

Journeying Toward Transformation

by

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Preface

The people of God have been given a wonderful commission, to represent Christ on the earth and to make his presence real in every location. Transformation-type language seems to be appropriate language to use to describe the Great Commission to 'disciple all nations'. When there is some evidence that a measure of transformation has taken place we should expect the following elements:

- a God-awareness in the community
- people coming to know Jesus at a personal level
- a positive societal shift regarding such issues as crime and social breakdown
- a flow of justice within and from the community

Those elements are, of course, part of the Hebraic vision of *shalom*, and although I do not believe that we will ever see a total manifestation of *shalom* prior to the return of Jesus, I remain optimistic that we are to pray and work toward some clear evidence of the presence of God's kingdom manifesting within society in the here and now. The challenge is to see on earth tangible manifestations of heaven's values and society.

Since 1998 I have been involved in pursuing this type of vision. What I write here cannot be the final perspective on this, but I submit these chapters as part of the ongoing contribution that many are making to this vision. I have been so enriched during these these past years as I have experienced fellowship with people all over the world who are pulling for the same thing.

When I began to respond to this vision I had a simple message: let the church be united and let there be unified prayer to turn things round. Those elements are still very central to what I believe, although I might well express them a little differently now. On every spiritual journey there are understandings the Lord adds on the way. In those early days I would never

have understood the language of ‘healing the land’, but that was one of the first conviction that has become core to my beliefs and aims. Soon after that followed the concept of the church occupying what had been cleared through prayer. Other concepts have followed or older ones have been nuanced.

In the following chapters I will try to unfold what I consider needs to be in place if we are to have a realistic hope of a city or region being transformed. In part the chapters are reworks of the two books: *Gaining Ground* and *Impacting the City*, along with material that has developed since those books were published.¹

The work before us is enormous, but surely not to the scale that the early church faced. Twelve core disciples, 120 in an Upper Room, and something like 12% of the entire Roman Empire as committed disciples within 300 years. This works out to be a growth rate of some 40% per decade every decade. They actually believed that the commission from heaven and the breath of the Spirit, constituted them as the body of Christ. They had the conviction that through the resurrection their Lord filled ‘everything in every way’ (Ephes. 1:23) and that they, as the body of Christ, were to grow to the fullness of the stature of this Christ (Ephes. 4:13).

If we could recapture some of their enthusiasm, some of their infectious faith, and perhaps their sense of adventure I wonder what might take place. In my context, the continent of Europe, I am asking what would take place if we made that all-out response to the call from heaven for Jesus to have his church back. I am painfully aware that it might mean the end of some forms of church, but the possibility of participating in the life of God pulsating through the body of Christ would be a reward beyond anything we deserve.

I trust that the material I present will stimulate your imagination and cause you to go back again to Scripture for a biblical vision for your situation to be strengthened. What I write I submit as a contribution – use what is useful and be bold enough both to use whatever tools are helpful at any given time, and to put down ones that don’t work. What is written is not some program for success – there is absolutely no substitute for success. Above all follow the Lord of the harvest.

¹ *Gaining Ground* (Tonbridge: Sovereign World, 2004) and originally published in 2001 as *Sowing seeds for revival*; *Impacting the City* (Tonbridge: Sovereign World, 2004).

Chapter 1

A Time for Fulfillments

If we are not prepared for the hard work of ploughing any hope we had of reaping will prove to have been false, for as Proverbs 20:4 says, 'A sluggard does not plough in season; so at harvest time he looks but finds nothing.' We all wish to harvest but if we are not prepared to work hard at the level of preparation (ploughing and sowing) we will find ourselves being very disappointed. Just before I began to travel with prayer teams in June 1998, a church leader asked me how long I envisaged travelling in that capacity. I replied that I anticipated I would need to do so for at least four to six years even to begin to scratch the surface. The look on his face told me he was hoping I would say 'a few months' so that we might all be able to rest back and experience the presence of revival in the nation by then. He was hoping that all our hard work would be over, as people in significant numbers would be responding to salvation. Revival - the answer to all our problems! What a wonderful thought, but I also suspect a major myth!

There seems to me to be only two legitimate 'finishing lines' that are given to the church in Scripture - the return of Jesus and the taking of the gospel to the ends of the earth. Indeed it is likely that these two finishing lines will prove to be one and the same. Certainly Scripture does not lead us to expect that with just a little more effort revival will come, thus ending all our problems! Hard work, difficulties and setbacks will be with us till he returns. Thank God Scripture is considerably more realistic than we are. And thank God that the Scriptures are there to fill us with the faith we need to believe God for the turning of cities and also nations.

We find ourselves alive at a time of significant shift in Western culture. This mega-shift is affecting every expression of that culture, including church.

Death is around us; the end of an era is visible. For those with hope, though, this can also herald the beginning of a new era for death can once again yield to new life. New expressions of church are bursting through the dust of death that currently covers our culture. New life expresses itself in ways that are both continuous and discontinuous with what has gone on previously. So in our current setting the church that is coming to birth will manifest some of what has gone before – it will be recognisable – but it will also appear with many new aspects. The future of church will almost certainly be more diverse than ever, and yet the possibility of a deeper level of unity will be more within our grasp than before.

I advocate that we do not yield to the quick-fix mentality of ‘revival as the answer for all problems’, and that we also embrace this wider framework that the Western church is now at the end (and beginning) of an era. Those factors indicate that our task of effectively reaching our generation has to be a considered one. Thus far what I have written could well be interpreted as if I am pessimistic about our potential for success. However, given the chapter title as ‘a time for fulfilments’, I hope it will become clear that far from being pessimistic I am in fact optimistic and (I trust) realistic. Provided we engage with whatever hard work proves necessary to fulfil our task we can genuinely anticipate an experience of revival that will not disappoint. The very word ‘revival’ creates a diversity of images and I think it is only fair that I first expand on how I understand the concept in our culture.

Revival: what do we mean?

The word ‘revival’ is a hard one to give definition to. At one level it is not a biblical concept, for if the word is to have any meaning at all it is only applicable to a church that has gone asleep (or died). Only such a church needs reviving. Surely God never intended the church to sleep, and ‘revival’ language can be dangerous for two reasons: it can suggest that a revival dynamic is abnormal and that such abnormality solves all ills.

Yet the word is applicable in the sense that the church, as we experience it, continually needs reviving. And provided we understand that God desires the church to rise again to the challenge of incarnating the life of Jesus within our culture it is not an inappropriate term. So long as we do not fall into the trap of the ‘revival-cures-all-ills’ trap it seems appropriate to me to use the term ‘revival’ as a statement of our hope.

A revival is coming – and in measure is already here in many places – but I am agnostic as to how it will be expressed. It certainly cannot be where the church dominates and everyone has to submit – that is the domain of empires and the manifestation of an anti-Christ spirit. I am sure there will be some great inbreakings of the Spirit, for that typifies the unpredictable wind of God (John 3:8), but, in all honesty, my overall hope is that we see the church rise from her sleep and grow increasingly into the fulfilment of her call. Sudden increases might well be more exciting, but an experience of steady growth might well prove to be healthier than a sudden explosion of the life of God. Statistically it has been suggested that the early church grew at some 40% per decade virtually every decade for some 300 years – definite steady growth, and dare I suggest it – truly revival growth. I also consider that steady growth will more likely deal with our wrongly placed desire for God to do for us what he has already challenged us to do. He asks that we work out what he has worked in us; that we grapple with the suffering of creation and so come through to a place of humble stewardship. Hence steady and consistent growth should indeed prove to be healthier.

If God, and he most surely will, comes to accelerate things dramatically so well and good, but if not then we need to know what it is we are to get on with, and to set in place. Perhaps there has never been a greater opportunity to demonstrate the manifold wisdom of God, not only to the heavenly powers, but also to those around us. God does have a ‘meta-narrative’ that he is telling, for he is the beginning and the end; and that story must be told and re-told in every generation through a myriad of cameos.

For that story to be told we will need to, as part of the body of Christ, connect with our community. As a connection is made with the community, the church becomes a redemptive body and enables the setting (people and geography) to begin to connect with the amazing redemptive story that runs from creation to consummation. If the church can embrace that God has called her to be a body of destiny then seeds of destiny can be sowed into the wider community. The story to be told then is not our story but his. The challenge facing any church leadership is to flow in such a way that any sub-vision that they are proposing is not centralised in a controlling fashion, but is ready to give way to the wonderful transformation message of the Gospel. Too often leaders have developed a vision that is centred in on the growth of the church and its activities – the end result being one of stifling the bigger vision of the church being redemptive in and through all of creation. Any vision

developed at a church level can only be temporary. It continually has to die in order that Jesus becomes centre stage in God's meta-narrative that is directed by the Spirit.

