The Problem With The House Church Movement

What’s Up With House Churches in Britain & Ireland?

Stories from Canada’s House Churches

Good Books

The Desert Years

And Much More…
The Mission
To see the kingdom of God established in our cities, regions, and nation, by linking arms as a relational, intentional, and missional network of house churches, that develop and deploy every believer in Christ as they impact others.

The Starfish Files
Starfish line the shores of the world’s beaches. Chop off an arm, and a new one grows to take its place. Tear a starfish in half, and you’ll soon have two starfish on your hands. A torn-off limb can even become a brand new starfish. And what’s more, they populate by releasing hundreds of thousands, and sometimes millions, of eggs in just a few hours. Just like the house church movement through the ages. An estimated 300,000 new house churches have started between 1998 and 2006. And this doesn’t include China’s 80 to 100 million house church believers or Latin America’s 1 million Basic Christian Communities in 2007. It’s also taking root in Canada. This magazine’s goal is to inspire, inform, and interconnect the house churches across Canada and beyond. It is the official publication of the Starfish Network, which is a “friendship network” of house churches across Canada.

The Team
Editor: Rad Zdero. Funders: Thanks to all of you who have contributed, and continue to contribute, financially to help keep this magazine going. God will reward you!

Submissions
Send your writings, suggestions, and photos to Rad Zdero (editor), c/o The Starfish Files, P.O. Box 39528, Lakeshore P.O., Mississauga, ON, Canada, L5G 4S6, or by email to rzdero@yahoo.ca

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Faith Statement
Our team accepts the Bible as inspired by God and agrees with historic Christian statements like the Apostles Creed and the Nicene Creed. However, we do not necessarily endorse every particular belief held by individual contributing authors to this magazine.

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THE STARFISH FILES
Canada’s House Church Magazine

CONTENTS
(MAY-AUG 2012, NO.14)

3. The Problem with the House Church Movement
by Andy Zoppelt

7. Starfish Stats

8. Canadian Stories

10. Ontario Organic Church Gathering
by Naomi Johnson

by Les Galicinski

11. World House Church News

12. Go000000 Books!

13. Knowing the Body of Christ
(House Church Worksheet)
by Nanette Bruwer

14. Kickin’ It Old School with...
George Fox: Founder of the Quakers

15. The Desert Years
by Rad Zdero
Andy Zoppelt is a born again believer who was powerfully saved as a young man out of a rough-and-tumble lifestyle. He has been part of the U.S. military, he was involved with the discipleship movement, he has worked as a Baptist youth pastor, and later went on to start his own church under the name of Christian Fellowship where he was the pastor for some 30 years. He is now employed as a home and commercial building inspector. Andy is also involved in the house church movement and has written numerous articles on the topic. He lives with his family in Florida, USA. He can be contacted at www.TheRealChurch.com

IS THERE A PROBLEM ?
We in the house church movement in many ways are taking the same path as those in previous movements. We have accurately pointed out the major faults and flaws in the institutional church: pastor, pews, programs, buildings, indifference, denominationalism, hierarchy. The list seems a mile long. We all agree that this institutional system of church is absolutely different from what we read about in the early forming of the Body of Christ. It is, without exaggerating, a 180-degree turn from what Jesus and the apostles set up in the early church. At this point we all agree. But, have we really looked at the sin in our own camp? Here is a list of some of our problems that need to be addressed.

1. THE SPIRIT OF DIVISION
Many house churches are content in being "us four and no more," because we meet in a house, we believe we are biblical! Most have little or no impact on their community, the poor, those in prison, those in need—and many are not even impacting missions. We have forgotten that even the early house church was never an end in itself. We have forgotten about connecting and functioning locally in the city. We reject others meeting in homes in our own area. It pains me to think of all those house churches disconnected in any given locality. But, Jesus made it clear in John 17 that unity was not an option for His disciples. We are either gathering or scattering. Each leader clutches their house church, as though it was theirs. Whose church is it?

