

1 September 2019: Theme: 'Unleashing the Church to Bring Life to the City'
Today's Topic: Everyday Ordinary Spirit-filled Lives.

1* We begin our new teaching series entitled, 'Unleashing the Church to Bring Life to the City.' This follows and builds on our last teaching series, which focussed on each of us finding our vocation and part to play in making God and His Kingdom known.

2* This new series has been inspired by the book 'Scattered Servants', by Alan Scott, which we encourage everyone to read and incarnate!

3* So Q1. Who is the church that's to bring life to the city? It's you and me!

4* Not superstars like Paul Woodman, or only leaders, but us ordinary people who've been saved and called by Jesus, and empowered by the Holy Spirit, to bring hope and life, and ultimately, Jesus, to those around us.

5* Alan Scott puts it like this: 'It is impossible to reach our city simply through better church services. Gathered environments can grow a church, but it is only scattered servants that can bring life to broken cities. It's time to unleash the power of everyone, everywhere, everyday so the church fills every city, industry and family with the beauty and story of Christ.'

Our aim through these teachings is to mobilize everyone in CL to fulfil our calling as a church (as held within these declarations on 286 walls), and in response to God's specific words to us at this time. We hope to stir us to corporate action and remove every obstacle and hindrance to us being all God has called us to be as part of the Church of Southampton. He is ready to empower us for the task if we will make ourselves available, if we will pray, and if we will move out as He leads and directs.

CL received a word in early March this year from Chris Abington. The scattered servants book reinforces this word to us. Chris brought the word: When I prayed for CL I saw a giant cruise ship; full of flags and explosive joy: Loads of fun; loads of family; rest for the weary; and joy for the depressed. It will be a safe place for many to come. As they come they will exchange what they thought was 'life' for the life of Jesus. I see them laying down drugs; hanging up habits and dreaming where there were nightmares. You were handing out hope to the homeless and a hand-up to the hurting.

Finances will begin to be miraculous and as you give more, it keeps coming back! Like streams flowing there will be multiple streams of income flowing in and out of this house. There will be an expansion in thinking. You will walk in the abundance of Heaven. There will be outbreaks of joy all over the city. Like wells being opened you will truly bring life to the city and others to come.

6* He quoted Acts 18:1-11 and in this account Paul moves out of the Temple area into the home next door where he continued to preach because God had told him He had many in the city who needed to hear the good news about Jesus.

V10: One night, the Lord spoke to Paul in a supernatural vision and said, 'Don't ever be afraid. Speak the words that I give you and don't be intimidated, because I AM with you. No one will be able to hurt you, for there are many in this city whom I call My own.'

He went on to say: In the same way CL moves outside the church walls, to the house next door and into the city. The enemy's tactic is to label, separate, and divide by any means. Jesus is about unconditional loving that joins everything together, destroying the distance between others. Everyone has their story that becomes part of the 'Jesus Story'. God wants us to move out and see 'who is next door' to share our story with.

7* As we go out many will come in and tell their story. We must not be afraid; we must not be silent; we must keep showing/speaking the love of Jesus in the creative ways He gives us. You and I were sent to this city. There are minds and lives God wants to restore and renew. The people are just waiting for us to 'take a step next door.' It's a prophetic, physical act! (3.3.19)

I believe each one of us is positioned in this city for such a time as this. And what time is that you may ask?

8* I believe it's time for planting seeds and anticipating a good harvest!

While on my 'creative sabbatical' (which I thank you all so much for making available to me) I began to do some creative writing with God. Some stories I wrote concerned my personal journey in God and where I am at and what God is saying to me (and some of that would probably find a witness with others). Other stories highlighted scriptures that God was speaking to me through. The stories became a new way of worshipping and hearing from God for me.

On 22 July, I awoke early and felt inspired to look into the early and latter rains mentioned in the book of Hosea 6:3 & Joel 2:21-26. I wrote a story and received a word:

9* (wait) It looks like rain!

You may not have seen it for a long time,
but rain is coming!
The skies may have been cloudless
for what seems like forever
but rain is coming!

Keep seeking God & looking for a cloud
the size of a man's hand -
a mere wisp of grey in a swathe of blue
that shows that rain is coming!
The ground beneath your feet may be hard and unyielding
but a great softening is now coming.
The earth will yield and be ready to receive her seed:
So gather seeds of every kind
& when you see the early rains, all follow behind
ploughing your fields and scattering your seed.
For some it means planting in rows;
but a harvest is coming and everyone knows
there's no time to lose and no time to waste:
Let no-one be found sleeping; prepare in haste.
Only a few weeks to get the seed in the ground
- ready to swell when latter rains abound.
We will plant in the autumn and reap fruit in the spring
a harvest of souls; our offering
to the One who died that they might live
taking their shame, and every sin forgives.
He charges us to let them know
in words and actions that will show
how loved they are and how loved they'll be
from now and throughout eternity.
Let's put on our shoes of every type and size
and carry the message far and wide.
Blessing we will carry and blessed we will be
messenger & receiver blessed equally!
So hear the news and hear it well
Rain is coming!

