

# Simply Church; Advancing His Kingdom

*Equipping Simple/Organic Church Leaders*

## Part A – Laying the Foundation

- |                |   |                 |
|----------------|---|-----------------|
| <b>Topic 1</b> | <b>Church: Then and Now</b><br><i>facing the truth about ourselves</i>    | <b>pp. 1-3</b>  |
| <b>Topic 2</b> | <b>The King and His Kingdom</b><br><i>putting first things first</i>      | <b>pp. 4-7</b>  |
| <b>Topic 3</b> | <b>The Hood of All Believers</b><br><i>unlocking the potential of God</i> | <b>pp. 8-11</b> |

## Part B – Growing a Family

- |                 |  |                   |
|-----------------|--|-------------------|
| <b>Topic 1</b>  | <b>The Holy Privilege</b><br><i>why am I doing this?</i>           | <b>p. 12</b>      |
| <b>Topic 2</b>  | <b>The Apostolic Connection</b><br><i>who am I aligned with?</i>   | <b>pp. 13, 14</b> |
| <b>Topic 3</b>  | <b>The Heart Condition</b><br><i>how is my soul?</i>               | <b>p. 15</b>      |
| <b>Topic 4</b>  | <b>The Personal Evaluation</b><br><i>where is my garden?</i>       | <b>p. 16</b>      |
| <b>Topic 5</b>  | <b>The Waiting Game</b><br><i>what am I waiting for?</i>           | <b>p. 17</b>      |
| <b>Topic 6</b>  | <b>The Missional Heart</b><br><i>how do we view our world?</i>     | <b>pp. 18, 19</b> |
| <b>Topic 7</b>  | <b>The Discipleship Issue</b><br><i>where do we start?</i>         | <b>pp. 20, 21</b> |
| <b>Topic 8</b>  | <b>The Apostolic Essentials</b><br><i>what are we building on?</i> | <b>pp. 22-24</b>  |
| <b>Topic 9</b>  | <b>The Apostolic Process</b><br><i>who are our sons?</i>           | <b>pp. 25, 26</b> |
| <b>Topic 10</b> | <b>The Relational Commitment</b><br><i>why do we bother?</i>       | <b>pp. 27, 28</b> |

**THIS MODULE**

## Part C – Preparing to Multiply

- |                |   |                  |
|----------------|---|------------------|
| <b>Topic 1</b> | <b>Kingdom Advance</b><br><i>confronting the difficult issues</i>               | <b>pp. 29-32</b> |
| <b>Topic 2</b> | <b>Apostolic Teams &amp; Strategies</b><br><i>harnessing a synergy of grace</i> | <b>pp. 33-36</b> |
| <b>Topic 3</b> | <b>Biblical Eldership</b><br><i>uncovering an ancient secret</i>                | <b>pp. 37-39</b> |

**CONCLUSION** **p. 40**

**Topic 7** The Discipleship Issue  
*Where do we start? Part 1*

**What is our defining activity?**

Our defining activity is described in Jesus' words: **"go and make disciples of all the nations"** (Matthew 28:19). We call this the Great Commission not the Great Suggestion or Grand Elective. These final 'marching orders' define how we're to be about our Father's Kingdom affairs (Luke 2:49 c. 19:13ff).

**"All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations..."**  
(Matthew 28:18-20)

Discipling the nations may involve a wide variety of activities but includes at least two things: one, helping individuals become fully devoted followers of Jesus and two, the church's role in revealing the counsel of God to society. We'll focus on the first aspect in these notes: assisting individuals to become disciples of Jesus.

**What does this involve?**

First, note the emphasis of Jesus' words in the Great Commission: **"Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations ... teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always..."** (Matthew 28:18-20). The implication is *not* that we are to make "members of our organisation" or "disciples of our group" – rather we're to make disciples of Jesus who make disciples who make disciples who make.... We are to freely give what we have received in such a way that they're able and free to give what they've received to others. In a phrase then, our task is to **make disciple-makers**.

Second, being a "disciple of Jesus" refers to being a learner or a follower of Jesus and this involves more than just clocking the card into a number of classroom teachings or course programs. It involves an engagement with Jesus through **core disciplines** in a **relational context** where we cooperate with the Holy Spirit as He works the nature of Jesus in us. This involves an intentional lifestyle of following Jesus with others. And while this could be unpacked in a whole host of ways, consider these thoughts around the best relational context (below) and the core disciplines involved (p. 21) for making disciple-makers.

**The relational context**

Discipleship is a communal experience. There is simply no such thing as a lone ranger disciple in the New Testament. Spiritual growth requires accountability and accountability requires account-giving in the context of intentional relationships (James 5:16, for example). No man is an island and sustained spiritual growth does not happen in a relational vacuum.

As a simple/organic church community grows, the relationships often become stretched and the ministry can become more general; that is, while we may enjoy wonderful times of Spirit-led ministry in our meetings together, the opportunity to open one's heart to a few brothers or sisters becomes more difficult when the group starts to get bigger than say 8 or 10 people. How do we continue to grow as a simple/organic church community while maintaining intimate disciple relationships?

