

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ...



... about simple church

What is a simple church? P. 1
Why simple church? P. 1
Is this really a significant thing God is doing in the world today? P. 2
Aren't those involved in simple church just disgruntled people? P. 2
Are there other names used to refer to simple church? P. 2
What does a simple church comprise of? P. 2
How big should a simple church grow? P. 3
When and how should a simple church multiply? P. 3
What is the purpose of a simple church? P. 4
How does a simple church maintain a missional purpose? P. 4
What does a simple church do when they meet together? P. 5
What about the children? P. 5
What about corporate worship and teaching? P. 5
What does the leadership of a simple church look like? P. 5
What is an apostolic team? P. 6
What about the possibility of heresy? P. 6
What about church wide unity? P. 6

Frequently Asked Questions

This article is an attempt to answer some frequently asked questions regarding simple church.

What is a simple church?

By "simple church" we refer to a **values-based approach** to being a **Kingdom-shaped church**; viewing church essentially as **organic, relational** and **fluid** rather than institutional, hierarchical and rigid; a **Kingdom family** rather than a business enterprise or a religious organisation. Simple church is a missional shared life, not a schedule of meetings and activity. Thus while every simple church certainly doesn't look the same, we are all whistling the same tune.

For more information, please see:

What is simple church? <Honey, I Shrunk the Church>

<http://crosswaveglobal.wordpress.com/2010/06/01/what-is-simple-church/>

What are Hebrew values? <My Big Fat Greek Mentality>

<http://crosswaveglobal.wordpress.com/2010/04/01/what-are-hebrew-values/>

What is a Kingdom-shaped church? <The King's Speech>

<http://crosswaveglobal.wordpress.com/2010/04/03/what-is-a-kingdom-shaped-church-the-kings-speech/>

What is the priesthood of all believers? <Shall We All Dance?>

<http://crosswaveglobal.wordpress.com/2010/04/08/what-is-the-priesthood-of-all-believers-shall-we-all-dance/>

Why simple church?

There are two main reasons why many believers are exploring simpler expressions of church life and ministry.

First, Biblical principle and historical precedent – "church in the house"

Biblically and historically the first century believers found life and expression in 'simple churches'. The essence of the early church is captured in Paul's phrase, one that appears four times in the New Testament: **"church in the house"** (Romans 16:5; 1 Corinthians 16:19; Colossians 4:15 and Philemon 1:2 c. Acts 2:46; 20:20).

The early church experienced God's love and life as a family of believers; a lifestyle of togetherness rather than a schedule of meetings; a walking with spiritual fathers and mothers rather than a dependence on gift ministry and positional clergy.

Second, God's nature and the Hebrew mindset – "family"

The very nature of God urges us to find our identity in His Fatherhood as a spiritual family not in an institutional organisation. God has chosen to define Himself (and thus exist) in community (family); therefore all that flows from Him is, in essence, community (family). God said: **"Let US make man in OUR image"** (Genesis 1:26-28).

By nature, God is essentially a Father and Son enjoying fellowship in the Spirit; thus "church" ought to be essentially fathers and sons enjoying fellowship in the Spirit. Yes, there is more to it than this. For one, there is our global mandate to disciple the nations ... but in fulfilling all our vital responsibilities as the **"church"** we must start at this crucial defining point. **In all we do, we must reason from who we are ... a family.** Biblically, we are to find our identity essentially in Christ **and** then in the spiritual family of believers that He **"sets"** us into (1 Corinthians 12:12-18; Matthew 16:13-18; Romans 12:3-8 c. Psalm 68:5, 6).

For more information, please see:

What are Hebrew values? <My Big Fat Greek Mentality>

<http://crosswaveglobal.wordpress.com/2010/04/01/what-are-hebrew-values/>

Is this really a significant thing God is doing in the world today?

Absolutely! Speaking of 'simple/organic churches' in America, George Barna says, "In a typical week roughly **20 million** adults attend a house church gathering over the course of a typical month, that number doubles to about **43 million** adults" (www.barna.org).

According to Dr. David Barret and Todd Johnson (editors of World Christian Encyclopaedia), there are over 20,000 simple/organic church networks alive and kicking today with a total of **394 million** church members **worldwide**. They predict that by 2025, there will be 581 million people involved in simple church networks, 120 million more than all the other Protestant movements put together!

Aren't those involved in simple church just disgruntled people?

Certainly some do leave the traditional church in reaction and hurt (there also many who are disgruntled who remain in traditional churches) – and then settle for a disgruntled, ingrown little group of "us-four-and-no-more;" a group of hurting, finger-pointing people who are destined to eventually hurt one another ... and ultimately give up on "church" altogether.

