

INTRODUCTION

*F*ebruary 3, 1931, began as a quiet Tuesday morning in the beautiful coastal region of Hawkes Bay in New Zealand. The residents of Napier and Hastings, the two main towns in that area, went about their business as they had for decades. Customers were keeping the banks busy. Shops were filled with merchandise and eager buyers. Restaurants were clearing away the last of the breakfast dishes and preparing for the lunch crowd. Those on holiday made plans to go to the beach. In other words, life was going on as it had always been and probably would always be as the sun rose over these idyllic villages.

Then, at 10:46 in the morning, everything changed. An earthquake struck. In less than three minutes, seismic forces reaching 7.9 on the Richter scale destroyed most of the buildings in both towns, killing hundreds of people. Those structures not flattened by the quake were destroyed in the subsequent fire that swept through the ruins.

Once the smoke and dust cleared, the residents of Napier and Hastings were met with a great surprise. The shattered landscape bore little resemblance to the terrain they had known so well. Landmarks such as Napier Bluff Hill, a popular tourist destination, had been torn from the coast and tossed into the sea. What had once been flat ground was now a series of hills. Where there had been valleys, there was now level ground. Most

shocking of all was the discovery that the water in Ahuriri Lagoon had somehow been swallowed up, leaving nine thousand acres of dry ground.

When the residents of Hawkes Bay set about rebuilding their town, they faced a dilemma. The extent to which the earthquake had changed their environment was astonishing. Their maps of the region no longer applied; those maps showed roads running along land that no longer existed. And they did not show the new land heaved up by the earthquake.

Eventually the towns of Napier and Hastings were successfully rebuilt in the art deco style of the time (and to this day remain among the best examples of period architecture in the world) because those who directed the rebuilding threw out their maps and instead relied on a compass. When the landscape changes, maps are useless, but the compass is still trustworthy.

SOCIAL QUAKES AND CULTURAL SHIFTS

Throughout history, seismic cultural quakes have affected our social landscape and with it the context of the church. Jesus was born in the midst of economic and political turmoil in the Roman-controlled territory of Israel. Emperor Caesar Augustus ordered a census of his kingdom in order to count the population and set tax rates. Every fourteen years a regular census was taken, with additional counts taken periodically. But this was an unusual census, as everyone was ordered to return to his ancestral home. Almost everyone in the empire could be considered a refugee without a permanent home; basically, the whole empire was on the move. The Jewish Pharisees, who thrived on controlling situations and circumstances with their laws and traditions, saw their world in upheaval.

Jesus was born in the midst of that upheaval. During his entire life on earth, the social and religious boundaries continued to shift. Just a few

decades after his crucifixion and resurrection, the situation came to a head as the Romans leveled the Jewish temple and dismantled the Jewish government.

Four hundred years later, another quake occurred. The eleven-centuries-old Roman Empire, weakened from within by political and spiritual struggles, fell. Vandals who crossed the frozen Rhine in 406 AD seeking better lands, attacked—and conquered. The humiliated Romans looked for a place to fix blame for this catastrophe. They found Christians to be an easy target. The ancient gods, they determined, had become angry that so many people were converting to Christianity. Augustine, then bishop of Hippo in Roman Africa, argued that the Christians were not at fault; pagan behavior had hastened Rome's fall. Augustine's writings, most notably *City of God*, gave a compass reading that the church followed for the next one thousand years. In the midst of chaos and confusion, it was the church that led the way.

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The next seismic shift occurred during the Renaissance. The invention of the printing press allowed the mass production and distribution of the written word, including Scripture. It changed forever how people think and learn. With access to the Bible now freed from tight control by the church, its truths became widely known, including the idea that salvation was by grace through faith alone. Thus the Reformation was ushered in, creating yet another upside-down event for the church. At the same time, a new science-based worldview emerged, introducing a cultural elite, including Galileo, Newton, Bacon, and Copernicus. Market capitalism replaced feudalism, and that—combined with the development of modern weaponry (gunpowder and long guns)—brought about the rise of the nation-state. Once again, old maps were tossed aside as no longer useful.

TODAY'S CULTURAL UPHEAVAL

We are now going through a similar shaking—a cultural earthquake. Our reference points have changed; our familiar social landscape is now so altered that many find it difficult to navigate through life. The global change seen most clearly in the West has resulted in a postindustrial, high-tech society, and a whole new way of thinking. In the last few years, this new landscape has come to be described as postmodernism. The phenomenal rate of change at the social and political levels of society has been breathtaking and appears to be accelerating. Never before has a society become so permissive, so dislocated and disjointed, so incapable of maintaining order, stability, and balance.

Alongside the social upheaval, amazing technological advances have gathered momentum at an incredible pace. We are trying to understand a world that no longer submits to the powers of familiar reason and logic. This profoundly affects the way that we communicate and, because of this, the way that we form community. With the development of this new worldview, a whole new context for doing church has emerged.