Jesus' promise to presence Himself in a **group of two or three** is a wonderful invitation to facilitate discipleship in this size of group (Matthew 18:20). In other words, even as the simple church community grows in size, individuals can walk with a smaller group of two or three brothers or sisters – which, in my experience, it works best along gender-lines. As these 'cells', if you like, **"encourage one another daily"** (Hebrews 3:13) when they come together to meet as a Kingdom family, their **"assembling"** as a 'body' is an overflow of the life they're already experiencing together (Hebrews 10:24, 25).

There are numerous benefits to a group size of two or three; certainly, as soon as a group becomes more than three people it starts to lose a sense of intimacy and becomes harder to coordinate. So how does this typically work out, practically speaking?

While every simple church needs to discover and nurture a healthy communal rhythm of life together for themselves; generally a simple church should meet together as a whole on a weekly or bi-weekly (every second week) basis while the groups of two or three also meet weekly or bi-weekly as it works best for them. In my experience, when a simple church or discipleship group meets less than this, the rhythm of life and traction of walking together is lost.

Another important aspect of a disciple group of two or three is that it is *not* leadership-dependent. A group of two or three does not require believers to commit to a leader but to walk with other disciples, a 'band of brothers'; their engagement is to the spiritual disciplines of a disciple, giving account of themselves to other Christ-followers (irrespective of their maturity), for effective mission and spiritual growth. (Remember, these *non* leadership-driven discipleship groups of two or three are part of a simple/organic church family supported by its parent-leaders). And as this "team" of two or three embarks on missional discipleship, their shared goal is to multiply themselves as soon as the number reaches four. In this way, groups can remain small enough to multiply (and multiplying will keep them small enough to be effective).

**Can you see the benefits of a discipleship group of two or three in the context of a simple church family?**

**Next > Topic 7, Part 2**

**Other resources on [www.crosswaveglobal.wordpress.com](http://www.crosswaveglobal.wordpress.com)**  
What does it mean to be missional? <Failure to launch>

**Topic 7** The Discipleship Issue  
*Where do we start? Part 2*

**What does a discipleship group do?**

In the context of a simple/organic church family; the simplest, most effective reproducible strategy of discipleship is multiplying groups of two or three. And in a growing Kingdom family that discovers a healthy rhythm of regularly assembling together, discipleship groups of two or three that occur outside of these times ensure that the intimacy and accountability so precious to spiritual growth are facilitated.

Plus, it is often through the life experienced and lessons learned in these discipleship groups that new simple/organic church plants emerge. As the 'mother' community grows in number, the fact that people have been working out a discipleship lifestyle – not merely attending a simple church meeting – can facilitate the emergence of 'daughter' church plants as an organic overflow of communal life.

Great! So discipleship works best in a smaller group of two or three as part of a simple church family but what does this discipleship group actually do?

**The core disciplines**

While there are a number of spiritual disciplines a follower of Jesus would be wise to engage in, three are essential in regard to what we've been discussing here concerning missional discipleship: intercessory prayer, Bible reading and confession.

**Intercessory prayer** focuses us in heart and action towards a hurting, needy world for whom Christ died. The group of two or three exists primarily to serve as a missional team, supporting one another's witness in the world; praying specifically for the lost people or prophetic causes that each person is engaged with. This outward focus is the essence of a selfless life of a Christ-follower.

**Bible reading** is obviously vital for spiritual growth; that many believers do not actually read the Bible regularly is probably one of the main reasons for our ineptness today. When a group of two or three agree to read the same 5-10 chapters of the Bible between their get-togethers, not only are they encouraged to abide in the Word for themselves (John 15:1-8), what each person learnt through their reading becomes the agenda for when they meet together. Thus, the group meeting – whether this is weekly or bi-weekly – is not dependent on teaching or specific curricula. God's Word alive in our hearts is our agenda. How refreshing!

**Confession** of one's weakness and struggles are essential for a fertile, pliable heart. The power of sin is in its secrecy; confession breaks sin's power by welcoming the light. While only our confession to God brings forgiveness (1 John 1:9); often healing and victory comes when we confess our faults to others (James 5:16). Just to be clear: the word "sin" (Greek: *hamartia*) in 1 John 1:9 refers to our sinfulness and forgiveness comes from God alone as we confess our sins to Him. The word "trespasses" (Greek: *paraptoma*) in James 5:16 refers to one's struggles or faults. We're certainly *not* speaking here of a return to clerical confession; we're rediscovering the power of shared confession with a group of brothers or sisters.

Thus, weekly or bi-weekly, a discipleship group gets together for an hour at a time that suits the parties concerned. Together they discover what God has been revealing to each through their agreed shared reading, they ask each other how they are *really* doing and they pray for one another and the missional influence they have been entrusted with. In a nutshell, the group explores three questions: What have you got out of your Bible reading? How is your soul? And what can we pray for as you serve your sphere of influence?

When the group grows to four people, the group simply becomes two groups of two. Thus, multiplying in this way, groups remain small enough to be effective. When a person comes to faith, this new believer can be invited into a discipleship group of this nature and taught by example the importance of these spiritual disciplines even while they enjoy the wider family life of the simple church community.

