of the church’s ministry, and he always makes a big deal out of the box of food: who has a report on last week’s food recipient, who wants to take it today, do any kids have something to put into the box, what are some of the contents (he holds up tuna, rice, beans, mac & cheese, cereal, and toothpaste). It’s kind of their weekly way of living-out a deeply held value.

A prayer time is facilitated by another volunteer (sometimes they share and pray for special needs longer than any other activity during the gathering).

New needs or ministry projects come up often from whoever runs across it. The church values the idea of responding to whoever or whatever God brings across their path during the week. Always by the end of the month the offerings for that month are given away to a person in need, and a mission of some sort (often to multiple items that arise). Some past examples include: shoes for orphans, Christmas gifts for prisoner families, supplies for hurricane victims, food and arrival kits for refugees entering the U.S., medicine for a transplant patient, clothes for homeless shelters, specific missionaries, cereal for a children's home, cash for families whose homes have burned, or for expectant parents without insurance...you get the idea!

There is a Bible time during which the leader guides the group in discussing a few verses of scripture. He kind of keeps the discussion on track, but frequently a personal comment by someone about how the scripture fits their own current life circumstances becomes the real heart of the discipleship time. People respond well to this "shared dialogue" approach. They internalize the truth of scripture and grow in how they live with Christ during the week.

Then it's over with a short prayer. No big fanfare. Someone gets the food box. Others pack up shoes, or toiletries, or coats, or kitchen utensils, or clothes that have been collected for a ministry project...which they will hand-deliver during the week. One or two leave with checks to put in the hands of a needy family.

If someone becomes a new Christ-follower the church caravans to the nearest backyard pool to celebrate their baptism. Most hang around and talk in groups of two or three, and within 30 to 40 minutes it's just an asphalt parking lot again. The church has filtered back into the

community. They live-out their core values for another week:

### **Core Values**

1. Share God's love through kindness and prayer everyday.
2. Do everything a church should do, but keep it basic: worship God, learn & live the Bible, help hurting people, stand by each other, and graciously share Christ.
3. Give all offerings away...to missions and to persons God brings our way.
4. "Where two or three have gathered together in My name, there I am in their midst." Matthew 18:20

*The "green" church exemplifies the most elemental & Biblical definition of church I've ever heard:*

***"A group of Christ-followers who fully function, believe, and understand themselves to be the Body of Christ in their circles of influence."***

The Bible doesn't give us just one verse or passage that concisely defines "church".....we have to read scripture and look for the recurring patterns or the Christ-like "rhythms of life" that Christians practiced and taught as they came together. How does God's Spirit & Word guide you to define church?

## 6. Being the Body-of-Christ, the Church, on-site: “how to begin”

**Passionate Christian friends** (and their unreached relationships) can become a life changing “*where-they-live*” Body-of-Christ!

Don’t skip lightly over the Biblical ideas in these first four paragraphs:

Ask God to arrange encounters between you and the friends/acquaintances/strangers in whom He has been stirring up a deep spiritual yearning. This only happens through your praying & God’s connecting you to the person or persons HE has made spiritually hungry!

Pray about this everyday for 7 days. If no connections arise then have an hour long prayer retreat with God...read Acts 16:7-14...Lydia was a worshiper but not yet a Christ-follower...God knew how to connect Paul and her...ask Him to connect you with someone like that...the not-yet-Christian who is probably already hungry for God.....watch for the “Lydias.”

Though a few Christ-followers might become the core of the group, don’t let this become just a cozy club of Christians. Keep praying and sharing with whomever He brings your way until some are ready to journey with you in this group...it only takes a few. Trust His Spirit to connect you to the right ones, and to have their hearts open.

Don’t be overly anxious & substitute events or advertising to draw a crowd...just pray, seek, watch, and wait on HIM to connect you to the God-hungry persons! Their circle of relationships will be what draws more persons to the gathering!

1. Gather at a home, apartment, park, café....wherever it's natural for the group to gather.
2. Seek to grow into a fully functioning Body of Christ. Without using “churchy terms” you can guide the group to experience the 5 basics (defining traits/recurring patterns/Biblical rhythms) of church life (see “practical ideas” below).
3. At every gathering ask God to continue arranging encounters between current participants and others in whom He has created a heart hunger for the person of Christ. **Always be authentic, never false**, in caring for another person. Be sensitive to their needs. Never manipulate. Include and value each one.
4. Personally pray for God to **raise up an “intern”** who will work with you and reproduce the gathering in another group. Also, seek out a “Paul” who will give you on-going wise counsel as you lead this group (2 Tim.2:2).