Revival then, for me, both speaks of the awakening of the church to fulfil her creation mandate, and also speaks of great inbreakings of the Spirit, so that through the church the presence of the future is manifest for any society to view.

Fulfilments

Into the context I have outlined above I want to speak of hope, of a season of fulfilments that is here before us in the Western church. Yet before writing about fulfilments let me also underline that the pathway to any fulfilment will always include a death experience. There is no successful fulfilment without death. The path from promise to fulfilment must travel by way of the cross.

However, enough realism for now! In Easter of 1991 I was in South Africa and over a period of days a vision began to take shape. I wrote down, under a number of headings, the things I believed were going to take place. I will give the headlines below and then put a little more substance to the headlines as I explain how I currently understand the various aspects.

(Just before giving the headlines it is worth noting at this stage that I used to think 'UK' whereas now I think 'Europe', so the scope of the vision is the European church. What I suggest though is applicable globally.)

- **A new type of church was to rise**

In my notes I wrote down 'Apostolic church'. This type of church would have great authority over a region. It would be as if that region had opened up spiritually and even if one travelled some 50 miles from that place the atmosphere elsewhere might still be closed. The contrast was very marked. Within the context of apostolic church I saw that there would be a great release of signs and wonders.

- **Different ages released**

A great youth movement was coming. These young people would be sold out and ready to go at the Lord's command. A number of these young people would not live the majority of their lives in the UK, but would relocate to other European cities thus helping to form the end of a bridge, with the result that

many cities became inter-connected.

Corresponding to this youth movement there would also be a movement among those aged approximately 55 and above. Some of those would have been on the edge of church but would find themselves catapulted into the heart of God's action plan; others simply stepped into something new so that their latter years proved to be more fruitful than all their former ones put together. A number of these people took early retirement with not a few living out the remainder of their lives in nations other than the nation of their birth.

- **Business and transformation**

I saw business people finding one another, and in particular finding one another internationally. Through their relationships they began to spark each other to such an extent that the day came when they would travel to nations that were under bondage through debt and poverty. They would gain entrance to those in power and let them know that they had come from God, but they did not come to simply hand out finances but to help with the reshaping of the nation. Poverty was broken of certain nations in a short period of time, and there was a level of unprecedented fruitfulness for the gospel.

- **An arts revival**

Finally, the arts were impacted. Something more than 'Christian drama' broke loose. The largest auditoriums in Europe were taken, and there was a revival of the arts in the streets. The latter opened up the wells of creativity; the former brought the colour of God to the public arena.

Some comments on the vision

In 1991 I had only one framework for the concept of 'apostolic church'. I thought that such a church would be where a local church - similar to 'my' one! - would grow to unprecedented levels and make a major impact on the spiritual atmosphere, as well as impressing everyone around!! Giving that my church would be one of them that was wonderful as I was in it!

However, I have become convinced that a big church is not what is going to do the job. Or, perhaps more accurately, a big 'local' church is not going to do it. However, if we could actually see and live from the revelation that there is a much larger church across our locality than our local church, then there is real hope that larger church will fulfil this vision. In other words I

now see church in the city or across the region as that body that the Lord is raising up, or 'reviving', to a level of apostolic authority. Leadership for this new expression of the body will inevitably be different to what has led what we have called 'local church'. Indeed some of the basic relational units might be smaller than anticipated, but the true bond of unity will be greater than before so that the church in the locality will truly begin to rise with an apostolic mantle.

Even many successful local churches are going to find themselves entering major transition. Unless there is an embracing of new relationships, in response to John 17, it will not be possible to rise up to participate in this new apostolic dimension. Inevitably there will have to be major redefinitions given to the words 'apostle' and 'apostolic'. Those who were apostolic in one era of church life might not automatically be apostolic in the next phase of development. The apostolic ministry is foundational, and in every move of God there will be apostles raised up to lay foundations for the expression of church coming out of that particular move.

There is a generation that is rising that will bring us into a level of fulfilment that has eluded us thus far. Youth and those who are not youth (I can't refer to those over 55 as elderly) are together that rising generation. All who are prepared to rise as part of what the Lord is doing will be the rising generation, regardless of age, for God is not the God of age. If what is rising is not marked by a certain age, it will however be marked by certain characteristics of the Spirit. Although, the rising generation is not primarily to do with age it also needs to be stated that if we do not see the youth touched in what is coming we will have fallen drastically short of a revival movement that is in the heart of God. So although it will not simply be youth that rise, it is necessary that a major part of what is coming be expressed through the younger generation.

The impacting of the business and arts arenas will be vital if we are to see a transformation that goes beyond our churches and touches our cities and nations. I cannot speak into these areas with any great expertise, but these spheres of activity will be addressed at some level in the context of this book. The saints are getting ready for their release and empowerment and we are gladly having to plan for the church to be placed in the context where God always desired: the world. A church truly gathered under one heavenly head is one that is placed in and through all of creation.

I trust by now that you will begin to see where I am aiming. I believe we need our faith to be stirred for new expressions while keeping our feet firmly planted on *terra firma*. We need to be people of prayer and of hard work. We need to love the church, but refuse to be held captive by concepts from a former era.

So, from my perspective revival is necessary to bring the church back to a level that God intended. This is an ongoing issue and in as much as the church is already being re-aligned with the purposes of God this reviving is already present among us in measure. We are now coming into a season of fulfilments, and that much of what was prophesied into the nations, churches and individuals at the end of the 80s and beginning of the 90s is coming to a time of fulfilment. Whenever prophecies are given they have to be received and waited on for their fulfilment and I believe now is the time for fulfilments to increasingly take place.

If this is so we can also expect many changes. When we move into fulfilments our experience will be different to what they were in the days of promise. One of the main aspects that we can expect is that prophetic intercession will begin to make room for apostolic declarations. I do not mean by this that there will be no more prophetic intercession, but that we will increasingly come to a time when what has been travailed over will be established. As this begins to happen the church will stand in a new place and declare what God has established.

Before, however, touching on these apostolic declarations there is the need for a brief explanation of what I mean by the term 'prophetic intercession'. I am using this term to cover every aspect of intercession (including prayer but not simply referring to prayer exclusively) that seeks to address the gap between what is and what should be. Historical sin has caused great divisions, like fissures in the ground. A good example of historical sin is that of the 'bloodguilt' that has been on the nation of Germany (and I certainly don't want to give the impression here that there is no bloodguilt on the UK for the wars that devastated Europe, in fact I believe that Germany is currently cleaner than England is over these issues). Over years many have stood in the gap on this issue and many actions have been implemented (prophetic intercession) with the result that today the bloodguilt has been removed from the nation. Historic guilt has been removed. God does forgive sin; repentance does turn a nation to God.

Prophetic intercession has created a platform for increasing apostolic declarations, where the effects of the sin can be proclaimed as over. Or, using other words, apostolic declarations are where declarations made through the church becomes effective (Matt. 18:18). This is not a technique but a level where the Lord wishes to take the church in order that the prophetic intercession of recent years will indeed bear much fruit.

What has been happening across Europe is that prophetic intercession, led in the main by faceless people, has begun to break through. Old strongholds are weakening, and this is making room for something new to rise up - an apostolic type church across cities, regions and even nations that will begin to make declarations. In so doing a new order in the heavens will open over cities and even over whole nations. Such an apostolic church will only be birthed out of intercession and manifest in a true spirit of unity.

The United Kingdom and Europe

If the UK church is to break through it is vital that we embrace our European identity. In spite of our isolation we have a history that binds us together. We are of the same stock and we are being called to play our part in the reforming of a continent. By using the word 'reforming' I am making a deliberate choice. We are being called to re-form, to put together shapes that are calling for God to fill them. (In Genesis 1, we read that this was how God first responded to a creation that was without form and empty - he made shapes or forms that he then later filled.) The Lord is encouraging us to pray and work for a manifestation of church across Europe that will cause there to be an even greater shake up than was caused at the time of the former Reformation.

There are fears in the UK (as well as in other European nations) about a united Europe. This is understandable both from a political and spiritual perspective. However, if the church in the UK does not engage with the reshaping of a spiritual unity within the church in Europe, and make a choice to share the burden of our corporate guilt, we will have no-one to blame but ourselves when a demonic and domineering Europe rises up. Dare I suggest that the Lord is calling for a united Europe - at the level of the body of Christ, and that the enemy wants to counterfeit this with an oppressive and even persecuting structure.

If through listening to negative voices about Europe the UK church

responds by withdrawing then those voices will prove to be self-fulfilling prophetic voices. If however, the church rises up in prayer and love then a new Europe could be formed. The Gospel must again shape up the continent that God graced for so long as a mission sending continent, and for that to happen the UK church must respond by embracing her European identity and destiny.