**So where do we start?**

If our defining activity is to make disciple-makers rather than running meetings, what should our experience of church look like? If we're a spiritual family that desires each person to be growing spiritually rather than merely showing up for every meeting, we ought to simplify how church is done and recapture the dynamic joy of disciple-making.

It is often in these discipleship groups that new parent-leaders emerge through learning to walk with others. And while the discipleship group is not intended to be a bunch of groupies who find their 'guru' forever and a day, mentoring/fathering relationships may emerge from the relationships that develop in these groups. We'll pick up more on this later in these notes.

**Can you see the value of a discipleship group that focuses on accountability to essential disciplines rather than being leadership dependent?**

**Next > Topic 8, The Apostolic Essentials**

**"For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them"**  
(Matthew 18:20)

**"But encourage one another daily ... lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin"**  
(Hebrews 3:12)

**INDEX**

**Topic 8 has three sessions ...**

**What are we building on? Part 1** p. 22

What are we building on? Part 2 p. 23

What are we building on? Part 3 p. 24

**Topic 8** The Apostolic Essentials  
*What are we building on? Part 1*

**What is our foundation?**

Jesus Christ is our foundation both theologically **and experientially** (1 Corinthians 3:11; Ephesians 2:20); that is, our communal experience is to be centred on Him. So how do we build a Christ-centred community that is **not** gift or leadership dependent and **not** means or program-driven but is rather dependent on the Presidency of the Spirit, fully appreciating the value of gifts and leaders and free to use appropriate means and resources?

**"For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ"**  
(1 Corinthians 3:11)

**"let the word of Christ dwell in us richly in all wisdom"**  
(Colossians 3:16)

Put another way, how did Paul establish new church communities that could stand strong in themselves amazingly quickly in a pagan world? He often moved on after a short period of time, leaving the fledgling work to stand on its own, only to return later to affirm and appoint the emerging spiritual parent-leaders in their midst. **What is the least, yet adequate apostolic investment required then?**

While we will look at four aspects that help to establish a simple/organic church community on a Christ-centred foundation in this topic, we'll cover just the first essential on this page. (The application of these essentials should be discussed between the simple church community and the apostolic worker involved).

**1. The (Essential) Creed**

This relates to the **Great Commandment** and refers to the way in which we **use the Word of God**.

The question is this: Do we make people dependent on gifted teachers and Bible study resources aiming at knowledge accumulation? Or do we help them to depend on the Holy Spirit aiming at transformation of life, attitude and character?

While there is certainly a place for clear Bible teaching or equipping, the meat-and-potatoes of simple church life is the privilege that **we all have to share with others what God has revealed to us** (1 Corinthians 14:26-40; 1 John 2:20, 27). From time to time, the simple church may feel the need to engage with some prepared teaching from among themselves or may invite in Ephesians 4:11 gift input, but the bread-and-butter of our communal life centres on the **Living Word** alive in each person or that which is extemporaneously (unscripted) revealed in our meetings together as we seek His Presence.

Thus focusing on discerning God's will through personal and communal Bible meditation rather than fostering dependency on the gift of a leader or teacher centres people on Christ and facilitates multiplication. Encouraging one another to regularly read God's Word for ourselves, supported by the discipleship groups of two or three, and cultivating the freedom to share what we're learning with one another means we're letting **"the word of Christ dwell in us richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another"** (Colossians 3:16).

In my experience, one of the main hindrances to body life/ministry and multiplication is the dependence that can quickly emerge upon a gifted teacher or worship leader in the group. Not only can members of the family neglect their contribution because they cannot 'minister' as well as the 'gifted member' but potential leaders often pull back from becoming parent-leaders in their own right because they cannot 'lead' as well as those they have become dependent on.

Take for example the analogy of **"meat"** and **"milk"** the writer to the Hebrews uses (Hebrews 5:12-14). Many mistakenly assume **"meat"** refers to a deep or stimulating message for a "mature" audience while **"milk"** is more simplistic for "less mature" listeners. However, in the context, **milk is what we receive from another**. The writer to the Hebrews explained, **"you need someone to teach you again ... you have come to need milk ... everyone who partakes only of milk is unskilled in the word"** (vv. 12, 13). Maturity is learning to hear God's voice for ourselves; thus, **meat is what we discover for ourselves**. The simple church family is the perfect context to nurture this.

Furthermore, a simple church community should seek to major on the essentials of our faith. We have so much in common in Christ – see the Apostle's and Nicene Creed for example (in the resource link below) – and as we purpose to learn to love God with all our heart and to love one another as we love ourselves, we major on the majors and stand on a firm foundation (Matthew 22:37-40). More than a few simple churches have imploded because of arguments and divisions over non-essential things such as eschatology and other highly-charged opinions.

On the issue of non-essential things, Paul counselled the church in Rome this way: while each person reserves the right to have an opinion – and should be **"fully convinced in his own mind"** knowing he **"shall give account of himself to God"** (Romans 14:5, 12) – we must **"not judge one another"** on these non-essential matters, resolving **"not to put a stumbling block or a cause to fall in our brother's way"** (v. 13). Excellent advice!