10* Word: God is bringing His Spirit rains to our lives and land; to water our land and make it fruitful as never before. After a long season of dryness, we need to be longing for the rain and ready with seed to plant, because God is sending autumn and winter rains that will receive, nurture and mature the seeds we plant. The harvest of diverse and varied crops and fruit will be full because of the Spirit raining on them at just the right time. Gather and plant seed now in readiness for the autumn rains.

For those in the autumn and winter years of their lives, these will be the most anointed, blessed and productive years in the Spirit. Be expectant of a great harvest from long and faithful years of labouring in God's fields.

*Spiritually, rain always represents the grace and blessing of God.

It's also no coincidence that our first CL Alpha runs in October! So we have to gear up now – let's start by laying a foundation of prayer, getting our land ready, and praying that God's presence and rain will come to the seeds we are going to be planting.

Two days later Nicky and I went to the Hillsong Leader's Conference in the O2 at the invitation of the lovely Dan, my son-in-law! Brian Houston who, together with his wife Bobbi, leads the Hillsong Network, opened up the conference with the words:

11* I can hear and smell the coming of rain! Can you hear and smell the coming of rain? Rain is coming to dry wastelands and breaking drought in businesses, relationships, finances, marriages and in personal relationships with God. He's bringing a deluge to desolate places – the dry parts of YOUR world. God is going to rain on the works of your hands.

12* If we are honest, many (not all) of us are in desperate need of a greater experience of the presence of God in our lives. Our land is dry; many of us feel dry; our prayer-life may have dried up; our time in His word may be diminished; we may have little expectation of God doing impossible things in us and through us; we may think we make no difference to the Kingdom of God. Testimonies dry up. Faith and hope can begin to fade away.

God is willing something very different for us, but we need to reposition ourselves to align with His words and begin to pray and declare His truth over our lives, over our relationships, over our prodigals, over our fields, over our 'houses next door', over the places where He has positioned us to plant seed that He wants to rain down upon.

Q. Who was here at the last meeting before the Summer Programme of church gatherings took place? If you were, you will remember that many of us took a corporate prophetic action together in response to a word that God brought through.

13* It was a statement of intent on our part. We willingly stood and asked the Holy Spirit to bring our hearts into full alignment with God's will for us as City Life. We asked Him to bring our hearts as a people, alive to His presence and His call. Oh that we could all say (like Count Zinzendorf): 'I have one passion. It is He, only He.'

This next season will give us every encouragement and opportunity to see that prophetic act and our heart cry for more fulfilled and realised. So I encourage all of us within our CGs to take hold of what God is saying, pray, and begin to flesh out these

words in everyday life; each person or group finding 'where the house next door' is for them and expecting God to rain on the works of our hands.

As we go to these places, carrying the presence of God, releasing the gospel through our words, works, and signs and wonders, there will be salvation, healing and deliverance released and our city will begin to be transformed.

If we stay confined in the church building, we won't see all God has for us and the many in the City awaiting the salvation that 'God has for them' will not be reached. If we don't plant seeds, there will be nothing for God to swell and ripen with His rains and no harvest will come.

14* The exciting thing is that 'these many that God has in our City' are already out there and they are His; they just don't know it yet. They haven't entered in because they need us to direct them to Jesus!

This call is to every ordinary person in CL! God wants us all on board (the ship), available, prayed up, empowered and moving out into all the situations in which He has placed us as His scattered servants. It's going to be fun and it's going to bring joy!

Let's incarnate the words received using our homes. For those of us fortunate to own homes, it is important to use them as a Kingdom resource. Our CL CGs meet in homes! If we are not in a CG let's get into one because we need community and one another to fulfil our assignment (as Bill Johnson always puts it!). We can't do it alone.

God blesses meeting together in homes for His purposes! Consider the early church.

15* The Bible passage I've been given tonight is a familiar one entitled 'The community of believers' - Acts 2: 42-46: Every believer was faithfully devoted to following the teachings of the Apostles. Their hearts were mutually linked to one another, sharing communion and coming together regularly for prayer. A deep sense of holy awe swept over everyone, and the Apostles performed many miraculous signs and wonders. All the believers were in fellowship as one body, and they shared with one another whatever they had. Out of generosity they even sold their assets to distribute the proceeds to those who were in need among them. Daily they met together in the temple courts and in one another's homes to celebrate communion. They shared meals together with joyful hearts and tender humility. They were continually filled with praises to God, enjoying the favour of all the people. And the Lord kept adding to their number daily those who were coming to life.