John the Baptist

One final biblical analogy that I believe will help us. I was present in a city where the unity among church leaders is as significant and as deep as I have seen anywhere. The unity could not be described as superficial for the pastors have wept with each other asking for forgiveness, the one of the other. They asked me if they should see themselves as a 'city eldership'. (I always find the answer given in those situations very educational, as the Holy Spirit loves to respond to our honest, humble search after truth.) Here was a situation that some might claim was very close to manifesting a city eldership, but surprisingly I found myself saying the following:

You are not to see yourselves as a city eldership, but you are to live, pray and exist with the burden and mandate to release a city eldership. When it comes through some of you might be part of it, some might not. However, if you do not live with the responsibility of producing a city eldership then it might not arise; also if you were to see yourselves at this time to be that city eldership you will actually prevent it from fully rising.

In other words their task was to be that of intercession, of standing prophetically for what was coming, and of calling for it. Their task was not to make claims for themselves, or to see themselves as what was coming.² I then went on to say that were to be like John the Baptist, who faced a similar line of questioning in John 1. So, as I close this chapter, let's take a brief look at the dialogue in that chapter, and in particular John's response.

² I also now understand that a 'city eldership' is not just going to consist of the church pastors but of those called to take responsibility from across the diversity of the city. As our understanding changes it makes it even more important that we do not over-define situations. It is often very difficult to undo what we have put in place. What we do today might be appropriate for this season and might move us forward, but it might prove to be the very obstacle that we have to remove in the next season.

Who are you?

The representatives of the Jewish Temple authorities came to John to ask him to state who he was. In doing so they gave him some alternatives. With each option presented he responded with a denial. Jesus was clearly the fulfilment of the first option presented ('are you the Messiah?'). John's also denies that he is the fulfilment of the last option ('are you the Prophet?'). He was not the Prophet for it was Jesus who truly was the Prophet like Moses (Deut. 18:15-17). It is however the middle option in John 1:21 that they gave to John ('are you Elijah?') that we know to be most accurate. For Jesus himself said that John was indeed the Elijah that had been promised (see for example Matt. 11:14 for Jesus comments and Malachi 4:5,6 for the promise of Elijah).

Why then does John deny this identification? It is most unlikely that John did not self-consciously see himself as the fulfilment of the Elijah prophecy. I suggest that for John to do what he did would have been very difficult had he not seen understood himself as carrying the spirit of Elijah. Also given that John's father, Zechariah, had been told explicitly by Gabriel of John's identity it seems most unlikely that this identity was kept from him. So I am sure that John knew very well that he was indeed the person destined to stand in the anointing of Elijah.

Why then the denial? Two reasons. First, Jesus had said that John was Elijah *if* the people were able to receive it. The fact that they were asking the question indicated that they were not in fact receiving him as Elijah. So his answer to the question 'are you Elijah?' is in effect 'no I am not - at least I am not Elijah *to you*'. Those sent from heaven only fully succeed in their mission when they are received as ones sent.

The second factor, though, is that John is so focused on what is to come that he cannot be diverted to discuss his own identity. When forced, he describes himself simply in relation to what he was called to do. He was a voice, crying out in the wilderness. If he did not stand in the gap until he saw who was to come established he would have failed. What positive purpose could possibly result from debating who he was? If he fulfils his task then indeed it can then be said that he was Elijah, but not before. And if he does fulfil his task then it was never about him anyway, but about the one who was to come.

It is this attitude that must permeate all current activities. We are to be voices that intercede for what is to come. We are to take ourselves so

seriously that we are willing to live and die for what is to come. We, however, realise that what is to come is so much greater than we are that we cannot raise ourselves up with great titles. So we take what we are called to do very seriously, but can never view ourselves with intrinsic importance.

The great call from the heart of the Holy Spirit is for a body to rise up that will truly partner with him to stand in the gap between what is here and what is to come. We are calling for something apostolic to rise up, and it is necessary during this phase that we do not make claims prematurely. What is coming is greater than what is here; when that arrives we will need to decrease. Indeed for John this eventually meant he lost his head, and I suggest that there will be some current heads that will need to be removed when a new apostolic dimension rises.

If Malachi 4:6, which speaks of the hearts of parents and children being reconciled, has helped shape us over these past few years, I suggest that we will now have to embrace Jesus words that 'freely we have received, freely give' (Matt. 10:8). Even if we have paid a price for something the grace of Jesus means that we have received it freely. If we received it freely we are not owners of it but stewards. If stewards we need to be wise, but if we are not owners we have to give it away freely.

The idea that one generation received something through paying a price and any subsequent generation will have to go the same route is false. Whatever we have received is for the benefit of those who are coming. Our ceiling needs to become the floor for the next generation. They can then build in ways that we were not able to.

I believe this is a time for fulfilments, a time for investing into the rising generation. It will soon be time to recognise what we have longed for is becoming increasingly manifest, then that will signal that we who have led must give way. At that stage if God will further grace us we can then partner with what is rising. It is possible to receive a fresh impartation but only as we reposition ourselves.

The Lord is calling the church to revival, to be awakened so that a day of true fulfilments can be our experience. This call will also take the church to the Middle East. Could it be that the glory of God will spread back to the trouble spots of our world? This is our time to respond as the fulfilment of God's promises are, in part, in the hands of the saints. For this to take place we must not be sluggards but make preparations for the visitation and

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habitation of God.

Chapter 2

The Basic Shape

In the preface I spoke of the early message I carried as being an emphasis on unity and united prayer. These two important components I have developed since that time and as this chapter unfolds I will enlarge on how I see these now. I also believe that there is one other major component that needs to be added to those two – that of the godly stewardship of the space that is opened up through prayer. Further, the context in which the whole shape is effectively developed should manifest two elements that signify the inbreaking of the kingdom of God. So I am going to look at these five aspects that need to be developed.

So, to summarise, the three components to transformation are:

- a recognition of the unity of the body
- prayer that covers the ‘territory’ at all levels
- an occupation through godly stewardship of the space that is cleared

The two contextual elements that then give shape to the context will be that of:

- *justice*, and
- the inbreaking of God’s reality through *supernatural signs*

The unity of the body

A major conviction gathered from Paul’s letters is that there is one body in a given location. He wrote to the one church in a given location, although he was well aware that the one-geographically-located church found expression in a diverse number of settings. So, for example, he wrote to, ‘the church in

Corinth' (1 Cor. 1:2), and yet within any given place he acknowledged that the church did not necessarily all gather together in one location. An illustration of this is in his letter to the Romans where we read that he instructed those that received his letter to greet the church that met in another location in the city - at the home of Priscilla and Aquila (Rom. 16:3-5).

There were diverse locations where believers met, but Paul worked hard to ensure that there was a true unity in the midst of the diversity. He rebuked those who divided themselves along the lines of who their favourite apostolic ministry was (1 Cor. 1-3).

A major stumbling block to many people is the scandal of the disunity of the church. Although we should not be naïve and think there are no issues to work through in order to express unity, we cannot entertain legitimate hopes for transformation without also seeking to make a contribution to a greater manifestation of reconciliation within the body. Although a shallow unity based on the lowest common denominator will not be very effective, it is clear that we have to move far beyond seeing other expressions of the one body as the competition.

So in pursuing an expression of unity in a specific location we will have to consider what barriers need to be dealt with and what that unity could look like - all expressed amidst a healthy diversity.

The diverse prayer of the saints

Paul said that we are to 'pray in the Spirit at all times in every prayer and supplication' (Ephes. 6:18) indicating that we cannot quickly declare that one type or style of prayer is the right one and any other style is wrong. I suggest then that we need to promote a multi-level approach to prayer.

Prayer that is varied will all help contribute toward the removal of offences (or we could say the undoing of the negative effects of history) and the release of the destiny of a place. Discovering how to develop the multi-levelled approach to prayer will be a key to breakthrough.

An occupation through godly stewardship

Words such as 'ruling' and 'reigning' are problematic as we often interpret these through a dominating (and thus fallen) understanding. However, 'ruling' in the sense of seeking to bring God's order through humble stewardship is

necessary if we are to rise to our calling.

As we pray and undo the effects of history it is vital that whatever is cleared is occupied. Jesus made this clear in his teaching about the casting out of a demon (Matt. 12:43-45) where he implied that once a demon has been evicted it is important that the 'house' is not left empty. Hence it is vital that the church (not in the institutional sense, but in the sense of 'church' as the people of God) rise up and finds her place in the context of society. Part of transformation will come as the church finds how to become immersed in creation.

How the people of God engage with their community will be vital. It cannot be one of domination *over* and imposition on the community, but one of servanthood *within* and *among* the community.

Two elements necessary to give a healthy kingdom context

- **Justice**

The prophets of the Old Testament are vocal during periods when those in power within the context of Israel ignore issues of justice. The laws of God that govern every aspect of the life of Israel are spiritual laws, but those laws of spirituality do not just speak into issues of morality, but into economic and societal dimensions. The kingdom of God demands an outworking through justice. Any true focus on transformation will carry this aspect, and justice will be more than an element we pursue - it will be a framework in which everything will develop.