**Can you see how easily we can become dependent on gifted teachers and Bible study resources aiming at knowledge accumulation in the way we use God's Word?**

**Next > Topic 8, Part 2**

**Other resources on [www.crosswaveglobal.wordpress.com](http://www.crosswaveglobal.wordpress.com)**

What is a self-governing community? <A lot like love>

What is essential for unity? <All for one>

Does 1 Corinthians 14:26 encourage open-participatory meetings? <Raise His voice>

**Topic 8** The Apostolic Essentials  
*What are we building on? Part 2*

**So, what is our foundation?**

Jesus Christ is our foundation both theologically and experientially (1 Corinthians 3:11; Ephesians 2:20); that is, our communal experience is to be centred on Him. How did Paul establish new church communities that could stand strong in themselves amazingly quickly in a pagan world? He often moved on after a short period of time, leaving the fledging work to stand on its own, only to return later to affirm and appoint the emerging spiritual parent-leaders in their midst. **What is the least, yet adequate apostolic investment required then?**

**"For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ"**

(1 Corinthians 3:11)

**"Whenever you come together..."**

(1 Corinthians 14:26)

While we will look at four aspects that help to establish a simple/organic church community on a Christ-centred foundation in this topic, we'll cover just the second essential on this page.

**2. The (Participatory) Lord's Supper** (Please review "The Priesthood of All Believers," pp. 8,9)

This relates to the **priesthood of all believers** and refers to the way in which we **minister to God**.

The question is this: Do we make people dependent on gifted musicians and packaged song-lists aiming at a "praise and worship" time? Or do we help them to depend on the Holy Spirit aiming at responsive, participation God-wards with an expectation that He will minister to and through them?

The Lord's Supper was the early church's primary means of communal worship. First, they enjoyed the Lord's Supper as a substantial feast not a symbolic ritual; it was called the **"love feast"** (Jude 12, for example). Second, the Lord's Supper facilitated both a celebration centred on Christ's victory and involved participation from all involved.

As we gather around Christ – not a leader, or an instrument or a teaching – we learn to become aware of His Presence in our midst (Matthew 18:20). Thus, our worship is increasingly Christ-centred, the opportunity exists for **"each of us"** to contribute **"a psalm, a teaching..."** as led by the Spirit (1 Corinthians 14:26), **"songs"** can emerge from amongst us as we **"sing and make melody in our hearts to the Lord"** (Ephesians 5:19) and we **"consider one another in order to stir up love and good works"** (Hebrews 10:24). With our focus on Christ in this manner, we learn to become increasingly open to His Presence and the manifestation of the gifts of the Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:7-11).

What of musicians and musical instruments? They're obviously welcome to bring their instrument and their contribution to the simple church meeting – adding it into the mix as they feel led, so that **"all things are done for edification"** (1 Corinthians 14:26). I'm certainly not discouraging singing or musical expressions of worship. The issue is how we use them: are we reliant on a 'worship leader' or do we facilitate communal worship?

And for sure, there is place for a "big-meeting" where simple churches gather in a corporate sense to worship – in which musicians can facilitate a musical experience of praise. Yet this ought to happen less regularly and should not be confused with the meat-and-potatoes of simple church body life and ministry.

In simple church community, musicians – like all other believers with gifts such as teaching and leadership – need to discipline themselves so as to add their contribution as led, not dominate and usurp the manifestation of the Spirit of Jesus through all His people.

While we don't have to have a huge meal every time we gather – perhaps it's more viable to do so every third or fourth time we assemble– capturing the celebratory, **participatory** nature of our meetings is vital. In Hebrews, Chapter 10 we see two reasons for **"assembling"** together as a simple church family.

(1) **We meet to minister to Him** (vv. 19-23)

Our meetings should have more worship than waffle, listening than leading, inspired silence than intellectual discussion. Our desire is to encounter His presence – Him present determines the agenda of the meeting.

(2) **We meet to minister to one another** (vv. 24, 25)

We meet to worship, to give, to serve. We don't all need to prepare a message but we ought to all prepare our heart. While every person can contribute, not every one has to – we learn to contribute as we feel led to. The role of leadership is to facilitate, not dictate, such a meeting – helping the family discern what God is saying through the contribution of those who feel led to share (1 Corinthians 14:26-33).

Sharing the Lord's Supper in a *celebratory* and *participatory* manner centres a community on Christ and provides an environment for the gifts of the Spirit to flow.

**Can you see how easy it is to become dependent on gifted musicians and packaged song-lists in a canned "praise and worship" time?**

**Topic 8** The Apostolic Essentials  
*What are we building on? Part 3*

**Again, what is our foundation?**

Jesus Christ is our foundation both theologically and experientially (1 Corinthians 3:11; Ephesians 2:20); that is, our communal experience is to be centred on Him. How did Paul establish new church communities that could stand strong in themselves amazingly quickly in a pagan world? He often moved on after a short period of time, leaving the fledging work to stand on its own, only to return later to affirm and appoint the emerging spiritual parent-leaders in their midst. **What is the least, yet adequate apostolic investment required then?**

While we will look at four aspects that help to establish a simple/organic church community on a Christ-centred foundation in this topic, we cover the third and fourth essential on this page.