The church has not adapted well to these changes. The measurable decline in church attendance of the postmodern generation, comprising a large proportion of the population, gives testament to this fact. George Barna reports that the number of unchurched adults in the U.S. today has nearly doubled since 1991. The median age of the unchurched adult (38) is lower than the national average (43). Thirty-seven percent of the unchurched are single and have never been married and fifty-five percent are men. Even more astounding is the statistic that nearly thirteen million

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people claim to have accepted Jesus Christ as their Savior but do not attend church.¹

Those of us involved in church leadership—pastors, staff members, small group facilitators, house-church leaders—are seeing the effects of the cultural quakes and eruptions that have taken place. Our old maps—Sunday school, vacation Bible school, church growth formulas, evangelism and outreach campaigns—no longer work as they once did. The generation growing up in the aftershocks of this phenomenal change has no notion of the way things used to be. The number of church attendees among those in their twenties and thirties continues to diminish; they are not coming back to the church as they have in the past. Most do not have a church to return to, as they have never spent significant time in church to begin with.

So where do we find the unchurched of this generation? Drive around some Sunday morning and you will find them, gathered in groups of two to ten, sitting around a table at a bookstore or coffeehouse. They are talking—and listening—to one another. They are experiencing community and seeking intimacy. These locations are not on our Sunday morning maps. If we continue to follow the maps we have always used, we will never reach this generation. They have moved on to land that really wasn't around twenty years ago. Yet we keep searching for the next new program or formula that will bring these spiritually hungry people back to our churches. What a pity. What we need is a compass.

This book isn't about updating our maps—it's about returning to the compass. In his classic novel *Les Misérables*, Victor Hugo tells of the importance of setting our course by compass: "The ocean seeks to lead it astray

SO WHERE DO WE
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As pastors, we understand the turmoil church leaders are dealing with today. For the past decade it has become apparent that the modern church models and methods are no longer effective. High control/low accountability church leadership systems are not working. The preoccupation with programs, property, and products is missing the mark. We know you want to see real life-change in your people and to see your church grow. We know you want your church to make a difference in your community and in the world. Jesus showed us the way in his teaching to his disciples 2,000 years ago. It is the only way.

—MIKE & WALT

around. And we are not going to list everything that is wrong with our culture or write longingly about how we might return to the “good old days.” None of that matters. Modernity is over—whether we want it to be or not. The post-modern era is neither good nor evil; it simply is. We do not want to get hung up discussing cultural philosophy and miss what is truly important. All that matters is the compass—Jesus. The Compass is true and will not lie.

in the alarming sameness of its billows, but the vessel has its soul, its compass, which counsels it and always shows it the north.” Our compass is Jesus. Just as north is always north, Jesus never changes. As today’s church passes through an ocean of cultural changes, it’s our Compass that will keep us on course.

Our maps aren’t working anymore. We’ve gotten away from the Compass. That fact can be discussed another day; we don’t have time to debate it now. We are not going to share step-by-step what we did to turn our churches

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CHAPTER 1

WHAT'S OUR JOB?

As a leader, you want your church to succeed, to grow. You've no doubt read all the books, attended all the seminars, and listened to all the tapes. Many popular church growth principles fail to effect permanent life change in those who make up the church. They're good principles, but they fall short—like digging a well but stopping before you hit water. We are not asking you to try out a new program. We are not offering new ideas to breathe life into your Sunday mornings. Sitting in church for two hours on Sunday doesn't make people disciples anyway. Instead, we are going to focus on how Jesus lived and told us to live.

We want you to walk confidently as a follower of Jesus across this new cultural terrain and to show those around you how to walk as his followers as well. We are going to show you principles of discipleship that are both memorable and multipliable. Since this was Jesus' approach to ministry, shouldn't it be ours as well?

THERE IS NO "PLAN B"

Jesus left only one plan for church growth: multiplication through disciples making disciples. The amazing thing is Jesus did not have a "Plan B." His last words spoken to his followers were, "You will be my witnesses in

When a man active in our church told me that he just didn't feel connected, that he didn't have a "feeling of intimacy with anyone," I saw clearly what was happening. I had built a church—a large church, successful beyond imagination to most people. But I had lost our community. We didn't need to build a new sanctuary. What we needed to be doing was making disciples. After a lifetime in the ministry, you would think I would know what to do. But I realized I needed help. I decided to look at churches that were successfully making disciples. It was Eddie Gibbs from Fuller Theological Seminary, who told me I should take a look at St. Thomas. When I met the people who attended St. Thomas regularly, I was struck by their depth. They were living in community with one another and demonstrated authentic faith. I came away from that trip convinced I had found what I was looking for. I imagined this to be like it was in the early church. This was discipleship at its best.

—WALT

Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8). He did not offer this as an optional assignment. The future of this new movement rested fully with these disciples. If these few disciples failed to carry out Jesus' instructions, there was no back up plan. Yet we continue to pursue every other method and church growth program to increase our ministries.

Fuller Theological Seminary, the internationally known institution where many have gone to learn principles and methods of church growth, is taking a new look at this discipline. Dr. Eddie Gibbs, the McGavren Professor of Church Growth at Fuller, says traditional church growth curriculum was developed in the 1950s and '60s when Western-based mission

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agencies were the driving force in world evangelization and church planting. Gaining members was the measurement device to tell if a church was growing. This, says Gibbs, is no longer the case.

