

**FROM SEATING CAPACITY TO SENDING CAPACITY:
Why an Incarnational Kingdom on Mission is Very Attractive**
by Neil Cole

If we think that a model of church is our solution to reaching the world we are already in a bad place, whether that model is a mega church or a micro church.

There is a vast difference, however, between an attractional posture and an incarnational/missional understanding of church. The difference is not in the organization, but in the release and flow of God's kingdom. The church is not meant to be sedentary but sent—"one holy, apostolic (sent) church."

Today we expect the lost to come to us. In the Bible, God is always the Seeker going after those who are lost. He pursued Adam in a garden and Moses in a desert. He found Jonah at the bottom of the sea and Peter on top. Jesus found Matthew in an office and Paul out on the road.

God became a man and entered the world through a birth canal just like the rest of us. He chose to come to us on our turf, rather than expecting us to rise to His. Jesus preached everywhere that the kingdom of God has come near. He came to seek and to save the lost, and He now invites us to join Him.

Many ask: "How can we make the church more attractive to the lost?" If we start down this path we unintentionally leave our true path: Letting people see how attractive Jesus is! It's all about Jesus... *not us*. In a sense, for every step we take toward impressing people with our own strengths we move further from letting them become impressed with His.

God always prefers to reveal Himself in weak things rather strong. It is the simple vessels that often reveal God's glory more than having to find Him in the midst of laser lights and fog machines. The curiosity of a child's question; the embrace of a loving grandmother; the accepting handshake of a good friend; the smile of a proud father; the warmth of a soft shoulder to cry on—these are the things that reveal God's character more than any sermon.

Love for one another is a powerful ingredient in evangelism, but sitting in an auditorium listening to a preacher talk about it is not as powerful as being able to see it and taste it first hand. A "neighbor nudge" for two minutes on Sunday morning is not enough.

Coming into a home with a loving spiritual family—each praying, singing and sharing their inner lives—is amazing for someone who never learned to trust. Sensing the power of Christ working in and through those people can break even the most hardened heart.

More than once, I have seen toughened gangsters and drug dealers, weep in the presence of Christ among His people and pour out confession unsolicited. I have seen a Palestinian Muslim surrender everything to Christ in the midst of a faith community

praying together. Four fraternity brothers gave their life to Christ in a meeting at their frat house in front of their peers unreservedly. Christ in us is powerful; it is the hope of glory. Simply being another anonymous person in a pew is not so powerful.

The reality is most people are not even curious about what is happening in church. For the few who are seeking, the last place they want to look is in church. Why? Because church is seen as a passive religious event that demands allegiance but offers very little experience. We ask for volunteers all the time. We offer spiritual-gift assessments to see where people fit best in our program, but we never really offer very challenging experiences for people. Handing out bulletins, directing traffic wearing a bright orange vest, chaperoning a youth function, or changing a diaper in the nursery may be helpful for the church program, but none of it is a task worth giving your life to. Many who struggle to do these things have a nagging unspoken question: "Did Jesus come so I can do *this*?"

We must transition from seeing church as a once-a-week worship event to an ongoing spiritual family on mission together. Then people will see church as something worth giving your life for. Honestly, people need one another more than they need another inspiring message. You would be surprised what people will do for Jesus, or for a brother or sister, that they will not do for a vision statement and a capital giving campaign.

One side effect of pursuing excellence in production is that common Christians become spectators who can contribute a percentage of their income to keep things going, but little more. We have raised the bar on how church is done so high that few believe they could ever do it themselves. The dark side of this endeavor is that we have lowered the bar of what it means to be a Christian so that simply showing up to the weekly one hour event with some regularity and a check book is all it takes.

My goal in life is to reverse this. I want to lower the bar of how church is done so that anyone can do it, and raise the bar of what it means to be a disciple so that they will do it.

I will never forget meeting with an organic church made up of high school students. As we were all singing praises to the Lord I felt His pleasure. I asked the students to share the biggest church they had ever been to. Southern California has many mega-churches. Several were mentioned, ranging from 2,000 to 20,000 attendees.

"I think Satan is more intimidated by this little church of 15 kids than by any of those Godzilla-sized churches," I said. They all snickered and looked around the room at one another with smiles, thinking that the old man had finally lost his mind.

I then showed them why I thought this way. I asked, "How many of you think you could start a church like one of those mega-churches?" No one raised a hand. I then asked, "How many of you think you could start a church like this one?" All raised their hands. The snickering stopped. It was one of those holy moments in life that are hard to forget. I then asked them to look around the room at all the raised hands, and I said, "I assure you, Satan is terrified by this. And he should be!"