2. REBELLION AGAINST LEADERSHIP
Many house churches overreact to the flawed leadership of the institutional church by denying the biblical five-fold ministry’s function within the Body of Christ. A price will be paid by denying those whom Jesus sends and anoints. Our individualism and independence have created a false sense of body ministry. Because we deny the diversity of ministry of the universal church, without which we cannot survive in times of shaking, God has withheld His power and presence. We feel threatened by the experience and revelation of the five-fold ministry and shelter ourselves in isolated home meetings. The diversity
of all ministry is not competition, but it complements and builds up the Body. These ministries are gifts to the church as "God has appointed." (1 Cor 12:28-21; Eph 4:11-12; 1 Tim 3:1-7; 1 Pet 5:1-4).

3. NO BURDEN FOR THE NEEDY
Mercy ministry has almost come to a complete stop in many house churches. When I was an institutional pastor, we would go to the streets to minister and feed hundreds of people. Even my city stood up and took notice—they asked how they could help. The local newspaper did a full 2-page write-up on us. We went into the jails and nursing homes. We were a light on a hill. Now I feel disconnected from my local brothers, rather than us pulling together. The only burden we have is what we shall bring for the meal after the meeting. If we don't have His burden, we cannot know His will, nor can we speak for Him. Let's get back to helping orphans, widows, prisoners, the sick, and others who need to be loved in word and deed (Matt 25:32-46; James 1:27).

4. NO FINANCIAL GIVING
Our anti-tithing doctrine in many house churches has led to a greed where giving is non-existent. It matters little what we believe concerning the tithing issue, if our believing doesn't include giving up our selfish attitude toward our finances to pull together locally and trans-locally. If we don't financially support the poor and needy (Acts 2:44-45, 11:29, 20:35) and those who function as travelling apostles (1 Cor 9:1-14; Philip 4:10-19), we are worse than the institutional church. Jesus and the apostles mentioned over and over their concern for the poor and met those needs as they were able. Can we do any differently?

5. TOO MUCH INFORMATION, NOT ENOUGH PARTNERSHIP
Our house church conferences are no different than institutional church conferences. These meetings are salted with information, strategies, how-to methods, and the spread of house churches. We have experts giving us information, while we experience little of the life of the Body. We are more entertained with information, expertly presented, than being built and trained together. I go to these meetings, but I weep and cry to be built with other leaders and am too often disconnected, standing alone. I want to get together to pray, spend time, share, and then build long-term partnerships and friendships with others in my region and nation (Gal 2:1,2,7-9). Is this kind of building not an apostolic mandate?

6. NO UNDERSTANDING OF THE CITYWIDE AND UNIVERSAL CHURCH
Because there is no recognition of the church in the city, there is no understanding of the universal church and universal ministry (Acts 2:41-47, 9:31, 15:36). The early church started out as a group of 120 people. As it grew, it maintained its universal connections. The church functioned in houses and cities, but maintained its universal unity. Leadership was not established only in houses, but in the city and universally. Every house church didn't necessarily have an elder, but the eldership functioned locally in the city. Because there was a universal unity, much of the five-fold ministry could function locally and universally. There were letters from city to city to keep them informed and in communication with one another. Disconnection brings about death. We need more connection and mutual partnership, not just more information.
7. DENOMINATIONALISM
This is a curse word to those of us who experienced the horrific divisions and competition created out of "naming" a Christian movement. Often from noble intentions, denominations got their start around some biblical truth or some leader. Paul the apostle warned us about this (1 Cor 1:10-13). Denominate means "to name". Rarely are we content with just being Christian. We somehow want to name our special movement and separate ourselves from all those who are of "Babylon." But, it is the name of Jesus that identifies us, not our network. House churches are starting to subtly fall into these previous entrapments—which we learned from the institutional church—by creating our own streams and networks. What do we think will happen with all our house church streams and networks? Unless we are very careful, they too will become denominations with labels that divide, rather than unite, the Body of Christ locally and universally.