“We have to address the issue of whether numerical church growth also represents a transformation in people’s lives and an impact on wider society,” says Gibbs. “Ministry must be seen more in terms of ‘By the people of God in the world’ than ‘For the people of God and largely confined to the existing members.’”²

Yet in order to have ministry conducted in this manner, these people of God must be sufficiently grounded in grace and truth to meet the onslaught of hate, greed, mistrust, and abuse they will no doubt face. Jesus spent the majority of his time with a handful of chosen ones, teaching them how to follow and make followers. “Make disciples” was his direction to his followers. When he returned to heaven, it was up to these men and women—who were still struggling to “get it”—to multiply or cease to exist.

After my heart attack and six-way bypass in January 2002, I began to consider who might be the successor to my ministry. It would have to be just the right person, someone capable of raising and managing a multi-million dollar budget as well as the staff and programs of a megachurch. It would need to be someone who could effectively reach the twenty- and thirty-year-olds I was struggling to reach.

I discussed this idea with other pastors across the country. But it was in Washington DC that I felt the ground shaking all around me. “Why would anyone want your church?” a pastor there responded. “Anyone who is serious about ministry today does not want to be stuck raising money for maintaining buildings and mortgages. They want to be on the cutting edge making a difference.” As hard as it was to hear, I knew what he had just said was right.

— WALT

The same is true today. God has chosen people—not plans or programs—to spread his message. Yet somehow most of our attention and energy has shifted from making disciples to buildings and budgets. We ask our members to spend their time serving as ushers, nursery workers, and committee sitters. When told that Jesus’ command is to go and make disciples, we are all too tired from raising money to meet the budget and organizing Wednesday night dinners to fulfill his commission. We have made church a business, and that has distracted us from our real call.

PASTOR, SHEPHERD, OR CEO

Perhaps John Piper has best articulated the problem in his book *Brothers, We Are Not Professionals*. Piper, the senior pastor of Bethlehem Baptist Church in Minneapolis, says the twenty-first century is a great time to be in the ministry. He also says “pastors are being killed by the professionalizing of the pastoral ministry. The mentality of the professional is not the mentality of the prophet. It is not the mentality of the slave of Christ. Professionalism has nothing to do with the essence and heart of the Christian ministry.”³

According to Piper, the professional’s agenda is set by the world, with rewards collected here as well. “Brothers,” he writes, “we are not professionals! We are outcasts. We are aliens and exiles in the world (1 Pet. 2:11). Our citizenship is in heaven, and we wait with eager expectation for the Lord (Phil. 3:20). You cannot professionalize the love for His appearing without killing it. And it *is* being killed.”⁴ Professional ministry doesn’t make disciples and that is the only job Jesus gave us. The only one.

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TRANSFORMING YOUR CHURCH

There's a new day dawning with unprecedented opportunities to transform our churches from the inside out. The passionate church is not dead—we simply need to fan the flames into zeal for the kingdom. That's what this book is all about. What will it take to be an effective agent of change in our world? Anyone seeking to be used by God in this emerging culture needs to return to three fundamental skills:

- study the culture,
- read the Bible,
- build the church.

Study the Culture

Learning to be careful observers of the world around us is no new idea to the people of God. The great apostle Paul looked at the temples and sculptures of the great city of Athens before he introduced the Athenian people to “An Unknown God.” Throughout the church's history, people have studied and listened to the culture in order to communicate the story in an accessible and understandable way. The twentieth century church found a way to do this.

Today's Christians need to look carefully at the emerging twenty-first century culture. (The artifacts of this culture—television, music, popular books and magazines, the Internet, movies—communicate the hopes, fears, values, and longings of the emerging culture.) We need to rediscover how to communicate the Gospel in a real and relevant way that reaches unreached people where they live.

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As we read the Bible we discover the values and vision God has for us. The key value that is communicated through the Scriptures is the message of covenant. At its heart, covenant is a relationship with God brought about by his grace. The Bible gives us a vision of God's kingdom. This is God's mission to the world—his kingdom come and his will done on this earth just as it is in heaven. God is calling his church to reestablish humanity and all creation under his loving rule. These two fundamental themes of Scripture—Kingdom and Covenant—are like the DNA of the Bible, the double helix found throughout God's Word.

Build the Church

The covenant community is made up of kingdom people who together form the church that Jesus is building. We need to recapture the fundamental understanding that Christians do not “go to church,” they *are* the church. The simple but profound principles Jesus taught provide both basic discipleship and leadership development. They can be used to point a generation that has lost its bearings to the Compass, and facilitate the building of authentic community in a society where it is fracturing and disintegrating.

Change is constant. Either the church changes or the church dies. Because the world is radically changing, the church must adapt to reach the world. Because Jesus Christ never changes, Christ-followers are equipped to handle radical rapid changes. Throughout history, the church has been going through constant transition. Keeping the faith and focusing on the God-given vision through the stormy seas of change is crucial.