

MESSAGE TRANSCRIPTS

Message Title: House Church 2.0

Re-visioning

Tim Armstrong, Senior Pastor

Weekend 11.12-13.11

We are going to talk a bit about an element of our church, which is fast becoming the DNA of Crossroads. Last year we launched an aggressive shift in our Crossroad's culture and what I'd like to do is today is to give you an update on what we've been doing in our house churches and kind of re-vision cast with you why we started this and why it's so essential for you as a "Crossroad-er" to implement this strategy into your own spiritual growth. To do that I want you to take your bibles and I want to take you back to a passage we studied about a year ago – Matthew chapter 28, verse 19 that really launched this concept of house churches. Now, if you're turning to Matthew 28 you might be recognizing it as a portion of scripture we that we speak of often. It's a passage called the great commission by Jesus Christ. It's the last of his words during his earthly ministry before he ascended to the Father. In fact, let me just give you a little timeline so you understand where this passage fits.

Jesus had already been crucified. He died. He rose from the dead. He spent about forty days or so revealing that he was alive; that he had risen from the dead to people all over the Jerusalem area and now that earthly ministry is coming to a close and he gives his last important words to his disciples. And I want you to think of these words as kind of a bookend because in the very beginning, do you remember what Jesus said to his disciples? He said, come... follow me and actually embedded in that statement is a command. He was telling his disciples now, come. This is going to be your new lifestyle. At the end of his life he gives another command and this is now go. Go take this new lifestyle of following me and take it out to the outer most ends of the world. So, you need to see this really as an important transition has taken place. Jesus is now passing over the mantel of ministry over to his disciples.

Now, look at the text. We're in Matthew chapter 28, verse 19. And Jesus says this – this is what I want from you. I want you to go. Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Which is, by the way and identifying mark; a public identification of your faith with Christ. I want you to baptize people and then I want you to teach them to observe all that I have commanded you and behold, I am with you always, to the end of the world. Jesus left the church, his disciples, Christ followers with a very clear command of how we ought to live our life. What ought to be the focus of our life? Look at the text. Notice there are three words; three statements: go, make disciples, teach. All of these have this concept of moving forward.

Now at Crossroads we take this command very seriously. And actually we've couched it into a type of missional statement - a mission that drives our organization. And this is not just some mission statement that's in some dusty folder filed away somewhere. This is a mission statement that has life here at Crossroads. We breathe this as who we are, what we do, how we do what we do. We say the mission of Crossroads is to turn irreligious people into fully devoted followers of Christ and if you've been hanging around Crossroads any length of time you've probably have heard that. You probably know it. We're here to turn irreligious people into fully devoted followers of Christ and when I'm teaching it I often tell people we have two halves of our mission statement. There's the front half and the back half. The front half is we're attempting to do what looks like the outrageous. We want to turn irreligious people. Now, let me just back up and make sure you understand where we're at. Irreligious. I'm not talking about anti-religious people. We're not talking about people who have no interest in God. We're talking about irreligious people. Many of us were irreligious in our own journey to following Christ. We didn't have

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anything against God. We just didn't know much about God until someone introduced us to Him and then that changed the trajectory of our life. We want to take people like that and the back half of our great commission. We want to turn them into fully devoted followers of Christ.

That word devoted, we use strategically. We use that word strategically. You're going to see why in a moment because it encapsulates now who we are as followers of Christ. We're not just kind of moving throughout life and we've kind of attached Christianity as part of our life. We're saying that what we want to do is we want to infuse that into every fiber of a person's life. We want to make that as a part of who they are and who they see themselves.

What's interesting is that any missional organization, any organization that follows a mission understands that there is movement in the mission. There's time when the mission's moving forward. There's times when the mission is plateauing. It's not really going anywhere. And then there's dangerous times when the mission is declining. So one of the leadership talks that we often have around here, because we're committed to our mission is how do we move our mission forward? How do we infuse into the Crossroad's culture the idea that we're constantly trying to move the mission forward? One of the things that we did during a, well probably well over a year and a half ago during one of our discussions as a leadership team – we said that one of the things that we need to consider doing is operating like those early first Christians did when they were just not even very distant from the words of Christ in Matthew chapter 28. We need to look at how did they live their lives? So what we do is we flipped over to the history book of the New Testament. We went to Acts chapter 2. That's where I want to take you this morning – over to Acts. Acts 2 and I want you to see a cameo appearance of how the early Christians lived out their devotion to Christ.