They were living and enjoying an environment in their homes that was attractive, inclusive and positively life-giving to others (who God added in daily) Believers and community go together! If we are not communing with other believers outside of

these Sunday gatherings, we are not creating community, and God hasn't got anything to presence Himself within or to add others into! I really encourage us to start seeing our home gatherings and CGs as communities like the one we've just heard described – full of life and praise, where Jesus is talked about and experienced around the table and where He can move and include others in on their journey to knowing Him.

Gene Edwards in his book – Revolution – an amazing depiction of the book of Acts and the church emerging after Pentecost – refers to this community aspect as 'Church Life.'

Gene Edwards – Revolution: The first church was made up of 12 Apostles, 3000 plus people, a huge shed, and an awful lot of homes, plus a lot of self-giving and a lot of unleashed joy. Christ was real; He was being experienced every day. The main place the church met was informally in homes – sharing 'church life!'

16* Church life, a wonderful new life-style and indescribable 'corporate experience,' was the major secret of these people. Being a follower of Christ just does not work without knowing and experiencing Him in the vital, overwhelming, joyous encounter of church life! These early disciples were set on knowing Jesus more with their brothers and sisters, and the more they experienced Him – the greater the joy and praise they shared. It is interesting to note how powerful they became simply as a result of experiencing Christ and experiencing life as part of His church. You simply cannot top church life for training and preparing servants of God. At the very same time that they were giving and receiving practical help, they were also learning revelation of the deepest spiritual truths. The practical, the spiritual, both were there. They were being equipped to live as a corporate body and, at the same time they found their individual ways of expressing their experiences of Christ, as the Holy Spirit raised people up and gave them functions and roles and gifts. These gatherings in homes were one vital aspect of their equipping; the other was learning together in the larger gathering, where the Apostles shared their experience of being with Jesus. If you had just spent four years, eighteen hours per day, living with God, what would you talk about? That's how the gospels came about! The cutting-edge of faith is to know and experience Christ daily. The revelation, which the Apostles had of Jesus, their practical help on how to know Him, thrilled every listener and held them in awe of the wonderful adventure that lay ahead. Following these larger gatherings the believers returned home and shared around the table everything they'd heard, seen and felt that day. The air became filled with bursts of overflowing life. They testified, praised, and sang and the place became saturated with God's presence. The church meeting in homes, under Christ, in the midst of

unbridled joy was one of the things that made the church so unique, so wonderful, so believable, and so magnetic.

I still believe that Apostleship and active, authentic church life are all that we need today to be a healthy growing church communities that impact the environment and transform cities. If there had been no Apostles in those formative years, the early church would have collapsed, but without church life and scattered servants, there would have been no growth and advancing of the Kingdom.

This two-winged bird of larger led gatherings and church life expressed within vital community, ensures that we are equipped and empowered to be the scattered servants we are called to be, carrying the presence and authority of Jesus with us into our daily settings. We become the everyday, ordinary Spirit-led carriers of God's presence that we were saved to be!

I think it's time for us to re-look at how these two aspects are represented in CL? During my sabbatical God spoke to me about leadership's prime responsibility being prayer and ministry of His word. As leaders we need to ensure that we are sharing with this church family the very presence and wisdom of God as experienced by us.

As smaller communities within CGs etc we need to ensure we all partake in authentic, active, practical and spiritual church life with other brothers and sisters, so that God can raise up and empower scattered servants to get the further work of the church done, as well as having an open table where God can bring others along who are looking for life.

17* Alan Scott refers to the early church saying 'The sharing of the good news of Jesus happened in everyday ordinary moments rather than in strategic locations. When gathered together believers received exceptional teaching and generosity, but scattered they had authority and opportunity to bring hope to hurting humanity through both communication and demonstration.'

18* It will be no different with us - The Kingdom comes as we - ordinary, empowered, scattered, servants - go.'

There is a lot to consider, pray into and work with and full notes and Qs will be sent to all CGs.

CG Questions & Discussion Points:

Q. In light of God's words to us are we willing to pray into them, to make ourselves available, and to move out among others as He leads and directs in order to make Jesus known? Discuss how to action this?

Q. What are any hindrances to our doing this and how can we tackle and remove them?

Q. Where is 'the house next door' for us (is it literal neighbours, or colleagues at work, or people/places God is calling us to serve, maybe as chaplains)?

Q. What areas of life do we personally need God to rain upon and how can we prepare for that?

Q. God's got words for us to share with 'the many He has in our city' – how can we as a CG begin to gather specific words for those God puts on our hearts? How can we share them? Be strategic and specific in asking God about them and releasing His word to them.

Q. Who are those God wants us to invite to Alpha? Let's start praying for them now and take an invite to them.

Q. Evaluate and share as a CG what you can all do to enhance living out authentic powerful church life with Jesus together and becoming more like the growing community of early believers? There's lots to pray into!