



# LifeSpot ... Bring back church!

## Original church

*You are the Christ—the Son of the living God*, Peter said. *Excellent answer*, Jesus replied. *And on this platform I will build my church. Hell won't be able to destroy it.* See Matthew 16:16–18. Then our Lord described the character of his church—sacrifice, discipleship, childlike faith, miracles, humility, obedience, seeking the lost, agreeing together, forgiving. But through centuries, church evolved into a clergy-driven institution, inward focused, exclusive, argumentative, proud, unappealing. We still struggle with this. At last, in our weariness, will we let Christ bring back original church? Disciples united and empowered in Jesus to seek and save the lost! I vote for a church like that—do you?

## A better way

The leader of a closed-system, clergy-dominated church came to Jesus one night, desperate for a better way. *The wind of change is blowing*, Jesus told Nicodemus, *but you have to listen intently for it.* See John 3:1–8. For churches stuck in a monotonous round of religious duties, the fresh wind of the Holy Spirit is the change-maker. That's why the enemy is hell-bent on keeping us in noisy commotion so we don't hear the Spirit. "You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you. then you will be my witnesses." Acts 1:8 (NIRV). This is the way of spiritual power; there is no other way. Today, will you join with others to ask God to blow his wind of change through you?

## Open doors

"We're going to get our church back." It's a comment heard occasionally from those upset by change, even change that might prove positive. Here's a hard truth—It was never your church. But if you insist, Jesus might hand it to you, and your lordship will transform your church into a curse. When we argue, fight, judge, divide, and control, the people we're supposed to reach for Jesus look at us and say, "If that's church, I'll take a pass." God could reach them through another means—and it might be an easier task than reaching us. To a pathetic early church in denial over its condition, Jesus declared, *I'm standing at your door. If you hear my voice and open the door, you'll find genuine fellowship with me.* See Revelation 3:14–22. It's time. Let's fling open our doors to the Lord of the church.

## Critical intimacy

When Jesus formed the first leadership team for the Christian church, he bypassed those who already knew everything. He chose ordinary people, non-experts. These regular folk had their own set of problems—but they were problems Jesus could work with. James and John, for example, were overly boisterous. "Sons of Thunder." The nickname indicates rage, anger, commotion. But look at the brothers three years later. Still spirited and energised—but also in quiet communion with Jesus. At table, John rested his head on Jesus' chest. John 13:23. It's a strange intimacy, but a critical one. When church is characterised by energised disciples who come close enough to Jesus to hear his heartbeat, nothing will stop the church. Will you be one of those disciples?

## Quiet cooperation

A commercial construction site is a noisy place—excavating, pounding, hoisting, hammering, cutting. But in nature, building and growing are generally quiet. Seeds sprout, forests form, flowers open, fish spawn, bread rises—noiselessly, consistently, miraculously. When Jesus said, “This is what the kingdom of God is like . . .”, these quiet images are the ones he chose. Church is not a marketing program, a Hollywood production, or a political campaign, where noise translates into attention and success. “Just do it—quietly and unobtrusively.” Matthew 6:4 (MSG). God is the one who makes things grow, and quietness is his way. Will you cooperate with God’s growing today?

## Mission succeeding

What’s the fastest-growing faith group on Earth? That would be foundational Christianity—believers in Christ who accept the Bible as God’s Word, and who see themselves as born-again disciples of the Lord Jesus. Their growth rate is 6 to 8 per cent a year. Compare this with a world-wide population growth rate of 1.1 per cent. (For an excellent resource on questions like this, see *reasonablefaith.org*.) Do you grasp the significance of this phenomenal growth? The Good News of Jesus is getting out there, making its mark. “The words I speak ... will not return to me without producing results. . . . They will do exactly what I sent them to do.” Isaiah 55:11 (NIRV). Would you like to play an increasing role in this succeeding mission?

## Excellent tradition

How is foundational Christianity growing today? Researchers tell us it’s growing most strongly through home-based and community-based church. This is not institutional, cathedral-like growth, but a quiet surge of conversions as disciples of Christ put the Good News of God’s kingdom out there in everyday life. The largest churches in our time are networks of home-based congregations. This presents an opportunity for regular churches—to extend their witness through community presence and the planting of new congregations in homes and community centers. It wouldn’t be the first time. The first time was with Jesus, the disciples, and the apostles. Let’s follow that excellent tradition!

## Hum of discipleship

By 100 AD, it’s estimated there was one foundational Christian believer—a Bible-believing, born-again disciple—for every 360 non-believers. By 1000 AD, that figure became one for every 220. By 1900, it was one for every 27. And by 2000, it was one for every nine—allowing for those who might be inactive in their belief system. (For more information go to *reasonablefaith.org*; search “Christian growth”.) Holy miracle! In our own era, God is reshaping his church from the noisy bustle of an institution to the quiet hum of every-member discipleship. This is what spreads Gospel seed and produces growth. We hold a life-giving kernel of truth and hope! We might sow with tears, but we reap with joy. Will you give praise to the Lord? He is doing great things. Psalm 126.