8. A FORM WITHOUT SPIRITUAL LIFE
I keep hearing how we in the house church movement are the largest movement in the world. We use China, India, and others in Third World nations to make this point. But there is no comparison between them and us here in the Western nations. I met a brother from China a few years ago. His word to me was that we in the West didn't have spiritual life, but we had form. We have accomplished a form without spiritual life, if we dare to be honest. We are not the same as many in the Third World nations. They are not what they are because they meet in houses and in small groups, but because they have spiritual life and power. Maybe we need to also learn from their passionate spiritual life and not just their house meetings and strategies. Let us become wise master builders! (1 Cor 3:10-15).

9. AN UNHEALTHY FOCUS ON NUMERICAL GROWTH
When God sent me into the institutional church as a youth pastor, I learned a powerful inside lesson, that it was all about success and numbers. When I go to a house church conference, I often hear, "How many house churches have you planted?" or "How many are in your house church?" Whoever has planted the most house churches or has the largest house church is almost placed on a pedestal. Is that different from the institutional church? Many genuine apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers cannot become manifest in the house church movement if we continue to judge by such a narrow standard. There's nothing wrong with quantity, but let's not forget quality! (Acts 2:41-47; Eph 4:11-15).

10. NO ROOM FOR A STRONG WORD
House churches have created a comfortable environment and a box, which we protect with tooth and claw. Institutionalism is based on
organizing to the point where God has no place for moving outside the program or box. I am convinced we need a strong Spirit-inspired word now and then in our house churches, either from someone inside the group or perhaps a visiting brother or sister. A famous man of God once said, "If you have not gotten a hard word from God, I doubt that you know Him." I remember one time I invited Art Katz to speak in our church. Art blasted us and pointed out every problem.

We need to make room for others to speak into what we are doing to help us practically, to encourage us, to challenge us, and even occasionally to rebuke us when we need it. In our local house church meetings, we face many hard issues of all kinds all of the time. Let’s face it. So, let’s not be afraid of graciously, but honestly, speaking out strongly on these matters to one another (2 Cor 2:1-11; Gal 2:11).

WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?
Maybe we can start to meet together as house churches and believers and really get to know one another personally. Then, as God leads, we could have some real weeping between the porch and the altar and repent (Joel 2). Perhaps God would give us a prophetic word, where we could sound the alarm on His holy mountain. We need to blow the trumpet with a clear warning and a true word from God in this day of shaking. Let us come together, because it is good for the brethren to dwell together in unity.

If the power of Pentecost came because of the disciples of Jesus and the unity of the body coming together, just maybe we should consider such a humbling position. Let us throw away our differences and come together and pray, fast, and serve one another. Let us allow God to build us together. Let us fall in love with Him and one another—no matter how long it takes and no matter what it takes. Without love, we all are nothing and are building our house churches on sinking sand. If we don’t learn from history, we will repeat it. Dare we come together in unity and build upon Jesus?★
What's up with Christianity & Church in Britain?

- 67% of people believe in some sort of “god”
- 53% of people claim to be Christian
- 39% of people claim to have no religious faith
- 41% of non-church attenders still pray privately
- 15% of people attend church at least monthly
- 22% of Londoners attend church regularly

Source: www.TearFund.org
2007 Random Survey of 7000 Adults

What’s up with Simple/Organic/House Churches in Britain and Ireland?

- 66% of people have been involved for 1 to 3 years
- 10% of people have been involved for 7 years or more
- 70% of groups meet in homes
- 20% of groups meet in pubs and cafés
- 60% of groups have not multiplied in the last 2 years
- 30% of groups have birthed 1 new group
- 2% of groups have birthed 4 or more new groups
- 60% of people have seen “some” baptisms

Source: www.SimpleChurch.co.uk
2011 Survey of Simple/Organic/House Churches
The house churches are gaining momentum here. We are hearing the Lord’s voice and seeing Him direct people our way. We have 20 house churches in our network, along with several “missions” that have sprung out of people’s passions. About two-thirds of people are from previous churches, although recently not going to any church, and one-third are new believers loving God and discovering “church”. We had a leaders’ retreat with 22 leaders. God spoke to us about how He speaks, how to recognize His voice, and how to recalibrate what we do and say with what He is doing and saying.