Now, normally when you get to Acts chapter 2, if you're a student of the scriptures you know Acts chapter 2 is all about Pentecost. It's about Peter preaching that dynamic message that really launched the church but in the back section of chapter 2 there's a short paragraph that tells us about the church and in this short paragraph we saw, our leadership team saw some strategic elements that we really were not incorporating into the church. In fact, we decided that these were so strategic that if we were going to move the church forward we were going to make a bold shift into the culture here at Crossroads. And one of the shifts was requiring something that some would consider outlandish. We were actually talking about dividing the church. Now, when you use the word likes divide or division in a church context it's never positive unless you understand it from a biblical standpoint and we understand division as a positive, biblical role model and it comes right out of this text. Let's look at. It's in Acts, chapter 2, verse 42. We'll just slowly move our way through it. I'll stop occasionally and point some things out.

Verse 42, they, this is the early Christians, devoted. There's that word. You might want to underline it. We'll be back to it in a moment. Devoted themselves to the Apostles teaching, to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. Now, stop right there. Already we see three distinct dimensions of the early church that emerge from this text. The first thing we see is that they were devoted. This is the word *proskartereō*. It literally means to do something with intense effort. So what can we learn about the early Christians? That they were passionate about three things. What were those three things? Well, it says,

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look verse 42. They devoted themselves to the Apostle's teaching. What is that? Well, they devoted themselves. The way I like to say it is they devoted themselves to learning the Word of God. They understood that the Word of God is a catalyst that moves us forward in our spiritual growth. It's one thing to know about Christ. It's another thing to take His Word, put it into our life and live it out. And that's what the early Christians exemplified for us is that they learned the Apostle's teaching. They were devoted to that.

Second thing. Keep reading. They devoted themselves to fellowship. Now, fellowship is kind of a "churchy" word. What is fellowship? It's sometimes what people say fellowship is what you do before the service. Or it's what you do five or ten minutes after service; on your way out to lunch. That's kind of the extent of fellowship. But you need to understand the dynamics of fellowship is much more than a chance meeting once a week. It's this idea, *koinōnia* which is this idea that there is this close, mutual relationship that you're developing with this other person. Why? Because this relationship, like learning the Word of God and putting that in your life – it is the catalyst of helping you grow closer to the Lord. So the early believers, what were they doing? That their friendship-based, their primary circle of friends were other believers; that it could help move them towards Christ-likeness. This is what they were devoted to.

And then thirdly, they devoted themselves to breaking of bread and then prayer. That's what I like about being a Christian. It's all about kind of getting together and eating. That's not all... what is breaking bread and prayer? This is worship – right? This is what they're talking about. They are gathering together and doing the Lord's Supper. Communion. An act of worship. Together.

So look at what they're devoted to. Learning. Relationship. Worship. Now notice the outcome. What's the outcome of this lifestyle? Verse 43. An awe came upon every soul and many wonders and signs are being done through the Apostles. And all who believed came together had all things in common and they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all as any who had need. What's this sound like? This sounds like love in action, doesn't it? And we can talk an awful lot about how they shared in common and how they distributed that. But do you know the thing that caught my attention is that word awe. There was this awe that fell over these congregations that gathered together. There was this awe of togetherness, of growing in Christ-likeness. What's this sound like to you? This sounds like dramatic life change. This sounds like dramatic growth and that's an understatement because when you think about this in context you might be thinking well, you know, there's a couple dozen people who are just sold out for Christ. Now, let your eyes drift up to verse 41. We're not talking about a couple dozen people. We're talking about this is on the heels of one of the most dramatic messages in church history that launched the church. What did it say in verse 42? That about three thousand souls were added to the church. Drop down to verse 47. It said that day by day there were added to those numbers those who were being saved. We're talking about a movement of people, an explosion in the area of Christ followers.