- **Supernatural signs**

When John the Baptist had a question over the identity of Jesus (Matt. 11:2-6) he sent disciples to him to ask the question, 'are you the one or do we look for another?' Jesus replied by telling them to inform John what they were seeing and hearing. They were to tell John that there were miracles taking place (and the poor were the ones hearing the good news). The evidence of the inbreaking of the kingdom of God will be seen through such signs.

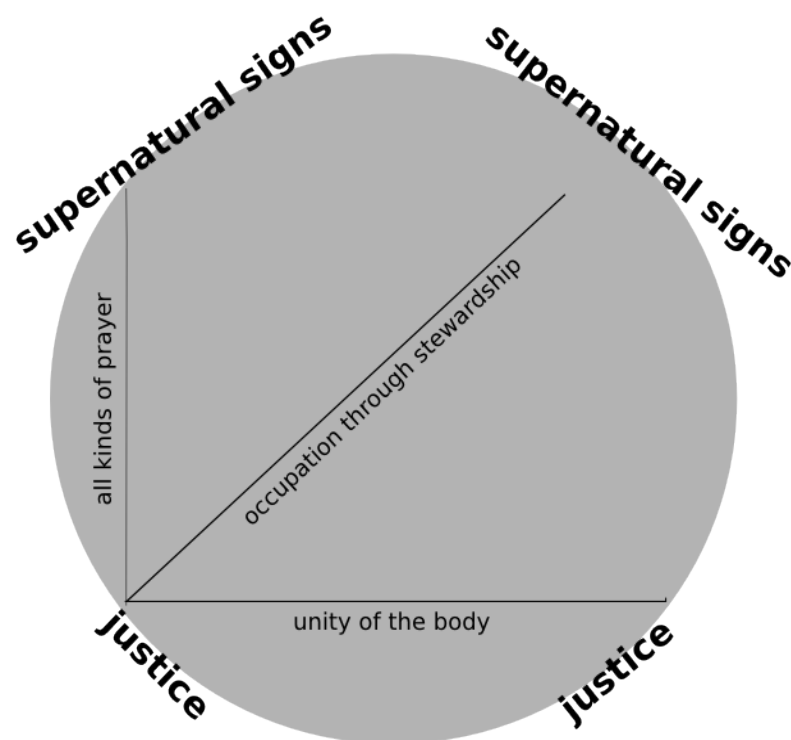
In the opening verses of Acts, Luke writes that his first volume (Luke's Gospel) was an account of all that Jesus *began* to do and to teach. Acts, by implication is the continuation of the works and teachings of Jesus but now through his body. There is no mandate to suggest that the inbreaking of the

kingdom of heaven, in ways that cannot be explained through natural means, is something that we are no longer to expect. Such signs are very much part of the context in which we are expected to work.

Whenever justice manifests it can be seen as miraculous as it demands a change of heart, but justice is something that rises up from the earth, whereas healings and miracles are signs that breaks in from another dimension. We need both, and both are the context of the kingdom – both are signs of the kingdom’s advance, and the presence of the King.

The term ‘supernatural’ might be problematic, but in using this term I am suggesting something that belongs to the age to come breaking in to the here and now in ways that cannot be anticipated from a natural standpoint.

We can illustrate the basic shape as follows:



The following chapters will follow through the implications of adopting this basic shape, but for now we can note that we will have to abandon every aspect of competition and in expanding our vision of the body we should realise that there is room for many diverse expressions. Only a full release of the body of Christ will be sufficient for the task that is before us. Transformation is not the call for a few to be involved in, and is not something that takes place within four walls but must be the expression of the body in

the context of all of creation.

The shape of the church (the wineskin) is indeed an important issue, as so many 'shapes' are spectacularly unhelpful at facilitating this agenda, but it also needs to be said that the start of the journey is unlikely to be in the realm of seeking to change the shape. Wineskins do not produce wine. The initial approach has to be of a transformation of mind and through that a desire to see the empowerment of all the saints of Jesus Christ - this will lead to a change of wineskin, either through the church yielding to that empowerment of the saints or through a separation of the body from the restrictions placed upon them as they find a repositioning in God's creation. We cannot avoid the implications for the shape of church, but the primary focus has to be the release of the saints to their calling. The release of the body is a more primary issue than the change of structure, but the former will subsequently have a major impact on the latter.

We must develop relationships for territory's sake

In 1996 I had heard the Lord speak to me that the time was coming when I needed to purchase some sackcloth, and in February 1998 while out jogging he told me that this was the time. It was so clear that I believe I could still go back and pinpoint the spot where he spoke to me as my feet touched the pavement while running. I managed to obtain some sackcloth and had a friend make up suitable clothing to wear. As I meditated on the meaning of the sackcloth God began to unfold something to me, which I had the privilege of sharing in some settings in the Spring of 1998. I have also had the challenge of living up to those words ever since.

In March, 1998 attended a conference for three days dressed in the sackcloth. On the third day I was given the privilege of publicly addressing the conference. I stood in my less than elegant clothing to say:

God is calling for the church to dress herself in new clothing. This is the clothing of humility. We are to take off the clothing that we have been wearing and realise that we have not done well in caring for our nation. As we humble ourselves we are then to lift our eyes up over the walls that we have built and reach out to others in the same territory or region. If we can embrace a level of humility we can then reach out to others for relationships for territory's sake. We have related in the past with those with whom we have had a common identity - we have experienced relationships for identity's sake. Those relationships cannot now take us any further. We are not to be unfaithful to previous relationships but if those relationships for identity's sake ever prevent

us laying hold of relationships for territory's sake we will have to sacrifice the former for the sake of the latter. We are to get off the train of convention - it is terminating here. These are days to journey where we have never gone before.

Among a number of other aspects I went on to speak of prayer teams coming to city after city, of prophets rising up but that many would be wearing different clothing which would make it difficult for us to recognise them, of those who were going to make vows before God, and even shave their heads as a sign of their commitment to God (particularly among the youth). These were critical days when we needed to press right in.

Little did I realise at the time how formative those words would be for what the Lord was about to lead me into, and I remain convinced that we need those relationships so must allow God to join us together in humility. If we do not do that we might have temporary success but in reality the territory will inevitably shape the church, rather than the church shape the territory as Jesus intended.

The need for a people who live in the midst of their city in a different spirit is necessary if we are to see our cities and areas impacted. An understanding of the term 'city' will also help us understand how powerful a concept it is and again how vital it is to live relationally with a servant-heart in that context.

Shaping our city - or being shaped by the city

The term 'city' is used in Scripture to refer to literal cities, but the concept can be applied to all manner of corporate bodies of people: so that at a macro level it can refer to a city as we understand one or even to a whole nation, while at a micro level the concept can be applied to a smaller institution such as a school, a club, a business or even a church.

The concept of 'city' can be applied to this broad spectrum, as many of the early cities we encounter in Scripture would have been small settlements, whereas later cities were of considerable size. The concept is really being applied to all relational structures, hence the macro and micro applications.

Behind the concept there is something which the Hebrew mind-set was very at home with, namely that there is a corporate entity that is larger than the sum total of individuals and which over-rules and affects the individuals involved within any organisation. This way of thinking can be contrasted with

the extreme form of individualism put forward in the 1980s, by the then prime minister of the UK, Margaret Thatcher, who in one of her speeches said that, 'There is no such thing as society.'

In everyday experience we all have some understanding of the nature of the corporate entity. For example, we can talk about a good school or the spirit that is within a football club, or even the spirit of a city - what we can call the corporate spirit of the organisation. It is this concept that has caused some (academic) thinkers to reject the idea of demonic spirits suggesting that language about demons is simply an ancient way of speaking about the spirit of an organisation. There really is no need to dismiss the issue of the presence of the demonic as their presence is best understood as attaching themselves to the 'corporate spirit', thus they re-enforce and bring a level of overall bondage to the corporate entity that they attach themselves to.

An organisation (city) is not totally independent of the people involved but these organisations have a 'spirit' that is above and beyond the individuals. The city then is not solely dependent on the individuals that reside and relate within it and it is the dynamic of the city as a corporate entity that will seek to shape the individuals.

Most of us who read this book will have had involvement in church and perhaps in different churches over some period of time. Our experience of church will be such that we will have learned the nature of a corporate identity. It is important that a church (or any group of people who are relating together) discovers an identity (and therefore call) and lives up to that identity. Given time every group of people, including a church will drift away from the original call of servanthood, becoming more of a consumer rather than a servant. By nature there is a tendency (as we will explain) for any corporate body to become set on survival with the lives, time and finances of people going in to support its ongoing survival. This is why I believe there is the case for something like corporate exorcism to take place within every Christian body on a regular (perhaps annual?) basis. By this I mean something along the following lines: that those who identify with that body address the corporate entity, declaring that they as people are there to serve God first and not the corporate body; that they tell the corporate entity that they will not seek its survival, but are demanding that it serves the purposes of God. If there are buildings that are owned or utilised by that Christian body I would even suggest that they lay hand on them and likewise declare that they as a

people will not serve the building but demand that the building serves the purposes of God.