**“For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ”**  
 (1 Corinthians 3:11)

**“having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone, in whom the whole building, being fitted together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord”**  
 (Ephesians 2:20, 21)

**3. The (Inclusive) Family** (Please review “The Brotherhood of All Believers,” pp. 10,11)

This relates to the **brotherhood of all believers** and refers to the way in which we **build community**.

The issue here is this: Do we make people dependent on the initiative and directive of leadership, expecting leaders to meet their needs? Or do we help them to depend on the Holy Spirit as they take a sense of ownership of the community, asking God to lead and empower their service in meeting other’s needs?

A core aspect of building a community essentially dependent on Christ, rather than being leadership-driven, **is to help every person grasp a sense of responsibility for the group’s health and growth**. This is more caught than taught. Berating people for not taking responsibility never brings the freedom and initiative of the Holy Spirit; imparting the heart for a communal experience of shared living does. We covered this in the “Brotherhood of All Believers” (pp. 10, 11) and will look at the role of a parent-leader towards this end later in the notes.

**4. The (Shared) Baptism**

This relates to the **Great Commission** and refers to the way in which we **engage with mission**.

The question here is: Do we make people dependent on leaders, formulae and programs to “do outreach”? Or do we help them to depend on the Holy Spirit to live as missionaries in their sphere of influence and to contribute as part of a missional community?

Paul appeared to avoid taking the responsibility for baptising new believers (1 Corinthians 1:12-16) – which unfortunately became the privilege of the modern missionary. How typecast are the pictures of a white missionary baptising indigenous people? Why did Paul avoid doing this? Mainly so that new believers don’t become principally engaged with the church planter as a personality or gift ministry. There is a powerful bond formed in the act of baptism and this bond ought to be shared between the new believer and their new spiritual family, not an itinerant apostolic worker.

While the baptism experience is first a powerful outward expression of the internal reality of salvation – and thus a powerful expression of the new believer’s faith in Christ – it is also the first introduction to the mission of Christ. This public declaration of faith is Biblically the new disciple’s first testimony to men, angels and demons that he is now a follower of Christ and essentially given to His Kingdom mission. The bond formed between a new believer and his spiritual family enhances this collective sense of mission together.

Thus when a simple church community feels the privilege, responsibility and urgency of baptising new believers; it not only creates strong bonds to nurture and disciple these new believers, it also keeps a community inflamed with the mission of Christ.

These four aspects are essential to laying an apostolic foundation; that is, establishing a community on Christ.

<u>Apostolic Essential</u>	<u>Principle</u>	<u>How we ...</u>
The (Essential) Creed	Great Commandment	Use God’s Word
The (Participatory) Lord’s Supper	Priesthood of All Believers	Minister to God
The (Inclusive) Family	Brotherhood of All Believers	Build Community
The (Shared) Baptism	Great Commission	Engage with mission

DIAGRAM 19

**Can you see how these four aspects, used intentionally, can help people become dependent on Christ and His mission rather than on leaders, gifts and tools?**

**Next > Topic 9, The Apostolic Process**

**Topic 9** The Apostolic Process  
*Who are our sons?*

**Who are we building with?** (Please review “The Hebrew Mindset,” p. 6)

Recall that in Hebrew thought, community is viewed essentially as spiritual **family** and leadership as spiritual **parenthood**. In this context, to the Hebrew mindset, our character matures in community through this three stage growth process: **child** – **son** – **father** (gender-neutral terms). This may shed some light on Isaiah’s incredible prophecy that Jesus would be born “**a Child**”, become a “**Son given**” and ultimately be remembered as a “**Father**” (Isaiah 9:6).

**“And the things you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also”**  
 (2 Timothy 2:2)

In addressing his audience, John wrote to the spiritual “**children**”, to the “**young men**” (or spiritual sons) and to the “**fathers**” (1 John 2:12-14). In a healthy community of faith, we’ll find...

- **children** – new believers who are experiencing the grace of God (v. 12)
- **sons** – maturing believers who are learning to walk in victory (vv. 13, 14)
- **fathers** – mature believers who know how to reveal the Father as parent-leaders (v. 14)

**Who are the spiritual fathers?**

One of the roles of the apostolic team working with a simple/organic church birthed on the foundation of Christ – as they learn to live and function as a brotherhood and priesthood of all believers – is to help to define and affirm the emerging spiritual parents in the midst. Through this objective counsel and through the mutual affirmation and witness within the community, healthy respect and appreciation of one another can occur. While every person is of equal worth and value before God, **respect of spiritual maturity is vital for a simple church family to appreciate God-given responsibility.**

Obviously, this does not mean we label or box people into various hierarchical positions – we’ve long left institutional thinking behind. Even as a healthy nuclear family functions with a sense of respect and appreciation so too does the spiritual family of God. This has two implications. First, the emerging parent-leaders start to understand their role in God – something we spotlight in Part C.

Second, believers in a simple church family start to express their appreciation of and, when necessary, seek the **perspective** of the spiritual parents among them (1 Thessalonians 5:12, 13; Hebrews 13:17). While we certainly do not need some else’s permission, walking in the counsel of many is a wise recipe for life and godliness (Proverbs 11:14 c. 18:1). And it is in a Kingdom family where these relationships can be authentic and integral. Both Paul and Peter’s instruction to parent-elders urged them: “**shepherd the flock of God which is among you**” (A

cts 20:28; 1 Peter 5:2). The Greek word “**among**” (*en*) refers to a closed, fixed proximity of relationships. Spiritual parents lovingly serve “**among**” the flock; they do *not* preside as “**lords over**” them (1 Peter 5:3). In response to this loving parent-leadership, believers are to “**obey those who rule over you, and be submissive**” (Hebrews 13:17).