Here’s a quick story. One night, I visited one of our new groups, which is attracting drug and alcohol addicts. Someone was cursing up a storm because they lost their wallet. Part way through, one of their friends came in and was so nervous about coming that he had a few drinks beforehand. After asking me some questions, he hugged me three or four times and left. One girl had to leave the room because she needed to take her birth control pills right away. Haha – and then of course there were a few smoke breaks throughout the evening.

I shared about how amazing it is that God forgives us, no matter what we have done to get ourselves into trouble. It was an incredibly raw night, and I was so excited. At one point, I thought, “Jesus would be right in the middle of this!” Since then, I have brought a few of the other house church leaders with me just to get a taste of it. Awesome!

The Church at My Place (CAMP) is a network of house churches that is actively engaged in living out the Lordship of Jesus Christ. We are committed to living out His great commission to make disciples and loving God and neighbour with all that is in us (Matt 22:37-39, 28:19).

Currently at CAMP we have three groups meeting. One is at our home, which is the original one that has now been meeting for 2.5 years.

We also have a group that meets in a rooming house where we do dinner church every Sunday evening. This format allows residents to join our fellowship for a meal. Some stay for the sharing time and worship. Others use the kitchen where we meet and overhear what we are doing. Some former residents who have moved continue to come back and join us when they desire to.

Our latest group meets in a retirement residence in town and is starting out as a Bible Study. Over time we will add a prayer time and worship in song.

We are one of the few house churches that I know of that uses the lectionaries to give some shape to some of our meetings. We have the Scriptures for each week up on our web site and people are invited to reflect on them and bring their insights. People are also free to share any Scriptures as well and other devotional items that may come across when we gather together.

More details and a blog are available on our web site at www.thechurchatmyplace.org.

Our church in Brampton (Ontario) in part, is an outgrowth from a group gathering over the past 7 years in Scarborough (Ontario). With just a few of us at the beginning, friends Devon and Judy Foxx, Sandra and Chris McIntosh, and I started gathering around Christ as a family, focusing at first on simply building personal relationships, worshipping, and enjoying each other’s company.

Our church now has at least a dozen adults plus a number of young folks participating regularly. Among other individual weekly personal interactions, we all gather together regularly on Saturday evenings for a meal, fellowship, discussion, prayer, and whatever else the Lord puts in our midst for our time together.

As the group has grown significantly, we sensed the timing and leading of the Lord to lay some necessary foundations for church life. To do that, we have gone through Jesus’ teachings in Matthew 5 to 8. This has significantly challenged us to “obedient to Jesus” discipleship and to love for one another. During the journey it has also stirred up and brought into the open a number of personal struggles that some of us are having – giving opportunity for healing and ministry.

We are learning to move away from simply mimicking Jesus in a “What-would-Jesus-do” (WWJD) manner to the reality of a “Led-by-the-Indwelling-Spirit” life – allowing Christ to work through us in a natural, organic, Spirit-led way.

We would appreciate your prayers as we step forward into what comes next!
God has opened some new doors lately for me to communicate, connect, coach, and catalyze. I’ve been making some overtures toward key leaders in Canada, the UK, and the USA who are involved in the “New Monastic” groups that are springing up. They have much in common with the house church movement, especially in their desire for authentic Christian relationships, serving their neighbourhoods, and often meeting simply from house to house.

A youth pastor in the USA and I have been dialoging about house churches. He has been reading, praying, and pondering. He recently wrote to me that he has finally resigned his formal pastoral position to focus exclusively toward key leaders in Canada, the UK, and the USA who are involved in the “New Monastic” groups that are springing up. They have much in common with the house church movement, especially in their desire for authentic Christian relationships, serving their neighbourhoods, and often meeting simply from house to house.