However, as pointed out, the landscape is changing fast today. All around the world the Spirit is moving and the traditional structure of the church is being shaken. Simple expressions of church are springing up everywhere ... many out of a genuine rediscovery of the early church simplicity and power. These courageous believers purposely honour the traditional church, yet press out for the "new thing" on God's heart of restoration.

For more information, please see:

What is wrong with institutional church? <Honey, I Blew Up the Church>

<http://crosswaveglobal.wordpress.com/2010/06/08/what-is-wrong-with-institutional-church-honey-i-blew-up-the-church/>

Are there other names used to refer to simple church?

Yes, there are various synonyms for "simple church" such as home church, organic church, missional church, relational church, redeemed communities, house church, Kingdom communities, etc. (Do you want to add a few of your own?)

None of these terms are by themselves sufficient and all of them have limitations; however, they're helpful and when used interchangeably capture various aspects of what we're pressing out for. The Biblical phrase is "**church in the house**" (Romans 16:5; 1 Corinthians 16:19; Colossians 4:15 and Philemon 1:2) but even this phrase is clumsy and still links "church" to a brick-and-mortar dwelling. Solomon declared, "**the path of the just is like the shining sun, that shines ever brighter unto the perfect day**" (Proverbs 4:18). We can dream of a time when one day "church" means to everyone what it ought to but until that day we will have to reluctantly use some *working* expressions.

Personally I think it wise to use a number of expressions interchangeably to avoid becoming stuck on one limiting phrase. We must remember we're contending for a Kingdom-shaped church, nothing less than that.

What does a simple church comprise of?

A simple church is essentially a spiritual family of anything between 3-30 believers who enjoy life-giving community. The group may start with simply 2 or 3 people but a healthy group can grow to around 20-30 people, before it may start to become too big and lose its sense of family. Typically, it reproduces itself at this point by planting a 'daughter' church and together these two spiritual families share a sense of collective, apostolic life together (anticipating the reproduction of more groups to come).

How big should a simple church grow?

Having given a general guideline in the question above, we're convinced that there is no specific number to which a simple church must grow. Our guiding principle on how big it should grow is simply this: is there still a meaningful sense of family?

How do we gauge if this is so? As soon as the simple church's communal life together or regular meetings start to become rigid, awkward or demands programming to run, we know we are losing a sense of family. Or if needs within the community are going undetected or if people begin to withdraw from regular fellowship due to a lack of intimacy and accountability, we know we are losing a sense of family.

Several factors may contribute to how big a simple church could grow:

- The gifting and measure of grace upon the leadership of the simple church is the main reason. We have found that some simple churches function optimally at no more than 10 people, where the leaders' gifts are primarily motivational gifts such as mercy, hospitality and/or encouragement. Other simple churches still enjoy a meaningful sense of family up to say 30 people, where the leaders' gifts are primarily leadership, teaching and/or administration. There is no correct number to which a simple church should grow; the leadership of each spiritual family should be helped to identify their primary giftings and their God-given measure of grace. Success of a simple church is not measured in numbers but in spiritual health.
- Two other practical factors that can influence the size of a simple church are the number of children involved and the actual size of the home where the meetings are regularly hosted. Children are, of course, a part of the simple church and therefore are an important contributing factor to whether or not we maintain a sense of family. The size of the venue can restrict a sense of family and should be thought through carefully. (Of course, the simple church is more than a meeting once or twice a week. But the meetings do impact on the life of the family).

For more information, please see:

What are Hebrew values? <My Big Fat Greek *Mentality*>

<http://crosswaveglobal.wordpress.com/2010/04/01/what-are-hebrew-values/>

When and how should a simple church multiply?

A healthy group that starts to exceed an optimum size, i.e. starts to lose a sense of family, should be viewed as "pregnant" and intentional, prayerful plans should be put in place to see a mature "son" released to plant a new work with 2 or 3 others from the "mother" church. Of course, a church that is intentional in discipleship and mission will more than likely not have to wait until it exceeds optimum size to do this.

Thus a church should multiply when a mature "son" is ready to be released and the best, most organic way for it to multiply is by planting a small "daughter" group out – rather than splitting the "mother" group in half.

Just listen to how that last sentence sounds now that we have used the metaphor of mother and daughter. If church is a family and the nuclear family is an indication of how God intends life to multiply, we don't split mom and dad up to start a new family. In our experience; dividing down the middle and separating the church into two smaller groups of equal size hardly ever leads to fruitful multiplication, and can feel like a "divorce" has happened. A simple church should **plant** not divide to multiply.

What is the purpose of a simple church?