**Who are the spiritual sons?**

Maturity is evidenced in one’s growing ability to consistently put others first; that is, to overcome – among other things – our tendency to “look after number one” (1 Corinthians 10:24; 13:5; Philippians 2:3-5). As we shed this childishness and give ourselves selflessly to serve our spiritual family in the context of the Kingdom mission, we are to nurture the godly desire to parent-lead others. Paul describes this desire as “**noble**” (1 Timothy 3:1 NIV). It may be worth reviewing “The Holy Privilege – Why am I doing this?” (p. 12).

To this end, each maturing “son” will find it helpful to walk closely with the spiritual parents in their simple church family, asking them to serve as a father in tempering the desire to parent-lead others. This Jesus-styled apprenticeship is what we mean by raising “sons” in a Kingdom family. When the parent-leaders of a simple church nurture spiritual children well, they’ll grow by the grace of God into maturing sons. Then the privilege of releasing mature sons into parenthood themselves is a wonderful pleasure for true parent-leaders. True fathers don’t keep sons in their shadow; they lift them on their shoulders and cheer them on.

As maturing sons continue to disciple others in the groups of two or three, serve in the missional vision of the church community, new ‘daughter’ church plants may emerge as they are released to start a new work themselves. In this way, organic missional life is reproduced. But the principle is vital: we’ll struggle to serve as a spiritual father to others if we haven’t been spiritually fathered ourselves.

Please view the resource links below to explore the concept of spiritual fatherhood and sonship more fully.

**Jesus-styled apprenticeship**

I do, you watch  
 I do, you help  
 You do, I help  
 You do, I watch

DIAGRAM 20

**Now that you view the church as essentially family, is it easier to grasp the concept of spiritual fathers and sons (gender-neutral terms)?**

**Next > Topic 9, Part 2**

## PART B – GROWING A FAMILY

### Simply Church; Advancing His Kingdom

#### INDEX

Topic 9 has two sessions ...

Who are our sons? Part 1 p. 25

**Who are our sons? Part 2** p. 26

## Topic 9 The Apostolic Process

### *Who are our sons?*

### Does the group itself grow through stages?

A spiritual community evolves through three similar phases:

Stage 1 Self-Existing <Child>

Stage 2 Self-Functioning <Son>

Stage 3 Self-Governing <Father>

Let's explore these stages of community growth. In stage one, the group is "self-existing"; that is, the group has come together naturally, by the Spirit. People *want* to be together – they are not obliged to do so. The apostolic worker and/or the original church planter's role is initially both missional leadership and ministry while the group members' main focus is relationship-building. This certainly doesn't mean they cannot minister but a depth of ministry will flow out of trust built through authentic relationships.

In stage two, the group becomes "self-functioning"; that is, off the back of deepening relationships, the people in the group start to feel they want to contribute meaningfully to the group's mission and life. At this point the apostolic worker and/or original church planter's role is simply missional leadership, championing a Kingdom missional base. The group's members become meaningful participants serving and ministering as they feel led to.

In stage three, the group becomes "self-governing"<sup>1</sup>; that is, the group understands covenantal family relationships, recognizing and affirming those who are emerging as spiritual parents "among" them. Mutual respect and appreciation begets a genuine community able to stand alone. The apostolic worker and/or original church planter's hands-on role becomes redundant – redefining this relationship is important. The apostolic worker may continue to serve the self-governing church as a 'grand-parent' to the group (a parent to the parents) in mutual apostolic alignment. The original church planter may or may not emerge into one of the spiritual parents in the group. The simple church is self-sustaining and capable of reproducing itself as a self-governing church under the Headship of Jesus.

<sup>1</sup> Let me again explain the prefix "self-" in these phrases. In the same way that a believer should exercise "self-control" as a fruit of the Spirit's work in his life (Galatians 5:22, 23); that is, he ought to submit himself to the leading of the Spirit, by "self-governing" we mean a spiritual family ought to submit themselves to the Presidency of the Spirit in their collective midst.

### So how does a simple church multiply?

In textbook cell-group multiplication, the formula is fairly mechanical: when the group gets over 15 people, divide the group into two groups and call it multiplication. Through hard experience, we seldom found this resulted in two healthy groups and after doing this once or twice, groups were loath to do it again. The overall feeling? Many expressed that it felt like a divorce. When we take into account that the church is essentially a family, what we experienced was akin to divorce!

Healthy nuclear families don't split down the middle and go there separate ways; rather as a son becomes an adult, the parents release them to get married and start a family of their own. And they don't lose a son, they gain a daughter-in-law. Yes, while the relationship requires redefinition; the relationship remains strong.