### **Practical Ideas for the basic functions or rhythms of the Body-of-Christ**

**A. supportive friendships...**share life concerns and pray for each other (perhaps silently at first if some prefer). Take turns telling (a) what the world has been dumping on you, and (b) where you have seen God at work this week, or (c) what He has been doing in your life. Be authentic and “be there” for one another in the ups and downs of everyday living. Try this over a simple meal.

**B. authentic worship...**focus on getting in touch with God's greatness using any combination of (a) music/guitar/CD/video, (b) art, (c) silence/awe, (d)

nature, (e) sharing about God's Hand in your journey, (f) scripture promises, etc.

**C. obedience-based discipleship**...apply a Bible passage to how you live. As a group discuss what it says about (a) God, (b) self, (c) others, and (d) life. Pick practical scriptures like: Psalms, Matt. 5-7, John 8, Gal. 6, Philippians, or James. The leader needs to guide, but not dominate the dialogue...just keep it on track. Shared leadership is the healthiest approach to growing Christ-followers and multiplying groups.

**D. life-involvement evangelism**.....include not-yet-Christians wholeheartedly and naturally, and allow them to hear/see how Christ is working in the lives of those present. Nurture everyone toward expressing their own "journey-with-God" during the gathering and in genuine relationships. Let people be drawn to God by all they hear and experience in the group....some are drawn toward becoming Christ-followers as they experience the fellowship of doing a servanthood project together and the joy of making a difference for others in the world! They become open to hearing the Biblical truths about how they can trust and follow Christ with their whole life!

**E. Help others like Christ would** (Matt. 25:35-36). Do a mission project. Help someone in a life crisis. Take a weekly offering (always let "giving" be an act of worship)... have the group decide on how to collect and use their gifts in meeting someone's need..let them deliver it!

## 7. Biblical Model: the Romans 16:3-5 expression of basic church-life

When Paul wrote "*Greet Prisca and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus,...also greet the church that is in their house,*" he (and God through him) was obviously affirming this little band of believers as the Body of Christ, the church, in their tiny slice of the world.

How enlightening it is to mentally picture that church in their 1st Century environment. Obviously they had no pulpit or pews. There was no separate classroom for the teens or children. Much of the New Testament had not been written yet and nobody had gone to Bible College! So, how did they live-out the elemental basics of church life together?

Consider discussing these questions with your own "gathered" church:

~ How did Prisca & Aquila make a living? (Acts 18:3)

~How big was their house? What was the furniture like?

~ How many people fit in their home?

~ How did they Worship? Disciple people? Evangelize? Do Ministry for others? Have Community together? ...all very basic and elemental, but still a simple expression of church!

~ Did anyone prepare, train, or "certify" their leader other than Paul? (2 Tim. 2:2, Acts 18:2-3)...by the way, how old do you suppose Peter, James, and John were when Jesus spoke Matthew 28:19-20 into their lives?

~Who gave them permission to transform their

neighborhood by planting a simple but sincere expression of church there?

~Did they have deacons? If so, how were the deacons identified....were they selected or simply appreciated by everyone while God “gifted” & motivated them to serve people? Did deacons in the Bible ever meet, or just serve others?

~Did they have elders or was their pastor/leader/mentor the same thing as an elder (a spiritually mature person who daily follows the Lord and nurtures others to do the same)? 1 Timothy 5:17

~Where did they baptize? Did the person who was best friends with the new believer get to baptize that person?

~How did they observe the Lord’s Supper?

~ What did they do with their offerings?

~ How much did the gathering cost?

~ How long did this specific expression of church-life last in this location?

~How much good did it do?

We don’t know the detailed answers to these questions but the simplicity of that church is both apparent & somehow refreshing!

This same simple elemental style of church has changed lives throughout 2000 years in every culture, sub-group, social class, and political environment imaginable.....home churches in China, riverbank churches in Africa, apartment churches in urban

America, and how about those early Christians driven to gather in the catacombs!

It has been well said,

**“If a group of Christ-followers is doing everything a church is supposed to do, why not call it a church?”**

## 8. “the meal”...yeah, it’s church for the rest of us!

This variation of a gathering is probably best for groups meeting in a limited space like a home or apartment.

**Christian Friends** in any group (and their network of unchurched relationships) can become simple relational churches. Each cluster can become an “elemental” Body of Christ by living out these 5 basics (or rhythms) of church life:

m...mentor each person toward bringing his/her own friends and expressing his/her own God-journey with the group...(life-involvement evangelism)

e...eat, share life concerns, and pray for each other around the table...(supportive friendships)

a...apply a Bible passage to how you live, as a group dialogue...(obedience-based discipleship)  
...the leader needs to choose a practical passage and guide but not control the sharing of Bible truth

l...love the Lord with all your heart, and others as yourself...(worship, and servanthood)

**Many passionate Christians are making the choice** to birth relevant church-bodies that totally transform overlooked groups of friends (who have mentally distanced themselves from the regular church). They support themselves entirely by a personal career as part of a revolutionary movement to follow Christ.