Biblical background to the city

The creation mandate (Gen. 1:28) spoke into two areas: the family (be fruitful and multiply) and rulership of the earth (subdue and rule). The family (and by extension all relationships) are constantly under attack for it is through relationships that the image of God is revealed. Likewise the command to rule is constantly attacked and corrupted so that authority is no longer exercised through servanthood but in dictatorial and oppressive ways. City building is part of the fulfilment to rule. Indeed creation does not end on the sixth day, it simply changes mode. From then on God is continually at work with people as he calls them to work with him in the process of filling up and subduing the earth, hence it would appear that there will be elements of creation, including where we have co-operated with God, that will come through the fire of judgement.³

Cain builds the first city and names it after his son, Enoch (Gen 4:13-17). There is more to this city than a simple fulfilment of the creation mandate. Building after the fall the city is itself fallen, yet this city is more than simply fallen: it is built away from the presence of the Lord, perhaps an indication of Cain's continued defiance of the ways of the Lord. In naming the city he seeks to perpetuate his own name. Here in this city is represented the alternative to fellowship with God, with an attempt to feel secure and significant without God. False fellowship through excluding God is always the direction a city will move toward unless held in check through the obedience of God's people.

The second city builder is Nimrod (Gen 10:8-12). This warrior-king is presented as building cities that are centres of military power, thus his cities become a symbol of domination. Both these early cities indicate an independence from God and a desire to establish identity and power.

From then on much biblical history centres on cities: Babylon and Nineveh, Sodom and Gomorrah, Tyre and Sidon, Rome and Jerusalem, Damascus, Antioch, Ephesus and many others.

³ The visions of Revelation do not bring us back to a garden, but the city that comes down from heaven truly is a garden city. Perhaps even the visions show that our works are transformed by his work.

The most famous of the early cities is Babel where the people come together with a desire to make a name for themselves and be gathered together (Gen 11:4). Babel lies unfinished; symbolising that no human city will ever fully achieve its goal for nothing can replace the lost presence of God or satisfy the desires of humanity for fellowship and significance in relationship. Babel, though, is not just unfinished – for it is rebellious through and through. It is not in submission to the God who comes down but expresses the vain attempt to rise up in self-achieved significance to the heavens. The city then becomes, as expressed in Babel and in the enduring symbol of Babylon, an expression of rebellion, refusing to live in submission to the living God.

This leads us (once again) to consider that in the fall there is a threefold rebellion that results:

- Individual rebellion
- Corporate rebellion of the city, the fallen structures
- The Satanic rebellion

Every city (or institution) will have within it the Babylonish that is seeking to come up and establish itself. This is so much the case that even Jerusalem, that city that was intended to be the city of *shalom*, becomes Babylonish itself (see Revelation 11:8 for a damning comment on the earthly Jerusalem of Jesus' day). The great prophetic city becomes the city that kills the prophets (Lk. 13:34). Only a new Jerusalem coming down from the throne of God will deal with the Babylonish that is present in her, and bring her through to her destiny (Rev. 21:2). God has a desire that in every city there is a coming down of his presence that will transform the city into all that God has desired for her. While at the same time there will be a Babylonish element that is growing up in every city. Progress will always be in part. There will never be a total fulfilment until the *parousia* but our prayer must be that the city will be significantly transformed through making room for God to come down. Every city then is a mixture of Babylon and the new Jerusalem.

The origins of an institution (city)

People come together with vision (either explicit or implicit) and work together to set up something that will facilitate the vision. At this stage the city has a measure of flexibility and malleability. Input at this stage is most critical as what is put together is like a DNA that will shape the future.

The city that develops is founded then to serve the purposes of the founders, so, from a prayer perspective, discovering the foundations of a city will prove very important to understand and subsequently deal with the issues presented by the city. One of the key questions to be asked is always: 'why is this city here?'

Once a city is founded it is named. Through being named it gains an identity and over a period of time it will develop and gain what can only be described as a personality. When coming to pray for a city we really want to understand, through both discernment and research, what the true identity of the city is.

The developing city

In time the organisation or city takes a firmer shape and begins to develop. As it develops it gains an independent power. Although this concept can be difficult for us in the Western world to grasp, we begin to see a corporate spirit coming into being. As this independent personality develops it becomes increasingly independent of the founders. Instead of, as in the initial phase, being shaped by the people, it now begins to shape the people.

Over time the developing city becomes increasingly set in its way and resistant to change. Here we can think of the issue of church life and its resistance to renewal in the words that are uttered: 'We have never done it this way before, and we are not going to start now!' The city (or institution or even church) originally created to serve the people, now at this stage of development begins to use people and resources to serve it. It demands loyalty, commitment and obedience, and rewards those who do so well. (It is worth noting that there is a difference between loyalty and faithfulness. Relationships require faithfulness for them to succeed; systems require loyalty.)

A most important point to note is that the rate of development in a city is continual but does not take place at constant pace. There will be times of significant accelerated change and those will be poignant moments for engagement spiritually. The city's future will be more open to change than than at any other time.

I can remember being in the city of Leeds and asking the question as to where the obelisks were in the city. The response was that there were none

that anyone was aware of. The next day I was explaining that I sensed that the city was seeking to redefine itself and that at such a stage it will always go back to its Babylonish roots and re-enforce them. Someone present, who was involved in city council meetings, confirmed that this was exactly what was currently taking place. He then went on to say that the city was remodelling part of the centre and that two obelisks would be erected either side of the entrance to one of the main city buildings. (Two obelisks marked the entrance to the sun god temple in Egypt and are normally a strong indication of Masonic influence.) We then proceeded to go to that area of the city and were surprised to find that particular building had twin towers, each built in the shape of the Babylonish ziggurat towers, with each one being surrounded by four obelisks! At the time of redefinition it was evident that the city was seeking to re-enforce its original idolatrous roots.

Whenever there is a desire to redefine an identity there is an extra ability at that stage to influence the future. This is similar to the input that influences a person growing up. At key stages of development significant input will influence the future of that person more than at other stages.

As suggested the city moves from flexibility of shape to gaining an independent personality, demanding to be served it manifests an instinct to survive at all costs. Babylon, the archetypal rebellious city, says: 'I will continue for ever - the eternal queen!... I will never be a widow or suffer the loss of children' (Is. 47:7,8). Survival will take place even if some of the people are sacrificed in the process.

The city is fallen & open to the demonic

Created by fallen people the city is a reflection of their fallen creativity. It is important we understand that fallen does not necessarily mean completely evil, for what is fallen can be open to redemption. However, the fallenness of the city means that it will always press toward an idolatrous position as it lays claim to a level of allegiance that only God can require. The city will require its people to serve and honour it and will challenge God himself for the position of worship. God rightly states that, 'I am God and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me' (Is. 46:9). We can compare this with the challenging counterfeit spoken by Babylon: 'I am, and there is none besides me' (Is. 47:8), or by Tyre: 'I am a god; I sit on the throne of a god' (Ezek. 28:2).

Whenever idolatry sets in, a door is opened to demonisation for behind

idols are demons (1 Cor. 10:10-20). In the case of the city we even see this with the Hebrew term '*ir*' translated as city for it also carries the meaning 'Watching one (angel)'. Inherent to the city is the concept of an angelic force standing watch behind and over it. So with Isaiah 14:12-14, which could well be a reference to Satan, there is envisaged a supernatural power behind Babylon that is cast down. We find the same with Tyre in Ezekiel 28:12-17. Behind the institutional structure is a spiritual power.

In asking where the power in a city lies we need to look to another dimension. In the extreme of the Babylon of Revelation we discover that it is describes as 'the great city that *rules over* the kings of the earth' (Rev. 1:18, italics added). Here the kings do not reign supreme, they simple serve the purposes of the city. The ultimate rebellion is where the city is out of control having an evil 'mind' all of its own.

This is why cities are such a focus: the demonic are looking for the 'earthing' they provide while Jesus is looking for their transformation. There is always a relationship between the political / economic / social positions of power and the spiritual. If the demonic takes hold of a city to a most significant level then those who hold institutional power will be those who are linked to that demonic source.