This is a vital question. The purpose of a simple church must be of Kingdom origins: **to see every person mature and released into their Kingdom destiny; resulting in the reproduction of new works**. Just as Adam and Eve were given dominion and told to multiply (Genesis 1:26-28) so Jesus urged us to do the same in the words of the Great Commission (Matthew 28:18-20). In a phrase then, the purpose of a simple church is *missional discipleship*: discipleship that is birthed in mission and results in mission.

Too many groups have fellowship as their purpose. True fellowship is a wonderful by-product of a family alive, in love and on mission. But when fellowship becomes the goal, it quickly becomes inwardly-focused and can become ingrown. In our experience, even groups that started with a missional purpose drift from this intent after a year or two together, unconsciously settling for fellowship as their purpose for being. Thus all groups should intentionally and regularly re-engage with their missional purpose.

For more information, please see:

How can I kill a simple church? <Internal Affairs>

<http://crosswaveglobal.wordpress.com/2010/12/01/how-can-i-kill-a-simple-church-internal-affairs/>

How does a simple church maintain a missional purpose?

Excellent question! Through at least two foundational and two practical ways.

Foundational ways

- *A reliance of the missional Holy Spirit.*

While most would nod their head in agreement to this, our dependence on the Person and ministry of the Spirit must be an actual reality (Acts 1:8).

- *Involvement of an apostolic grace gift.*

God has given the functional gift of apostle to birth new works into a missional purpose; it is not an optional extra (Ephesians 4:11; 1 Corinthians 3:10, 11).

Practical ways

- *By keeping intercession for those who don't know Christ high on the agenda.*

Over time, the needs of the spiritual family can begin to dominate the agenda. They are real, tangible and can become consuming. Yet keeping the needs of the lost high on the agenda is not only vital to maintain a missional heart and purpose but it actually delivers us from chronic self-introspection.

- *By facilitating accountability groups of 2 or 3 within the simple church family.*

As the simple church grows two things happen. Firstly, the meetings of the church tend to become less intimate and more general. Yes, our ministry and prayer ought to be Spirit-led but the opportunity for intimate sharing and confession becomes less and less possible. Secondly, the interaction of the group members outside of the meeting becomes less regular. Thus the meeting itself starts to lose a sense of depth in accountability and discipleship.

By encouraging the spiritual family to meet in groups of 2 or 3 outside the regular meeting for intentional discipleship ensures that vital spiritual disciplines (such as confession, Bible meditation and intercession) take place in accountable relationships. Ensuring that these groups multiply into two groups of two when the group grows to four people keeps the group missional. These groups work best along gender-lines.

For more information, please see:

What does it mean to be missional? <Failure to Launch>

<http://crosswaveglobal.wordpress.com/2011/02/01/what-does-it-mean-to-be-missional-failure-to-launch/>

What does a simple church do when they meet together?

As an overflow of a shared life together, a simple church family ought to meet regularly as a whole – once a week or once every second week is optimal (less than this and the group loses traction and a rhythm of life together) – for the express purpose of (1) ministering to the Lord and (2) ministering to one another (Hebrews 10:19-25).

These meetings are typically open-participatory meetings where the purpose is to minister to the Lord as a community gathered and minister (share, prophecy, teach, pray, etc.) to one another as He leads (1 Corinthians 14:26-40; Ephesians 5:18, 19; Colossians 3:16; Matthew 18:20). The primary Agenda of the meeting is His Presence in our midst and the meetings are thus often unscripted as each prepares His heart, expectant to engage with Him and respond as He leads. These meetings often include eating together, laughter together, sharing of testimonies, intercession for those without Christ, praying for one another, some tears, planning a project together, more laughter together, etc. etc.

What about the children?

How does one answer the question of children when an extended family gets together for say, a holiday celebration? The children are an integral part of the family experience of course. Every simple church family ought to find ways to ensure their children (of whatever ages) are vitally apart of the communal life and can participate in the meetings themselves to the degree they're able.

What about corporate worship and teaching?

As several simple church communities gather together, they can enjoy the wonderful blessings of gift-led corporate musical worship and gift-ministry input (teaching, preaching, training) etc. etc. However, when experiencing these 'blessings' week in and week out as our sole or primary expression of church, we become dependent on them and lose our sense of New Testament communal life.

What does the leadership of a simple church look like?

Biblically, **"elders"** – parent-leaders – are appointed to oversee a simple church by apostolic teams (Acts 14:23; 1 Timothy 3:1ff and Titus 1:5). This is vital for the correct apostolic foundations to be established and for the necessary accountability to be in place.