Now, let me just stop for a moment. Let me tell you how I think because as I'm reading through this I'm seeing this through the eyes as a church leader, as someone who leads a church and so I'm asking the text questions and one of the things that I ask maybe is something you would ask. I'm thinking how in the

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world do you manage three thousand plus people and their spiritual growth? Really – how do you keep that on track so there's not a fallout to apostasy; so there is new spiritual vibrancy going on; so that ministry is occurring; so that service to others is continuing on? How do you move those three thousand plus forward in the mission? Well, the text doesn't just leave us hanging it actually tells us. Look at verse 46. This is the inside look. It tells us the early church strategy. How did they live their life? And day by day they were attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes. They received their food with glad and generous hearts. There it is – a reference to food. No wonder we like being Christ followers. It's inundated with food, right? One of the things that I don't want you to miss in this is that the idea is that they are two environments that are emerging from this text. There's this text that they gathered together in a large environment. You might think this like something we do today - this large church gathering. They gathered at the temple, which we can see why especially if you've ever visited Jerusalem. You know how large the footprint of the temple really is. Today there's a golden mosque that has been built where Solomon's temple once was but during the time of Christ this is an area where people who would gather together to worship Yahweh. Both Jews and what are called proselyte Gentiles who were becoming worshippers of Yahweh. And so this was a huge footprint in the area. Literally thousands upon thousands of people could be in this area worshipping and what do we read in the text? That they would gather here. The early believers would gather here and this would be kind of their central meeting location but then they would go from their and presumably, later in the week they would gather again now in divided areas, small groups, small house churches around the area. What would they be doing? We know what they would be doing because they were devoted to three things: to learning the Word of God, to relationship building and to worship. And by the way, this is just not some happenstance in the text as what they were doing at this particular time. We see that this was the pattern of the early church.

Hold your place in Acts chapter 2. Come with me to Acts 5 for a moment. Acts 5:42. Peter and the disciples moving the ministry out and forward. And what did they say? That every day they were meeting in the temple and from house to house they did not ceasing teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ. This was just a continuation of the model. Keep going. Acts chapter 20, verse 20. Now we're into the Apostle Paul's life. The Apostle Paul is making his way around the Mediterranean planting churches in Asia Minor and what was his strategic outlook on the church? Look, he says to the Ephesians. He said I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable, and teaching you in public and from, what does it say? House to house. So, here we see this strategic development of the early church. There was these two environments – that large environment and the small environment.

What does this tell us? It tells us that ministry was really not restricted to one location. And the more that you study this the more that you find that there's historical data to back up this concept of how to do church. You read about the historians and you read that some of the Roman leaders were beside themselves that all these believers were gathering together in the temple. We're not quite sure to how to understand this. Was this some kind of political movement that they need to be concerned about? Not only that but you read about the archeological developments especially in and around Jerusalem and you find out that they have unearthed a number of dwellings, homes that had relics of like church related activities in their home as if their home was used as a small church. And you go on and you go through the archeological records and it wasn't just small homes. It was medium sized homes and large homes. In

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fact, one archeological find is a home that literally had an addition to it. They put this addition to it that could house somewhere between one hundred and one hundred and fifty people. We're seeing that this house church movement was not just in the temple square but was diffused throughout Jerusalem.

Now, here's the thing you have to think about. Jerusalem during the time of Christ, somewhere between eighty to one hundred thousand people. Most historians would agree that about fifteen thousand people, at this particular time were naming the name of Christ. So, shortly after the launch of the church with those three thousand that it continued to grow upwards to about fifteen thousand before severe persecution pushed them out of the city. So, we're talking about a mega church environment. And what was the strategy that the leaders used so that growth would continue not only in the church but in these individual believers? We see it right here in the text. You say well, how does this relate to Crossroads? How does this relate to who we are two thousand years later? Well, go back to that discussion that I was kind of forming in your mind. We have a group of leaders here in the church asking how we can push the mission forward. We're studying Acts 2. We decided this was something that was missing from the strategic element of Crossroads because we've always thought of church as just the gathering of a large group of people. We've identified church as just that but Acts shows us a whole other dimension that church also goes beyond the gathering weekly into our individual lives; into our homes where we devote ourselves to learning, to fellowship or relationship building and worship. So we said what we want to do is we want to breathe life into this ancient strategy into modern church and so we set out to launch house churches and primarily over the course of this last year that has been the focus of our church – training men and launching them out into the community to start house churches.