Jesus has broken the authority of all powers

At so many levels it can be said that Jesus came into the world at the right time. He came to a nation that was under the power of Rome (political power), under economic oppression through the Herodian dynasty and under religious oppression through the legalistic nationalism of the Pharisees, while beyond and behind those powers there was a great level of oppression from the demonic powers. At the cross he submitted to the will of God, and his submission totally exhausted the power of the enemy. The rebellious powers lost all their strength for submission is more powerful than rebellion; love is stronger than hate. The authority of Jesus means that the demonic can be confronted and the city brought back to serve the king. He has risen with all authority in heaven and on earth.

The church must be committed to walk in the footsteps of Jesus picking up his mantle to confront the powers with the same submission to the Father. Transformation is a process and a battle. Much of the change that has to take place is internal (both personal and inter-relational in the body of Christ).

There also needs to be a vision of the kingdom of God coming 'down' in the same way that John saw the New Jerusalem coming down from God's throne. Vision is so important and such vision comes in the context of prayer. Prayer gives revelation and there has to come a time when the revelation is realised in our midst.

Revelation - release - realisation

Prayer should lead us to a place of revelation for without revelation nothing ever leaves heaven. As we wait on God strength is renewed and we mount up with wings like eagles (Is. 40:31) - we begin to see from a whole new perspective. Many times I have been in a context where we have us to set aside a few hours with much of the time spent in worship, waiting on God, so as our eyes could be opened to spiritual realities. The challenge is not to latch on too quickly to the first piece of revelation that comes, but to learn and wait so allowing God to take us deeper in revelation. Early on in this journey I heard Colin Easton quote Proverbs 19:2, 'one who moves too hurriedly misses the way', and I have sought to make that a guiding principle. It is too easy to make assumptions about what is revealed or even become so taken up with it that we become blind to further revelation. As we continue to wait the revelation can deepen.

Recognising that we need revelation means that we have to focus in a major way on waiting on God for sight to come. It is vital that the church in a given region receives revelation about her own role, that the region itself receives understanding of the redemptive purposes of God, and that there is an embracing of what is to come.

Revelation by itself is insufficient but must lead to prayer and appropriate action for the revelation to be released. The release of what has been seen is itself a process. We have to pray for the kingdom of God and all it entails to come, for whatever is in heaven for a particular place to become visible on that specific part of earth. In other words if we simply see something by revelation this will not be enough, we will have to pray this through until we know that it is in process of release.

Release does not always come easily for there will be major resistance to it. This is why it is vital that we never forget what has been seen in the place of prayer, but what has been seen must be kept 'alive' through prayer. In prayer we gain vision that is from God (outside of prayer we often lay hold of

fantasy, it is not sufficient for a dream to have a Christian element in it to make it true vision) and that vision is always beyond us. The vision will be challenged but in prayer we keep calling for the will of God on earth. As we persist our faith grows in spite of the lack of visible evidence of a shift around us. As our faith grows we are moving what we have seen from simply being revelation to a process of release.

In certain locations, particularly where there is a strong Masonic element, it is even possible to get something in motion but the final point of connection eludes us. It is this principle of 'missed connections' that I have observed so many times where the Masonic is strong. So even when everything seems to be 'signed, sealed and delivered' there is a final missing of fulfilment of the promise. So we persist until we know that we have it in motion, at first there will be no external evidence that this is the case, but increasingly there will be external evidences as the day of fulfilment comes close.

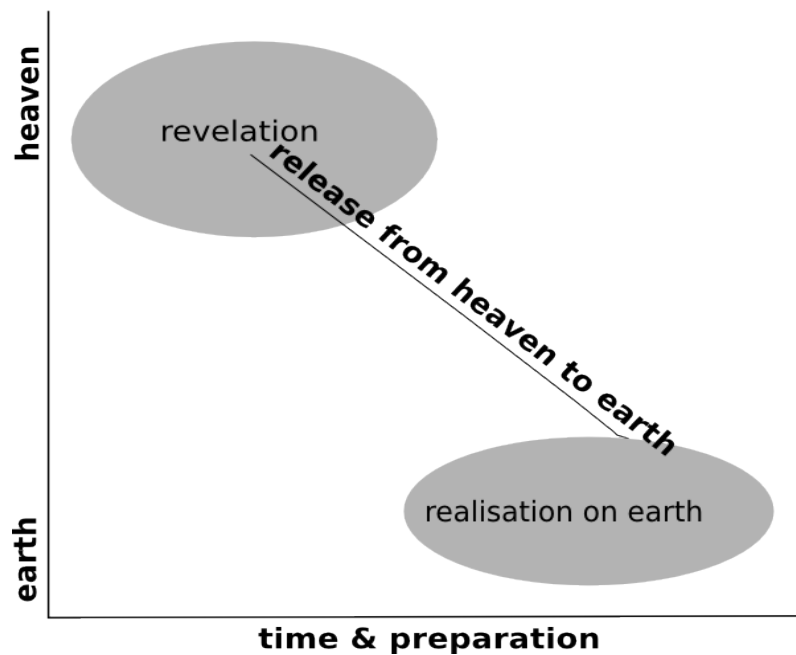
I believe our whole lives need to be made up of new aspects concerning the will of God that are being revealed to us, together with other aspects that we know are no longer locked up in heaven but are on the way toward us, and other aspects around us that are the fulfilment of what was once only real in vision form.

So prayer moves from prayer for revelation: 'Lord open our eyes'; to prayer that what has been seen will be released - this is where there will be prophetic declarations in prayer as to the will of God and a calling for everything resistant to the will of God to give way; to prayers of thanks for the realisation of what once was only revelation. These prayers of thanks will also be supplemented with prayers that what has been realised will be truly established and not stolen away.

The key to the process is persistent focused prayer and appropriate response. I seek to explain it this way: if God reveals something to me and I am at position A, I need to pray for the revelation to be released according to the will and timing of God. The release begins to come in due season but is designed to connect with me when I reach (for example) position D. I cannot connect where I am at currently. Although the fulfilment is for my situation the context and even my understanding will be different by the time it comes. This is why all prophecy is best interpreted after the event! I often wonder what Peter would have preached had he been handed the book of Joel prior to

the day of Pentecost. After the experience at Pentecost it was easy: 'This is that.'

We must develop vision that sees into heaven - that sees the unseen. We have to develop a persistence until what we have seen 'leaves' heaven and is in process of coming toward us. We also must allow ourselves to be impacted for change during this time - inevitably there are changes and preparation in us before we see manifest around us what we simply saw as vision some time before. During this process the changes that take place are internal - for eventually it is what he does in us that he then does through us.



Chapter 3

Keys to the city

It was my good friend Jim Thwaites who first engaged me in conversation over the limited perspective I was carrying about reaching a city.⁴ At the time of the conversation I was promoting unity and prayer as the two key elements that needed to be in place for a city to be reached, and was passionately seeking to promote the former and provoke the latter. I have gladly embraced the necessity of a third element of the release and empowerment of believers to be committed to and engaged with the diverse spheres of the city.

Leadership

Leadership is a gift from God and many of us have had the bad experience where there has been a lack of clear leadership. In the same way that this is true within a local setting, so it is true in the setting of a city. A lack of city-wide leadership can be so debilitating to progress. Conversely, many of us also have had the bad experience of over-controlling leadership where no one is released and the only vision that count is that of the person or people with official leadership titles.

Both experiences often stem from fear within those in leadership. Fear of making mistakes or of what people will say can paralyse leaders from setting out a direction, and fear of losing control or becoming redundant often results in leaders who hold on to control. The knowledge of when to be present in a situation as a catalyst and when to be absent is one of the gifts of wisdom that we need desperately from the Holy Spirit.

⁴ His books *The Church beyond the Congregation* (Paternoster Press: Carlisle, 1999, revised edition, 2000) and *Renegotiating the Church Contract* (Paternoster Press: Carlisle, 2001) have been very influential on my thinking, and I recommend them as foundational reading.

So much of this is resolved when we abandon the concept of leadership as being 'leadership over' to the concept of leadership being 'leadership within' (a church or a city). Jesus himself said that his followers were not to lord it *over* and that he was one who was *among* them to serve (Luke 22:25-27). All bodies need leadership, but we certainly do not need dictatorship.

A process has been underway now for some time. The shorthand phrase 'pastoring the city' has become a useful handle to keep us focused on one of our main goals, namely that of reaching the city as a whole. It has been great to have those who have pastored churches confess that their church is only one congregation of the whole body in a region. It has been wonderful to see them embrace one another and together take on responsibility for the whole geography where they and their colleagues are situated. Leadership unity is indeed precious.

If only more cities could experience this we would be a long way further down the road than we are. However, effective 'pastoring' of the city is not going to be achieved by simply having all the church pastors together, but by releasing those people who will take responsibility for all the different areas of the city. These are the ones who together are called to stand in a pastoral role for the city as a whole. In other words we cannot draw a straight line from 'pastors recognising they are pastoring a congregation of the one church' to 'pastors who once pastored congregations now together pastor the city as a whole'. If that was the way to progress we would likely discover that the (gathered) church was being pastored while the city remained uncared for.