In a simple church, when a mature son senses the prompting of God to become a spiritual parent and start a new spiritual family, the spiritual parents father him into it. We have found it helpful in releasing a "son" to release one or two others from the 'mother' church who feel called to join him. We call this a church plant, although it is simply the organic result of spiritual fathering. So how does a family multiply? Just as a natural family multiplies by sowing a son; so a church multiplies by sowing a mature son (planting).

So how big should a church grow before multiplying? This is a question best not answered with a mechanical formula, rather it requires spiritual discernment. The question to consider first is: at what point does a simple church lose a sense of family? The answer to this question is different for each simple church and is **determined mainly by the gift mix in and measure of grace on the parent-leadership of the church**. In my experience, some groups can start to lose a sense of family at 10 people; others can still enjoy a genuine sense of family at 30 people. This is another reason why involving the objective perspective of apostolic counsel is helpful.

### Why does reasoning from the context of family keep us on safe ground?

Next > Topic 10, The Relational Commitment

**"the house** (Greek: *oikos* = family, community) **of God ... is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth"**  
(1 Timothy 3:15)

#### **The Apostolic Process:**

##### **Stage 1 > Self-Existing**

The group feeling is: "I want to be here".

The church planter's role is: leadership and ministry.

The group members' role is: relationships.

##### **Stage 2 > Self-Functioning**

The group feeling is: "I want to contribute here".

The church planter's role is: leadership.

The group members' role is: ministry.

##### **Stage 3 > Self-Governing**

The group feeling is: "I want to lead (be led) here".

The church planter's role is: redundant.

The group members' role is: both ministry and leadership.

(If an apostolic team worked with the group, their supportive role going forward needs to be defined)

DIAGRAM 21

**Topic 10** The Relational Commitment  
*Why do we bother?*

**What's the point?**

Even in a healthy family conflict happens. In fact, Jesus taught that the potential for offence is inevitable (Luke 17:1). Why? Because no matter how mature people may be, they're not yet perfect. And surprise, surprise, we're not perfect yet either! Our imperfections will expose and be exposed by the imperfections of others. **Strong spiritual families understand that conflict is very much part of life; it is not an interruption to life.** And they believe that as God's people we are uniquely equipped to **resolve conflict rather than dissolve relationships**. God's love is our greatest resource and God's love never fails. Love remains our litmus test: **"by this shall all men know that you are My disciples"** (John 13:35).

**"Love never fails"**  
 (1 Corinthians 13:8)  
**"And above all these things  
 have fervent love for one  
 another, for 'love will cover  
 a multitude of sins'"**  
 (1 Peter 4:8)

The ability to face conflict positively and build relationships constructively is the number one skill a spiritual family needs to be self-sustaining and fruit-bearing over the long haul.

**How can we best prevent unnecessary conflict?**

Prevention is better than cure and a simple church community can avoid truck loads of unnecessary conflict by grasping the simple but profound values of acceptance and admonishment.

After covering several noteworthy subjects, Peter said: **"and above all these things have fervent love for one another, for 'love will cover a multitude of sins'"** (1 Peter 4:8).

True love **covers** sin – it does not **expose** sin. In community we learn to accept a person even if we don't approve of some of their peculiarities or behavioural activities. Only in a non-judgmental community, can trust develop; and trust is essential for life-giving relationships.

Because we've learnt to truly accept, we can learn to sincerely affirm. As we all know, genuine affirmation is vital for life-giving relationships; it is a wonderful gift from God and is a sure recipe for bringing the best out of others.

Having made that clear, true love **covers** sin – it does not **excuse** sin. In community we learn to speak the truth in love; that is, we value admonishment. The Greek word for **"admonish"** (*noutheteo*) means, "to put in mind;" thus, to caution or reprove gently; to instruct and counsel by word. This means that because we love one another; we invite each other to speak honestly into our lives (Psalm 27:6). And because we love the truth more than our egos, we learn to appreciate loving correction as a healthy overflow of true relationships (Proverbs 12:1). Of course, we also understand that discretion is important and admonishment is best one-to-one – not in a group or behind the back – and face-to-face – not via email or by innuendo.

Here is a vital principle for healthy covenant community: **resolve to cover others while confronting necessary issues or else you will end up rejecting others over these issues.**

On *issues of personal preference* we ought to simply cover one another. You may not like my hairstyle, my sense of humour, my passion for Liverpool Football club or the size of my appetite, but then we all have our irks and quirks (after all, I could be a Man U fan!). In community, we love each other by covering one another; refusing to turn molehills of preference into mountains of prejudice. If you freeze me out of your community on non-essential issues like this, then you've settled for a very, very shallow version of community as God intends. Instead, in true community, we do a lot of "covering" (Proverbs 17:9).

On *issues of Biblical principle*, where my actions or attitudes are detrimental to others and/or discredit my testimony, you should lovingly confront these issues for my sake. Notice, there is a huge difference between confronting *an issue* and confronting *the person*. I'm not a fool; I know the difference. We know when people care for us or when they're being careless. If my sense of humour is rude or my passion for soccer dominates my every discussion or my appetite is gluttonous; then as my spiritual family, you must **"in a spirit of gentleness"** help me to see how I'm damaging others and myself (Galatians 6:1). Thus, in community, there will be times we admonish one another and, in genuine love, confront appropriate issues.