Now, ever since then we've had a barrage of interest both nationally from people who would be calling or texting or writing asking us, asking about our house church movement. What are you doing because we're not seeing this anywhere in the community or the world. We're not seeing this sense of push towards a house church movement like what we're doing here at Crossroads. This is very organic so we have a lot of people asking questions about it. What we find is a lot of you are still asking questions about what is this house church thing that we keep hearing about so kind of in my re-visioning I just want to go back and look at some of the questions that often surface and one of the questions that continues to come up is the question that relates to us as a central gathering. The question is well, is the house church going to be a replacement for this central Crossroads service? What's the answer to that? No. Right. No. Because the biblical sense is what? We have what? Two environments. We have the large gathering and we have the small. We have these two environments that are continuing to put intense effort to help you become devoted followers of Christ. So, what will you get here at the central? You'll get learning, you'll get relationships, you'll get worship. What will you get at the house church?

Another one of the things people ask is what am I going to experience when I walk into this house church because it can be somewhat unnerving walking into someone's home they don't know anything about. What am I going to experience? I tell you what you're going to experience. You'll experience the exact same thing that you experience here at Crossroads. You'll come into an environment that cares about you. If you have children most of our House Churches have some kind of children's ministry or child care so you're families are welcome. You'll come into an environment that is welcoming you to learn the Word

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of God; to create relationships built around your relationship with Jesus Christ. You'll worship together. If you go to a House Church like you would come to Crossroads you'd say you know, I want to get involved. I want to have some activity of service. They'll be opportunities of service for you in our House Churches; probably more so in our House Churches than any place right now is an involvement of service.

You say, alright, well, is there House Churches specifically for young people or for singles or for retired or for families? No. We don't work that way. Why? Because we build our House Churches, listen to this – on the same platform that we build the church because that's what we see in scripture. So what we have in our House Churches is multi-generational gatherings of people just like we have in the large environment here at the central teaching. We have this sense of large central environment here. Small environment – identical. They look the same.

One of the questions and rightly asked people will say well, who's leading these House Churches? Who are the men we are calling pastors in these House Churches and should they be called pastors? That's a great question. That's a question at the leadership level and the Elder level here at Crossroads we took very seriously before embarking on this. We went out and we began to look for men who would in their own lifestyle demonstrate a passion, a giftedness as well as a lifestyle of working out their Christianity that would exemplify someone as a role of pastor or Elder in our church. We were looking for men who could be named pastors, who could be commissioned as pastors. Which, by the way, just parenthetically you understand how the scriptures work in the passing of the ministry baton? That is the over arching concept of the leader's responsibility in scripture is to train others to take the ministry and move it forward. Jesus had twelve disciples. Paul had eight disciples, do you realize that? Study your bibles carefully. Paul had eight men that he discipled. Why? So that he could give the ministry away. This is what we're called to do as leaders.

In fact, let me just introduce you to the nine men that I've been discipling over the course of this last year. These are the nine men who went out and they launched six House Churches around Richland County. We call them the Alpha group because they are the first group that went out. Right now we're actually we're also involved not only continually training the Alpha group but we're training what is called the Beta group – the second generation. Eight more men that later this year are going to go out and plant House Churches all over the community. But let me just introduce you to the ones who right now are in service around the area.

We have two House Churches in Mansfield. One of them is led by Jim Roland. Jim's a great guy. Student of the Word. He actually took a Small Group and he morphed it into a House Church. He lives over in the Lakeview area. So, if you live in Mansfield this might be one of the House Churches you would consider attending.

Now, not that far away, just a few blocks away Chris Davis has also launched a House Church. Chris Davis is a familiar name around here at Crossroads. Many of you might know him. You might support him. He is the founder and leader of a mission organization called Global Youth Ministry Network. He

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and his team go all over the globe training youth pastors. He lives here in Richland County. He has a heart for the pastorate and so he has joined our team as a pastor of a House Church in Mansfield.

But it's not just located in Mansfield. You can go over to Ontario. We have two men in our Ontario House Church. Jeff Schultheis and Doug Wolf. Both paired up together. By the way, that's really what we want to do. We want to send men out as pairs into the community. Doug and Jeff are pastors in the Ontario area. Jeff is the chairman of our Elder Board. Doug he's serves for years in our Children's Ministry. In fact, my kids think Doug's a rock star and if you have kids you know you've heard about Doug Wolf. Well, Doug has such a pastoral heart he's been morphing in himself into this House Church role by becoming a house church pastor in Ontario.