A youth pastor in the USA and I have been dialoging about house churches. He has been reading, praying, and pondering. He recently wrote to me that he has finally resigned his formal pastoral position to focus exclusively on planting house church networks.

I have discovered and started attending a home cell group that meets near my neighbourhood. They are connected to a multi-site megachurch. But, this home cell group and the top leadership of the megachurch are open to experimenting with 1 Cor 14:26 meetings and freeing up their home groups to function more autonomously. Hopefully, this connection with them will lead to God’s “micro” and “macro” purposes being fulfilled.

My recent book Letters to the House Church Movement was reviewed online in February by house church leaders Ross Rohde (thejesusvirus.org) and Keith Giles (subversivel1.blogspot.ca). And Keith Giles did a podcast interview with me which will eventually be posted on the web.

Let’s continue to ask for God’s strength to move forward in this “new thing” he has called us to! ★

Our regional relationships are developing as the lines become blurred between house fellowships and networks and as people step forward spontaneously to minister.

In April, representatives of 3 to 4 house fellowships, as well as curious outsiders, gathered in a rented facility in Saint John (NB). One of the couples from a local house church felt a need to be more outward looking, so decided to organize a larger gathering. I attended with Bill Morrison, who helps to oversee another network in the Fredericton area. We both enjoyed participating freely in the event. I believe some misunderstandings are melting away about networking and cross-pollination at a “macro” level.

In the Fredericton (NB) area, a weekly “Hope Café” is becoming a real “hot spot” for various house fellowships, ministries, and individuals to gather in a larger context. These get together are not a “church service” in any sense of the word, but rather they function as a connection point for the 247 Network of 15 to 20 house churches (www.247network.ca) and others. I attended recently and had a chance to share on the priesthood of all believers. I was interviewed on the same topic on video for the benefit of visitors to the 247 blog.

Through Bill Morrison’s “circuit riding”, 20 house churches in Boston want to connect with our region. These are all positive developments in cross-pollination and partnership at a “macro” level, which strengthens the individual house groups, so they don’t journey alone (Acts 2:41-47, 15:36, 20:20). ★
In March 2012, 50 Ontario Organic Church believers came together to hear global church news and share a love offering with persecuted or suffering brothers and sisters overseas. They also came to share kindness and network together.

A ‘blessing table’ overflowed: people brought along something worth sharing, ‘just because’. Choices especially delighted the children present, but adults took home appreciated items too. And the supper table teemed with food, thanks to Judy, Liz, and others.

Dinner conversations were hard to pull away from as people regrouped for open discussion afterwards. “This is so good. I really appreciate this,” several said, referring to the opportunity to sit with other house churchers and talk freely without having structured plans or other features imposed on the whole time.

Ron Pearce, founder of Empower Ministries (www.empowerministries.ca), gave 2 hours of world-church stories, with open Q &A. In over 20 years of trust building, top church leaders around the world have discovered a true bond servant in Ron and in the work he has founded. They know that the strategic and often dangerous work God places before them will not be jeopardized nor exploited, nor will any Western systems be imposed. Instead, the revival fires God capably alights through His national grassroots churches will get ‘gasoline’ poured on them. “We find out what the greatest needs are, meet them, then evaporate,” said Ron.

Empower Ministries is not attracted to the glitzy, show styles of Christianity. Instead, they look for leaders who are effective in seeing souls saved and efficient in discipleship. “We look for effectiveness, efficiency, and focus.” And “house church, or something like it, is what God is using today.”

‘David’, a leader who had spent time in prison, strung up and beaten, because of ministry work. When released, something was terribly wrong. Any operation would be too costly and too risky—David was told not to marry, he wouldn’t live long.

He asked God for 2 years off of ministering so he could rest on a family farm. “God heard that prayer differently,” Ron said. David ended up in prison again, this time assigned to back-breaking, brick-hauling labor. The pain was excruciating; but with every bend and heave of the heavy baskets, David, strangely, found himself broadly grinning.