If we fail to cover the person or confront the issue, we will end up rejecting the person over the issue. Sadly, if we don't cover the personal preference issue, we'll despise the person because of it. Tragically, if we don't confront the Biblical principle issue, we'll condemn the person because of it. Either way, we reject the person and end up withdrawing from a brother we could have served.

Listen to Paul's superb confidence in a Christ-filled community: **"Now I myself am confident concerning you, my brethren, that you also are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge, able also to admonish one another"** (Romans 15:14). Remember, it is always more rewarding (and honouring to God) to resolve an issue than dissolve a relationship.

**Does walking in covenant community scare you? Why?**

**Next > Topic 10, Part 2**

**Other resources on** <http://www.crosswaveglobal.com/Resources.html>  
 Community Re-plugged

**Topic 10** The Relational Commitment  
*Why do we bother?*

**What's the cure?**

Not only are we equipped with the prevention but Jesus also provided us with the cure; a three-step plan to deal with offence, showing just how important this is for the safe-guarding of healthy community and the impact we are to, through our love for one another (John 13:35), have upon the world. Let's look at this three-step directive for resolving conflict (Matthew 18:15-17). **"even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do"** (Colossians 3:13)

Firstly, Jesus said: **"if your brother sins against you, tell him his fault between you and him alone"** (v. 15). **Private appeal.** Clearly, we are not to drag others into our mess! Our primary goal is the *reconciliation* of the relationship, not to justify the situation and "put the other person in their place". We should not arrive with a chip on one shoulder and a bazooka on the other! **"A soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger"** (Proverbs 15:1). Rather, in private – **"between you and him alone"** – you should share how you felt hurt by what the other person did or did not do, not demanding justice, but giving the Spirit of God space to do His work (Romans 12:19; Proverbs 28:23). Whatever happens, resolve to forgive: **"even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do"** (Colossians 3:13). Unforgiveness is like drinking rat poison hoping the other person will die.

Secondly, if he will sadly not reconcile with you, Jesus said: **"take with you one or two more"** to serve as a mediator (v. 16). **Peer mediation.** Again, the purpose is reconciliation, and with that in mind, we need to select an unbiased mediator! The person you select should be mature in the Lord and should not be polluted with "your side of the story". If you truly desire reconciliation and have acknowledged any wrong on your part in the situation, you should invite a mediator in without first priming them with "your facts".

If you are ever asked to serve as a mediator, refuse to hear the "facts" until you have both parties before you; **"the first one to plead his cause seems right, until his neighbour comes and examines him"** (Proverbs 18:17). Even at the risk of seeming unsympathetic, don't violate this gem of wisdom. Rather compassionately say, "I can see you're deeply hurt. It would be a privilege for me to attempt to help ... though to do so with integrity means that I should not be seen as taking sides". And then in mediating conflict, ask *what's* right not *whose* right.

Sadder still, thirdly, if the person still does not reconcile, Jesus said: **"tell it to the church"** (v. 17). **Public admonition.** This is not a license to gossip! Consistent with the counsel of God's Word, the best way to follow this instruction is to bring the matter along, with the mediator, to the spiritual parents of the community who would then have to follow God's leading in carrying out Biblical correction. Personally, I think the thought of this consequence is intended to provoke the fear of God in those in whom the Spirit of God dwells so that it never happens! Yet there are unfortunately times when, no matter what we do, others will refuse to reconcile with us. As long as we have made every attempt to seek reconciliation we can have peace with God: **"as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men"** (Romans 12:18).

**Why bother?**

Sometimes true community is really difficult and we're tempted to throw our hands in the air and say, "Why bother?" The answer is this: because we're training for reigning. How we handle interpersonal conflict as individuals and as a community is one of the primary ways in which God equips us for reigning in this life and the coming age. Right at this moment, we are training for reigning in **"the life that now is and of that which is to come"** (1 Timothy 4:8).

When Paul rebuked the church at Corinth for letting a dispute between brothers end up in secular court, he wrote: **"Do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if the world will be judged by you, are you unworthy to judge the smallest matters? Do you not know that we shall judge angels? How much more, things that pertain to this life? ... Is it so, that there is not a wise man among you ... who will be able to judge between his brethren?"** (1 Corinthians 6:2-5).

We will judge angels? Wow! Jesus also spoke about ruling over cities (Luke 19:11-27). While we do not know conclusively what this involves, the point however is profound: the Corinthian's were failing boot camp! Rather than training for reigning in this life and the age to come, they were flunking the test. The challenges we face, especially working through interpersonal conflict as a community, are allowed by God to train us for our eternal destiny as the sons of God.

When we become embittered through the offences that arise in church life, we lose the opportunity to be transformed into Christ's image from glory to glory by His Spirit (2 Corinthians 3:18). We fail to learn to war. We miss out on the nourishment God has sent our way to harness our potential and capacity for eternity. It is sad to think of how many people leave spiritual communities because of conflict rather than working through it; finding a new level of community and character in the process. Rather they go from group to group; **weaker and smaller each time, unprepared for their assignment in eternity.** Can you imagine if a child changed parents every time things didn't go his way at home? He would be an absolute mess!

**Can you see why resolving conflict is so important?**

**Next > Part C, Preparing to Multiply**