We move out of Ontario if you live outside the city limits, out say towards Olivesburg we have a House Church there for you. We have two men that are in the Olivesburg church. We have Tony Knight and Larry Lemaster. This is a great little House Church. It's in a farmhouse out in the sticks. And these people they are growing. They're busting the seams out of this little farmhouse. In fact, I meet with the Alpha team every other Friday morning, early in the morning. We were talking to Tony and Larry and they were saying, yeah, our House Church has grown so big we can't fit into the one room. They're now in the other rooms peering through doorways to be involved. That's just so exciting that we see this type of movement.

If you live in the Lexington area we have a House Church in the Lexington area. Scott Frederici is the House Church pastor there. Scott, also dynamic teacher of the Word of God. He's been a teacher in our Classes as Crossroads. Many of you might have taken his theological classes. He's now joined our House Church movement.

And then out in Bucyrus. A lot to say about Bucyrus. We have two men out there. Bob Lehew and Roger Speck. If you travel from that side of the area there is a House Church in Bucyrus. What's great about Bucyrus, and I love this about all of our House Churches but, especially Bucyrus. About half of the Bucyrus House Church are people who have never been to a central gathering here at Crossroads. They have come into the Crossroad's ministry through the House Church. That is what excites me. We're moving the mission forward through our House Churches. And these are dynamic, Godly men. We're training them on a regular basis in their pastoral skills and leadership and teaching of the Word of God.

Which, let me just say. That is something that we have historically as church culture valued. But we've gotten away from it and it's happened over the last two hundred years or so where we have made the pastorate this academic figure head that goes off and gets trained in a university or seminary and then comes back and then that now is the credential to be a pastor. Now, I'm all for training. I spent my years in the ivory tower but I also understand the call of scripture. This call of scripture is that we are to duplicate ourselves and there's no sense in scripture where we should limit men who have a desire to be pastors but maybe are doing another work. To make that work and then do their true calling and go out and plant churches. And so what we're doing is we're embodying that here at Crossroads.

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Let me just say to you – there are some of you here at Crossroads right now. You're saying I've done the 9 to 5. I've got my career but my heart longs for something more. God might be calling you as a pastor to a House Church. You should come see us.

Well, what is this House Church? House Church is that men commissioned by our Elders to go out and be pastors. You say well, isn't this an awful lot like a small group? No. I'll tell you the difference. Our Small Group ministry is a connection-based ministry led by key volunteers. Our House Church ministry – led by men trained and commissioned by our Elders to be pastors at Crossroads. That's a huge difference.

Last question – why should I get involved with a House Church? Well, I think one of the most basic reasons you should get involved in a House Church is because it is the biblical pattern of a disciple of Christ. We see that in the book of Acts. Let me just tell you this. I think you ought to get involved because it is a great catalyst for the next step in your spiritual development. Now listen. Listen to me clearly. I'm the last guy leading this ministry who would want to add another thing for you to do in your life. In fact, one of the things that I often do is we go over our ministry with a fine tooth-comb and if there are things that are taking time but not driving you towards the mission we often eradicate that from our ministry plate. I would not add something for you to do if I didn't think it was biblical or worthy. If you're not part of a House Church I want to encourage you. Stop out at the House Church tower. Talk to these guys. Talk to the guys that are already in it. Talk to the guys who are in training and about ready to launch next year. Some of you might be saying I want in on the ground level. Tell me those guys who are going to be launching and where they're launching. I want to get there. Others of you say no. I want to get involved in something established. So stop out. Stop out at our iCenter. Get information. Go on our website. Download our mobile app. Get information there and visit these House Churches. Why? Because I truly believe, strategically, from the Word of God this is what we ought to be infusing into our cultural understanding of being a follower of Christ. Why? So that you're learning moves forward; so that your relationships are built around believers and so that your worship is not only in a large environment but in a small environment, intimate and close, growing with the Lord.

We pray for you as church leaders on a regular basis and you need to understand. Our prayer is that you would involve yourself in the strategic elements of the church. Let's not just involve ourselves in the easy one time gathering. Let's involve ourselves at the next level and see if spiritual growth doesn't develop in our lives. Pray with me.