Officials noticed this odd, ‘happy man,’ and assigned him a leadership role. From his office, he found he had access to a room filled with government confiscated Scriptures. He passed these out to the inmates. When released, 2 years later, his body had miraculously been healed.

David is one of China’s outstanding examples of a man after God’s own heart. Through his suffering he has been used to win thousands to Christ and has connected them to underground house churches.

China’s house churches remain in urgent need of hundreds of thousands of Bibles. Empower Ministries can print and deliver these within the country for $2 each. If you can help, visit www.empowerministries.ca.

A day like this takes a lot of work to plan. But, the day was a privilege to participate in because compassionate care assistance was raised for imprisoned house church leader’s families, numerous Bibles (they’ll be ravished) were also funded for house churchers without one, and there were opportunities to kindle old and new friendships in ‘the grace of house church together’.
It results in new birth and a spectacular ascent into the heavens with the Holy One who is resurrected, vindicated, and enthroned as supreme Lord of all. This divine transformation results in a new creation born of God. The believer now has been given a new standing with God (justification) and a new nature from God (sanctification).

Immediately the inner battle against the sinful self begins as the believer experiences the effect of indwelling sin, which mitigates against the Holy Spirit, which indwells the believer. The believer is called to mortify the sinful self through the power and resources of the Holy Spirit, the Word of God, and with the help of the people of God.

Simultaneously, the believer begins to bask in the glow of the presence of God through the Holy Spirit. The believer is also called to progressively live by the power of the Holy Spirit and practice the discipline of release. Past hurts, wounds, as well as material possessions, time, and circumstances, are to be released to the One to whom the believer now belongs.

Prayer becomes the life breath of the believer. Communion with the Bridegroom is made the heart of a growing relationship. Worship becomes a lifestyle of spiritual service to God and people. The Word of God is now the believer’s spiritual nourishment and means of communication with the divine Lover. The living word inspires convictions and disciplines in how to live in the body as a movement to perfection in holiness in preparation for the great wedding day.

The bride is not to sit idly waiting, but is sent by the divine Lover out into the harvest to tell others of the love of God and to invite everyone to partake with her in that divine wedding. Her Lord’s call to make disciples becomes her divine passion as she fellowships and works with others who are similarly betrothed. In this divine drama, Jesus Christ becomes the believer’s greatest joy. To get the book (which includes a study guide), go to www.lovesgreatestjoy.com

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**WORLD HOUSE CHURCH NEWS**

**AMERICA**—The Momentum west coast organic church conference took place in LA county (California) in March 2012, featuring Neil Cole, Ross Rohde, Keith Giles, and many others. Greenhouse Training events were also hosted in California, Texas, and Washington. See more info at www.house2house.com

**AUSTRALIA**—Coomera Christian Fellowship, a house church in the state of Queensland, started 2012 with a real highlight by baptizing some new believers. One of the house churches in Perth, in the state of Western Australia, gathered 35 believers and non-believing friends, family, and neighbours on Christmas Day 2011 for lunch, socializing, and the baptism of several folks. For more info see www.oikos.org.au

**BRITAIN**—Neil Cole visited Nottingham in April 2012 for the Newforms National Gathering. He spoke on organic church, missional principles, and building missional teams. See www.simplechurch.co.uk

**CANADA**—Greenhouse Training happened in Toronto in March and April 2012 with Phil Helfer, Scott Wilson, and Neil Cole. Ron Pearce of Empower Ministries was the keynote speaker at a regional gathering of house churches in March 2012 just west of Toronto.

**CHINA**—One afternoon in November 2011 in the city of Zhuozhou, 52 villagers gathered in a home for a Christian worship time. Then 140 police officers and other government officials surrounded the house, interrogated members, and took several into custody. Source: China Aid, www.persecution.org

**VIETNAM**—In late 2011, a gang of thugs attacked an underground house church in Hanoi, injuring 12 Christians. The pastor of the house church was severely beaten and was warned not to host any more Christian gatherings in his home. The house church is part of a larger network of 2000 members meeting in 35 home groups around Vietnam’s capital city Hanoi. For more info see www.BarnabasFund.org
GOOOOOOOOOD BOOKS!