*“Ben” radiates as he shares about the church-body of young adults and families that gather in his home. They begin to arrive about 10AM and sometimes stay well past the noon fellowship meal. During their few hours*

together they enjoy life-sharing fellowship, Bible discussion, prayer, worship, and ministry projects...usually in a different sequence each week...often taking a snack or play break with the kids. He says it is the most engaging church they have ever experienced. **It is easy to bring friends** to such a group. Everyone has time to listen, to laugh, and to encourage one another. Not only are people coming to know Christ and maturing in their faith, it is transforming how they live! **Ben challenges them regularly to grow spiritually to the point of beginning such a church in their own homes.**

### How to Begin

1. Ask God to arrange encounters between you and the friends/acquaintances/strangers in whom He has been stirring up a deep spiritual yearning. Keep praying, seeking, watching, waiting, and sharing until some are ready to journey with you in this church...it only takes a few. Trust His Spirit to connect you to the right ones, and to have their hearts open.
2. Please don't settle for a cozy club of "just us" Christ-followers...always be seeking/loving/including those who are still searching for HIM! Some who begin with you may not yet be Christians. **Don't begin until HE guides you to the person or group whose heart(s) HE has been preparing.**
3. Plan the meal to be easy and casual...it may be just snacks ...**focus on God and relationships**, not food/cooking/eating.
4. Gather at a home, apartment, park, café, etc. Use the "m.e.a.l." idea just to guide you in carrying out the **five basics** of the church: life-involvement evangelism, supportive friendships, obedience-based discipleship, servanthood, and simple but sincere worship (see Practical Ideas, chapter 5).

5. At every gathering ask God to continue arranging encounters between participants and people in whom He has created a heart hunger for the person of Christ. **Always be authentic, never false**, in caring for another person. Be sensitive to their needs. Bring them to the meal with you. Never manipulate. Include and value each one.
6. Personally pray for God to raise up an “intern” who will work with you and reproduce the “meal” church in another group. Seek to “refocus” and multiply about every 6 months!
7. Including not-yet-Christians in the meal allows them to experience how Christ is working in the lives of believers...and be drawn to Him themselves. 1 Cor. 14:24-26
8. As you eat take time to share what’s really going on in your life and journey with God. Pray for, encourage, and stand by each other.

## 9. Finding the person God has made “hungry” Acts 16:6-15 Bible Study

**Note the influence of the four distinct factors in this church planting passage:**

1. The Holy Spirit guiding leaders to unlikely persons/groups and preparing those specific hearts for a spiritual beginning
2. Prayer as a point of connection with not-yet-believers
3. Relationship ties quickly drawing family and friends into new elemental church bodies
4. The absence of money and facilities

Please read the ten verses from Acts before you reflect on (or discuss with friends) the following thoughts:

Paul was just beginning his 2<sup>nd</sup> missionary journey here, and was obviously seeking the Spirit’s guidance to the right places and people. He was sensitive enough to God’s leading that he refused to go into an area if the Spirit redirected him. How refreshing. It’s not uncommon today for Christian leaders to plan a great endeavor “for” God, and then proceed whether the Spirit affirms the idea or not! **God knows what you want Him to do, but what does HE want you to do?**

So, don’t just race ahead with the plans that you have in mind, even if your motives are good. Rather, seek God’s definite direction and go to that group of people, even if you have to keep praying and waiting until HE makes the path clear. God already sees a person (or persons) whose heart and life He has been working in...someone He has been making “hungry” for His love, forgiveness, and Lordship...**let Him guide you to that person!**

As one church planter says, we should have a “prayer plan” for finding persons and starting churches, rather than an “activity plan!” God has a way of guiding us to the persons HE has made hungry for the Gospel when we take time to seek and wait on His leading.

I hear practical examples of this wise counsel from all over. A former missionary to Africa says his team quit going into villages and showing the Jesus film because too many who responded were only curious and didn't stick with their profession of faith. Instead they began to pray that God would lead them to a “person-of-peace” (Luke 10:1-9)...a person God had made ready for their message or their mission....a person who opened the door to his/her circle of relationships. Sometimes it took 14 months, and sometimes 5 minutes to “encounter” this person....but prayer was the key. The believers and churches started in this manner flourished.

Still another example comes from Alabama. A pastor planted 52 churches in five years in low income apartments, primarily by prayer-walking in the apartment complexes...seeking the person(s) God had made hungry!