The line that we draw from 'church pastoring' to 'city pastoring' is not straight and there is at least one very definite and wonderful detour. There are many spiritual leaders for our regions who do not have time to easily conform to our church schedules and I believe the Holy Spirit is pleased that they don't have this time. Their commitments lie elsewhere and most of their time is spent outside the parameters of what we have called church. (We might even find that there are some potential city pastors who have become disjointed from church as it currently exists and are going to be released into city pastoring without coming back through the system that we have called 'church'.) Leaving on one side the issue just raised, and returning to the suggestion that many spiritually anointed leaders are already correctly positioned in the spheres that make up the city, we will soon discover that church leadership will have to learn to make a relational detour to support

them (and be educated by them) in order that the pastoral people for the city rise up from within the many spheres of our cities. So a few paragraphs on these spheres will be in order, and then we might be able to plot some of the progress that is necessary.

Spheres of the city

Some of the key elements that have to be engaged and impacted within the city are: government, education, media, health, business and the arts. Our desire is not to produce a Christianised place where every aspect is sanctified through having a Bible verse on the top of the letter heading, but where every sphere of the city is being influenced to act in a godly way that genuinely enhances goodness and acts as a catalyst for the presence of God to come. As believers work for the prosperity of their city (and by that I do not simply mean economic prosperity) so there should be growing connections with the men and women of peace (see Jer. 29:7; Lk. 10:1-12). Not all of them will be Christians, but God will anoint them for their task, and I believe a number will become god-fearers and some indeed will become full believers in Christ.

If the appropriate people from the spheres are to be drawn through to stand in their place in the city it will be vital for a number of current church leaders and ministries to take time to come alongside them so that there can be a mutual influencing one of the other. Those in the spheres will need to know how their faith can make a difference – a difference that is beyond where their faith simply makes ethical demands on them, or where it requires them to witness. Ministries will need to learn of the challenge that these people face so that they in turn can be forced into finding ways of making their own teachings relevant to life situations. Those church leaders will have much to learn, but if God has anointed them to equip the saints then those in the spheres will also benefit enormously.

I suggest that this process of repositioning for some current church leaders is exactly where a number of cities and regions find themselves at this moment of time. The challenges are great but the treasures to be released are beyond our wildest dreams.

Prayer & Prophetic watch ministry

Although it takes more than prayer to see a breakthrough, without prayer there will be no birth and what is birthed will not be sustained. Prayer brings

about great changes, and I am most grateful that God is a God who hears and answers prayer. Many breakthroughs are going to come, not because we have prayed but because the prayers of previous generations are awaiting an answer in our time. Many prayer warriors have died but they have died in faith.

The challenge facing many leaders and also many who carry responsibility for different aspects of a city's life is to be dependent on prayer. By so stating it I am not suggesting that prayer is meant to replace hard persistent work, but to acknowledge that without a prayer dimension we will never express our dependence on the Living God intervening. We need both prayer and disciplined hard work to be in place. It is through prayer that God can energise the hard work and also over-ride all our corporate wisdom. Through prayer he can release a word that worldly wisdom would reject, but as we obey God a channel is opened for the Spirit of God to move.

We will need to see a multi-levelled approach to prayer develop. To help us grasp this let me use some categories to describe these levels. Categories are helpful in analysing although most categories are inadequate to express what takes place in the flow of life. That will certainly be true in what follows, but I hope that the three categories I am suggesting will at least help to give a framework to develop and release all kinds of prayer in the city in a way that does not undermine unity.

Ongoing prayer

The first category I have termed 'ongoing prayer'. By this I mean the everyday prayers of the individual saints and the corporate prayers of the congregations. If we see that as the foundational level we will be doing everything in our power to encourage that, and if we advocate any other aspects of praying we will introduce them in such a way that the ongoing level of prayer is not discouraged.

In theory we should get 100% agreement on the need for and the benefit of this type of praying. It is therefore essential that those who carry a mandate to give a lead in a city context, whether that is to lead in prayer or in any other way, continue to find ways to encourage the prayers of the saints. Consideration should be given to this so that no communication about on prayer undermines this. We want to encourage the maximum number of people praying in a city. So as we move on to examine another two categories

we need to bear in mind that we must be committed to encourage the everyday prayer of the saints.

Strategic prayer

The second level of praying I have termed 'strategic prayer'. I believe that strategic prayer is needed so that we do not simply release more prayer, but that the 'more' begins to cover what is often not covered. If we can convince the whole church to pray more, the likelihood is that more of what is already being prayed for will be covered, and that there will be whole aspects our city that will remain uncovered. I pray for my neighbours, and if I were to decide to pray more it is most likely that I will then pray more for my neighbours. In other words I will pray for more of what I am already praying for. That is a good thing, but it inevitably leaves many things in our localities not covered in prayer. Strategic prayer needs a measure of shaping, so that the essential elements of the city are covered. Strategic prayer will aim to target the geography as a whole so that the whole geography is covered and not just the areas where the church's presence is strong. It will consider the demography of the city so that all the diverse social aspects are covered. Strategic prayer will look at the institutions (particularly the ones that shape the life of the city) and the positions of influence to make sure that they are covered. It will give attention to the entry points to the city, such as the education and trade aspects, as well as considering the physical entry points, so that they are all well and truly being covered in prayer.

These aspects do not just happen, but are covered as someone, or a team, takes responsibility for this. This is where a prayer strategy is developed. Although I might wish to imagine that the vast majority of believers will agree with the need for such a type of strategy, it is probably only something like 60% of believers who will actually agree. How many will be involved in such a strategy will vary from city to city, but the percentage will likely be considerably less than the 60% that I suggest will agree with the theory. A lack of numbers though is not a problem as I advocate that we do not try and convince everyone but work with those who wish to flow in that direction. Our task is not to persuade but to release the maximum numbers who wish to participate, without discouraging those who cannot respond but are continually given themselves to the level we have described as 'ongoing prayer'.

If we present strategic prayer in such a way that it is understood as some form of superior way of praying we will soon find ourselves in trouble. If we do not present it as elitist, but rather present it in such a way that it is open to others joining, I believe we can have the best of both worlds. We do not discourage those who cannot 'buy' in, but encourage them in their ongoing praying, while we release those who have a passion for strategic prayer. My goal is not to cause competition, but a harmonising of the work of prayer, so that the maximum numbers are being released to their heart-felt convictions. It is the responsibility of those graced to give a lead to ensure that this takes place.

Other than in a few areas where there might be some small disagreements (such as over praying for those in institutions; praying for institutions to change; praying for the entry points to a city; etc.) what I have suggested so far should not be too difficult to put into practice. A measure of maturity is needed to work toward the releasing of people to their different convictions. It is this issue of release that is the key and the challenge, so some perspectives on releasing the third level of prayer ('prophetic praying') now needs to be addressed. I am aware we can hit some controversial and even potentially divisive situations but it is my conviction that we need to see these people released and released in a way that does not jeopardise the unity in our cities.

Prophetic praying & releasing the watchpersons

First then to a definition of what I am including under this term. The terminology might be inadequate but I am using this term 'prophetic praying' to distinguish it from the strategic prayer I have outlined above, and suggest it as an inclusive term to cover such prayer activities as: the discerning of spiritual powers over an area; the practice of spiritual mapping; cleansing the land of the effects of historic sin; the making of prophetic declarations, and the like.

I am more than happy to accept that not everyone will be convinced of the need for prophetic praying (as I have defined above), nor for the validity of it. In fact I am glad that there are those who disagree with my convictions on these subjects, as I am not arguing that such activity is central to the Christian faith. (I might wish to try and persuade people that they are key elements in winning the battle for a territory, but I cannot legitimately argue that they are

among the central tenets of our faith.) Strategic prayer is not too controversial but as there is no universal agreement on this third level of praying it becomes clear that it is this type of praying that presents a major challenge to the unity within a city. However, if we handle this well we can find a way forward that makes us find a new level of unity – a unity not based on total agreement but on commitment to one another.

In a given set of relationships across a specific geography we will discover that perhaps only 15% of the people will have a conviction about the rightness of such ways of praying. So how do we process the inevitable tension that results? There is (as always) no other way forward other than a relational one.

There will be the need for openness and honesty between those who wish to pursue this course and those who are called to give oversight within the geography. We cannot have those who are the prophetic prayers seeking to convince those in leadership of the rightness of their beliefs, but neither can those in leadership insist that the only prayer that is practised is one that they can endorse or agree with. No one has a monopoly on truth – either at a doctrinal or practical level.