The Global House Church Movement
Rad Zdero

Viral Jesus
Ross Rohde

Letters to the House Church Movement
Rad Zdero

Totally Devoted
Simon Cross

Ekklesia as God Intended
by Keith Giles

Les Galicinski

Love’s Greatest Joy
A closer walk with God
- Includes Study Guide

Small Is Big
Unleashing the Big Impact of Intentionally Small Churches
Tony & Felicity Dale | George Barna

This Is My Body

Street Crossers
Conversations with Single Church Planters and Stories of Those Who Send Them

The Inextinguishable Blaze
God’s Call to Holiness, Repentance, Intimacy, & Spiritual Awakening
R. Maurice Smith
Knowing the Body of Christ

Your Name: ______________

Identify your spiritual gifts, talents, and areas you are passionate about. Fill in the boxes to the best of your knowledge. Don’t be afraid to add areas you may be passionate about, but have not developed yet in your life.

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<th>Talents (skills you have or things you are good at, e.g., musician, tennis player, etc)</th>
<th>Areas you are passionate about – mark “P” (or if interested to pursue in the future – mark “I”).</th>
<th>Spiritual Gifts (teacher, apostle, helps, spiritual discernment… See Rom 12:3-9, Eph 4:2-12, 1 Cor 12:1-31, 1 Pet 4:10-11)</th>
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<th>Talents that others see in you</th>
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List topics that you would be interested in doing a short teaching or presentation on, that would benefit your house church or visitors to the group.

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5. 
George Fox started the Society of Friends, nicknamed the Quakers by their enemies. He spent his late teen years and early twenties traveling England and sharing his concerns about the established churches, but without success. After a profound experience standing atop Pendle Hill, he began to gain a hearing through his itinerant preaching. Many early Quakers went out two by two throughout England and all across the world. They drew 20,000 converts in the first 5 years of their mission. They were heavily persecuted by religious and government authorities. The Quakers emphasized the work of the Holy Spirit in a believer’s life, personal holiness, Spirit-led believers’ meetings, non-violence, helping the poor, sexual equality, and criticism of Catholic and Protestant churches, which they thought were apostate. They preached and met outdoors, in taverns, in homes, and anywhere they could. The following excerpts are from George Fox’s autobiography.

As we travelled we came near a very great hill, called Pendle Hill, and I was moved of the Lord to go up to the top of it; which I did with difficulty, it was so very steep and high. When I was come to the top, I saw the sea bordering upon Lancashire. From the top of this hill the Lord let me see in what places he had a great people to be gathered.

***

I directed them to the Divine Light of Christ, and His Spirit in their hearts, which would let them see all the evil thoughts, words, and actions that they had thought, spoken, and acted; by which Light they might see their sin, and also their Saviour Christ Jesus to save them from their sins... and by the same Light they might see Christ that died for them to be their Redeemer and Saviour, and their way to God.

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Since these meetings have been settled, and all the faithful in the power of God, who are heirs of the gospel, have met together in the power of God, which is their authority, to perform service to the Lord, many mouths have been opened in thanksgiving and praise, and many have blessed the Lord God, that ever He sent me forth in this service.

I declared unto them that the Lord God had sent me to preach the everlasting gospel and Word of life amongst them, and to bring them off from all these temples, tithes, priests, and rudiments of the world, which had been instituted since the apostles’ days, and had been set up by such as had erred from the Spirit and power the apostles were in. Very largely was I opened at this meeting, and the Lord’s convincing power accompanied my ministry.