And how about Austin, Texas....a missionary kid, now grown, began to prayer-walk in a “rough” apartment complex and after several months encountered two ladies who were open to prayer for their families needs. He started going by weekly to pray with them and soon one trusted Christ with her life. More family and friends began to join the weekly prayer time at her invitation. Within several weeks the “missionary” suggested they begin a church together in her apartment. She wholeheartedly agreed, along with 30-40 of her friends who started coming!

**If prayer is the key to “connecting” with the person(s) God has made spiritually hungry...in the Book of Acts, and in Africa, and in Alabama, and in Austin.....well, you get the idea!!!**

Obviously prayer is more effective than events, activities, and advertising...and costs nothing except our time with God.

So, what factors cause us to often catch ourselves praying a bit then quickly forging ahead with our humanly limited “outreach strategies?”

As soon as Paul got clear guidance from God he went immediately to that place...that group of people. But, even then he held off on proclaiming the Good News for a few days. It seems he was still waiting, praying, actively seeking, and watching for the person (or persons) God had made hungry for new life in Christ. If I had been there with Paul, I would have probably suggested that we gather a crowd, post some signs, or even have a drawing for one of Paul’s well made goat skin tents! But Paul was looking only for a God-arranged encounter with the right person...he searched, but waited on God to connect him to that person.

Finally, down at the riverbank, a place commonly used for prayer in that culture, Paul found a group of women. How many? Probably only a handful. No great crowd here. And, of course, women in this era were not considered equal to men. But Paul began a conversation with this tiny group of “God-searchers”, and sure enough Lydia’s heart was ripe to hear God’s truth for her life. She was a worshiper of God, but not yet a Christian. How long had God been working in her life? What circumstances had made her want to know more about HIM?

**The same God who saw Paul trying to go the wrong direction also saw Lydia's heart and readiness to hear Paul's message, once he found God's direction. HE brought the two together!**

Lydia quickly invited Paul to speak to her household...her family, servants, and close friends...her circle of close relationships. Almost certainly she became the crowd-drawer, not some big advertised event. It was all tied together by prayer, God's connections, and relationships...no money was needed!

Her family and friends also believed and were baptized. This hints that Paul was starting a church right in Lydia's home.....how wonderfully simple.....how God-dependent.....how contagious it all was!

In Acts 16:22-34, God intersects Paul's life with the local jailer at a time when both were in a life-crisis. God used that crisis to make the jailer "hungry" for something deeper in life, and this tough guy both trusted Christ and opened the door to his network of relationships, his household. I'm sure they saw a big change in their jailer husband/dad/friend. The jailer became the crowd-drawer and many were baptized upon hearing his story and Paul's message. So, within days a second church was started in this previously overlooked circle of family and friends.

Why was the jailer not at the riverbank with Lydia? They lived in completely different social segments of the city. They worked at different times, went different places, and had totally different lifestyles. Even as new believers their lives clearly did not mesh.

Would her homechurch and his join together now? Probably not. Though both groups would learn to

worship, grow as believers, share, and minister to their community, they almost surely would do it in different ways.

**Summary:**

- The Holy Spirit led Paul to two groups he would never have picked out with his own wisdom: a woman and her household, and a jailer and his household.
- Prayer became the bridge between Paul's heart to share the Gospel and Lydia's heart to hear it.
- Both Lydia and the jailer had an impact on their families and friends, their circles of influence. These new church plants crystallized around the relationships, not around events/activities/programs. What God is doing in one life profoundly touches others who are close to that person.
- **All of this happened at a riverbank, a prison, and two homes that were adequate, relational, and cost free.**

## **Christ-followers of the ONE who acts in love & power**

You have to be awed by the grassroots churches of the early Christ-followers. As they gathered and lived-out the rhythms of the Body of Christ there was nothing boring about it!

**In Acts 4:29-31 they prayed like they expected God to move with love & power and use them in extraordinary ways...and HE didn't disappoint them!**

They never allowed following HIM to become routine, business as usual, or just going through the motions. It was not culturally or politically correct....as a matter of fact it was downright risky. **They were giving their lives for the Kingdom's cause!** And, God used them as His tools to change their world.

**We can still follow Christ like that today...**

### **Dialogue Questions**

...to use with a friend or a group in discussing any chapter of this book

1. Are there groups of friends or daily relationships that come to mind as you reflect on these ideas?
2. Has God's Spirit made you hungry to start or be a part of something like "green" church?
3. How might God have you reshape one of these ideas for the group of overlooked friends HE has pressed to your heart?
4. What's holding you back from taking the first step?
5. Who might partner with you in praying about this for the next 30 days?

***+The most life-changing  
ministry we can humanly  
provide a group of  
overlooked friends is a  
simple Body of Christ, a  
Church, planted among  
them, to be His Hands, His  
Heart, His Voice, His  
Compassion in their  
circle of relationships+***

**elemental.contagious.powerful**