Understanding a Hebrew mindset means grasping that these elders are spiritual parents in the context of a spiritual family, not directors bossing over an organisation. In birthing a simple church, an apostolic team works to nurture a healthy spiritual family and this includes identifying, developing and supporting the spiritual parents that emerge within the church family. This typically happens 6-12 months after the start of a simple church.

These parent-elders are to, at this point, shepherd the flock entrusted to them (Acts 20:28; 1 Peter 5:2). While the apostolic team ought to continue to serve and support the elders and the simple church, their input is on an invitation basis; it is not imposed. The relationship between the new parent-leaders and the apostolic team that served them is a very important relationship (Acts 20:20ff; 1 Timothy 5:17-22).

For more information, please see:

What is an elder? <The Good Shepherd>

<http://crosswaveglobal.wordpress.com/2010/08/01/what-is-an-elder-the-good-shepherd/>

What is a self-governing community? <A Lot Like Love>

<http://crosswaveglobal.wordpress.com/2010/06/15/what-is-a-self-governing-community-a-lot-like-love/>

What is apostolic alignment? <A Few Good Fathers>

<http://crosswaveglobal.wordpress.com/2010/09/01/what-is-apostolic-alignment/>

Can anyone start a simple church? <Field of Dreams>

<http://crosswaveglobal.wordpress.com/2010/11/01/can-anyone-start-a-simple-church-field-of-dreams/>

What is an apostolic team?

An apostolic team is a team of Ephesians 4:11 equipping gifts – apostle, prophet, evangelist, pastor and teacher – who together spearhead the Great Commission through, amongst other things, the planting and serving of churches. They aim to establish simple church communities that become the beach-head for the Kingdom of God to invade every facet of society. In so doing, they aim to make their hands-on role redundant by nurturing a self-governing community which includes identifying, training and appointing parent-elders to oversee the simple church family.

For more information, please see:

What is an apostle? <Definitely Maybe>

<http://crosswaveglobal.wordpress.com/2010/07/01/what-is-an-apostle-definitely-maybe/>

How does authority work? <Like Father, Like Son>

<http://crosswaveglobal.wordpress.com/2010/10/01/how-does-authority-work-like-father-like-son/>

How do apostolic teams work? <The A-Team>

<http://crosswaveglobal.wordpress.com/2010/10/15/how-do-apostolic-teams-work-the-a-team/>

What about financial giving? <For Love or Money>

<http://crosswaveglobal.wordpress.com/2011/03/01/what-about-financial-giving-for-love-or-money/>

How do we build teams ... that multiply? <A Dream Team>

<http://crosswaveglobal.wordpress.com/2011/04/01/how-do-we-build-teams-that-multiply-a-dream-team/>

Where are the fathers? <Hey, Dad>

<http://crosswaveglobal.wordpress.com/2010/04/10/where-are-the-fathers-hey-dad/>

Where are the sons? <The Boys are Back>

<http://crosswaveglobal.wordpress.com/2010/04/15/where-are-the-sons-the-boys-are-back/>

What about the possibility of heresy?

First, let us acknowledge that heresy is possible in the traditional church too – it is not a problem inherent to simple church alone. One of the responsibilities of apostolic teams is to help churches and believers remain Biblical in doctrine and practice.

What about church wide unity?

We are exhorted to **“keep the unity of the Spirit”** for **“there is one body”** (Ephesians 4:3, 4). Simple church communities, aligned to apostolic vision, view themselves as an essential part of the Body of Christ; they are thus post-denominational – where the prefix “post” means “after” or “moving beyond”; it doesn’t mean “against” or “anti”. In other words, while we honour God’s gracious work with His church in the past, we believe the church of the future will no longer be divided by denominational loyalties; that is, we will cooperate with Christ’s prayer, **“that they all may be one”** (John 17:21).

As apostolic fathers and families find ways to serve and work together, free from sectarian agendas, we’ll increasingly grow in our expression of the One Body of Christ.

For more information, please see:

What is essential for unity? <All for One>

<http://crosswaveglobal.wordpress.com/2010/05/01/what-is-essential-for-unity/>

Interested in more resources?

For the interested reader, please see our website (www.crosswaveglobal.com) or our blog page (www.crosswaveglobal.wordpress.com) for other articles related to simple church community and life.

For more information on our journey, please see:

How did your story begin? <The Story of Us>

<http://crosswaveglobal.wordpress.com/2009/12/15/how-did-you-begin-the-story-of-us/>

For other resources please contact us...

CrossWave



Written by
Craig Kirkby

January 2008

Recently edited
March 2011

WEB

www.crosswaveglobal.com

MAIL

craig@crosswaveglobal.com