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The people were in a rage, and fell upon me in the steeple-house before his face, knocked me down, kicked me, and trampled upon me. Having furnished themselves with staves, hedge-stakes, holm or holly bushes, [they] fell upon me, and beat me on my head, arms, and shoulders, till they had deprived me of sense; so that I fell down upon the wet common.
EDITOR’S COMMENTS: THE DESERT YEARS

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I must confess that a recent conversation with a Christian friend of mine inspired me and also forced me to completely re-write this editorial—I hope for the better.

We shared with each other some of the victories and difficulties we’ve had in the past few years. For my part, I reflected on my mother’s recent death, my own personal health challenges, my recent season of inactivity in ministry, and my own ministry disappointments over the past several years.

As I went to bed that night, some biblical characters came to mind, each of whom had their own periods of obscurity. Some have called these experiences the wilderness years, the quiet years, the hidden years, or even the desert years.

I can’t help but feel pity for Abraham, who was promised by God to one day have a son through whom his descendants would be as numerous as the sands of the shore and the stars of the sky. This at a time when he was 75 years old. But, Abraham had to wait for 25 years before the son of promise—Isaac—was finally born.

I’m also reminded of Joseph, who perhaps unwisely told his brothers about his lofty dreams about his future destiny as a great leader, only to invoke the anger of his brothers and be sold into slavery by them. For the next 13 or so years, he was on a roller coaster ride of circumstances until he had finally become Pharaoh’s right-hand man in Egypt, the center of global power and knowledge at the time.

I think about Moses, who tried to prematurely start a violent uprising against the Pharaoh’s political system, only to be exiled for 40 years to tend sheep in obscurity until God called him to fulfill his destiny. I wonder what went through his mind. Did he feel utterly forsaken by God? Did he think his talents were being wasted? Did he give up his dream of freeing the Hebrew slaves from bondage and content himself with a quiet domestic life?

I think of David, who was anointed as a teenager by the prophet Samuel to become king of Israel, who slew Goliath, and who became a leading warrior in King Saul’s army. But, on the heels of Saul’s jealousy, David became a fugitive running for his life for almost the next decade until he would finally become king of Israel, as predicted.

I wonder about Jesus, who spent his first 30 earthly years as just an ordinary peasant and wood-working carpenter or perhaps a stone mason, depending on which scholar you ask. No ministry. No fame. No miracles. No followers. And no task from the Father, other than waiting for the right time. Well, there was that little incident in the Temple when he was 12 years old, in which he impressed people with his knowledge of God. But, other than that, no real action.

I shouldn’t forget to mention Paul, who started his Christian journey with a bout of blindness and then spent about 3 years in Arabia, some scholars suggesting it was a time of stillness and supernatural preparation by the Lord. For a guy like Paul, whose later ministry involved almost frenetic preaching, healing, writing, and traveling, this must have initially felt like torture, or even a punishment from the Lord in repayment for his prior persecution of Christ’s people.

Church history is no different. Saint Patrick was kidnapped by Irish raiders, spent his teen years as a slave in Ireland, and went back home to Britain for good, until he received a vision which called him back to Ireland, where he started a church planting movement.

George Fox, founder of the early Quaker movement, spent several years traveling and talking to people about his concerns about the practices of the church’s of his day, with no fruit, until he received a vision atop Pendle Hill.

John Wesley, founder of the Methodist revival, spent several years in Christian service and some time as a failed missionary, while doubting his own salvation, until his heart was “strangely warmed”—he finally knew he was truly Christ’s and that Christ was truly his!

The list could go on and on of men and women of God who experienced “the desert years” before fulfilling their destinies and seeing any fruit from the labours.

Perhaps some of us are in a similar place. Perhaps we are wondering if our desert will ever end. Perhaps we are being teased by false oases and other mirages. If so, may we not lose heart, but let us be ready for the time when God calls.★
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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Rad Zdero earned his Ph.D. degree in Mechanical Engineering, specializing in biomechanics and bio-materials. He is the director of a hospital-based research lab in Toronto, Canada. Rad has been actively involved in the house church and small group movement since 1985 and is dedicated to encouraging the full restoration of original New Testament Christianity in our day.