I therefore advocate that those in leadership seek to endorse and release the people with the conviction to their calling, and that those who are called to prophetic intercession do not put themselves above those called to lead. True unity has to be based on the endorsement of each other, not the endorsement of a particular practice. The safeguard in it all is that we hold each other to our first calling, that of seeking ‘first the kingdom of heaven’. There must be no greater motivation than to see an area impacted for the Gospel of Jesus Christ. If those who seek to pray in a particular way are doing so because of their desire to see the Spirit of God come in power to save, then, in all honesty, God will probably even allow for some error in practice to be present. He does not primarily bless right practice but what flows from a pure heart.

These watchpersons are the ones who will be dealing with the spiritual elements over the city, in the sense of discerning what they are, and how they have come to be rooted in that location. In their communication, they should not express any form of superiority, for it is the ongoing prayers of the saints that is the base from which everything else flows. Yet it is also true that what they hear needs to fuel the prayers of the whole church – this simply means

again that at the level of communication there is wisdom as to how things are expressed.

This means that we are looking for a unity that is expressed in an even greater level of diversity, with people being released (within Scriptural boundaries) to their callings, but with the requirement that they maintain the unity of the Spirit. So in simple terms I suggest the following:

- Honest relationships where no one seeks to control the other party through trying to convince them of their beliefs, nor through exercising disapproval. We are not to make one another in our own image.
- Those called to lead (or perhaps better, those who are called to create an 'eldering' culture) are to release those who have the conviction to pray in these prophetic ways. Releasing does not require that we agree with every practice nor even that we understand someone's convictions. We can approve of people without having to endorse their practice. It does mean though that we do not criticise their practice.
- The only restriction can be when there are practices employed in praying that are *clearly* unbiblical. And by this I do not mean when they are simply in the realm of what I am uncomfortable with. So for example I am well aware of the controversy surrounding the rightness, or otherwise, of addressing spiritual powers, but I am unable to see how (biblically) a person can insist that this practice is forbidden, as there are biblical perspectives on both sides of the argument. Even if one were uncomfortable with it we would have to be very slow at insisting that it ceased or that we made it an issue of fellowship. Within the bounds of Scripture people have to be released to their convictions, and their convictions might go beyond my *interpretation* of Scripture.
- Finally, that prophetic praying is presented as one more way of praying, and that it is not superior to, nor does it replace, other forms of prayer. In presenting it in this way we are releasing those with conviction to this form of prayer and that we are approving of them without in any way discouraging every other vital form of prayer that is taking place.

If our desire for the city or territory to be impacted is always bigger than our desire for others to agree with our beliefs or practices then we will not go too far wrong, and even when we find ourselves in tension we will find a way forward. If we can hold through in our differences then our unity will not be

threatened but will even go deeper. We can live with tensions, and sometimes God uses the tensions that surface in our relationships to push us to the place of holding together because of God's acceptance of each other, and not accepting a level of unity that is based simply on a low level of agreement with each other.

So in all the above I am simply advocating that we find ways in which all kinds of prayer can be released, and that it is done in the context of approval. Our cities will not be won when we do everything right or when all our beliefs are correct, but there will be significant shifts when the unity we seek releases the body of Christ into a greater measure of diversity.

We need all kinds of prayer to be released, so let us make an agreement that we will seek to encourage one another to express our God-given convictions in a spirit of humility. It is easy to criticise that which we do not understand, and sadly criticism can become one more means of control. It was for freedom that Christ set us free, so the spirit of the Gospel means we must 'err' on the side of release not of restriction.

Before introducing the next chapter there is one more area for consideration.

The Amos-type prophets

Some time ago the Lord spoke to me that it was time for the Amos anointing to be released. This prophet spoke out the word of the Lord, but his main focus was in the realm of issues of injustice. There are prophets who are today speaking into these realms, but sadly there is usually a disconnection between the typical 'charismatic' prophets and these people. This is yet another aspect that has to be added to the mix. In our cities there are those with the calling to reawaken the church to her task of being the voice and hands for justice, and the enemy has separated them from those who are praying and those who are discerning powers over the city. The truth is they belong together. Again we will have to find ways of releasing people to their burdens and creating bridges between those of different persuasions, so that we do not force those with one set of beliefs to impose their beliefs on others, but that there is a mutual influencing of each other. These Amos-type prophets are also those who are called as watchpersons, and often are those who are either immersed in, or engaged with, the spheres of the city

Diversity

We need then a great diversity of prayer released in our cities. Not everyone will necessarily be able to embrace all aspects of the diversity. This is not a problem, as our unity is not based on everyone agreeing on every point. There is a deeper unity that we have to contend for and this will mean, in the context of prayer, we will gladly grapple with how we can effectively see people released in these different ways. We will have to work our way through this relationally as inevitably (and rightly so) there are different beliefs on such thorny issues as spiritual warfare.

Unity does not mean that we all believe the same thing. In fact I am not too sure that God is committed to bring us to that type of unity. He is committed to us working together though because we love one another and believe the best about one another.

If we wish to see prayer developed through to the place where a city is being spiritually 'harnessed', that prayer will include the basic ongoing daily prayers of the saints. That indeed is perhaps the most important element in prayer for it provides the foundation for everything else. In theory all believers should be able to buy into this type of praying, and nothing must be done to discourage that. However, I also suggest that there is a very real place in the city for the development of strategic prayer that increasingly covers every aspect of the life of the city. Finally, I believe there will be the need for prophetic prayer and the release of those who have been gifted by God for fulfilling a role that we can call being prophetic watchpeople. I am well aware that this type of ministry and the associated practices are controversial, but I suggest strongly that this is developed without demanding that everyone is in agreement. Unity is stronger than agreement, and we can hold together even when there is disagreement. That is the heart of the Gospel for it is through the Gospel that former divides are healed.

I plot below what is a common journey in the context of our cities. The descriptions are a guide rather than an accurate map. There is a critical phase of those in current (church) leadership being willing to move relationally to stand alongside those in the spheres - and it needs to be emphasised that it is 'alongside' not 'above'. This has to coincide with a calling from those within the spheres for this, and from that meeting point we will begin to see emerge those who are called of God to 'pastor the city'. Prayer in all its diversities will then fuel the whole process. The goal is certainly not to impose a new

structure, but to create a canopy over a city, and an involvement with a city, so that a harvest of righteousness rises up.

Leadership:

- Moving from 'I am pastor of this church' and my calling is to see it grow and be successful, and that other churches are the competition ('surely we have to be realistic: after all we are all fishing in the one pond').
- Through a willingness to meet other leaders at an honest level, and the developing of unity events where we can begin to move toward some substance to the language that there are many congregations of the one church in the city.
- They begin to see the spheres and those who labour in them. They are drawn out to stand alongside such people in support.
- They no longer demand that such people express their commitment through their attendance and their tithe, and there is the beginning of people taking their place in the city to a genuine expression of the church in the city.

Those engaged in the spheres in the city

- Move from understanding the 'call' as being to 'full-time' ministry with the work that they themselves do as simply being 'secular'.
- To understanding that those in secular employment have a purpose but that this is mainly in the realm of supporting the local church financially and with expertise so that the church (and other ministries) are successful. (Often there is an adoption of 'kings' and 'priests' type language to describe this situation - such language will eventually prove to be unhelpful.)
- They begin to understand that they are called to see godliness expressed in their sphere; and to draw the good out of the sphere.
- They then are able to draw on those with ministry gifting so that there is a level of equipping in the place of work. They now understand that the work is the ministry.
- Their commitment to the city becomes very clear, and they do not get sidetracked through an inordinate level of loyalty to the local church.

Many begin to spiritually enter the realm of pastoring the city.

Prayer in all its dimensions:

Ongoing: that deepens and broadens and is encouraged in such a way that there is a genuine increase in the belief in and expression of prayer.

Strategic: a wave of prayer that not everyone is involved in but begins to cover the geographical and demographical aspects of the city, the key institutions and the points of entry to the community.

Prophetic intercessory acts and the release of prophetic watchpersons: these acts begin to deal with the historic issues in our cities and release the destiny of the geography. The watchpersons hear heaven's agenda and are used to fuel the ongoing praying that takes place. Their anointing will bring a focus to the strategic level prayer.

And amidst all of this a growing voice calling for justice is heard and listened to: the Amos-type prophets find their place.

If the above type of journey is engaged with there is the possibility of the city being pastored, with some of the current pastors becoming city pastors, and some very definitely not. They will all find their place alongside many who have come from the spheres and from the army of intercessors. They take their place - and no one needs a title, for their calling is not in the title but in the task that is before them.⁵

5 The difference between the language of 'Apostle Paul' and 'Paul, an apostle' is not simply pedantic nor semantic. The former description (and I note this is the most popular today in many circles) is titled and status-oriented. The implication is that this person is very important and needs to be submitted to. The latter is a responsibility that Paul (or whoever) has to live up to. He (or she) will be judged by how they fulfilled their calling.