

## **The Formation of Apostolic Community**

At the 5 Year Mark Where Have We Come From and Where are We Heading?

### **I. OUR 5 YEAR ANNIVERSARY AS A COMMUNITY - REMEMBERING THE PAST AND LOOKING FORWARD**

- A. As 2010 comes to a close, an important season for our spiritual family and ministry is ending and a new one is beginning. February 2011 will mark the 5 year anniversary of the beginning of THOP and our first daily prayer meeting (2006-2011). These first 5 years are extremely significant and deserve careful reflection lest we forget the weight of the incredible testimony that we bear as a community and a spiritual family as well as the prophetic promises concerning our future.
- B. When we first began in 2006 there was confidence, zeal, passion and an unswerving commitment to the vision of establishing day and night prayer and worship in Tauranga. But that was no guarantee that we would survive. The first 5 years of ministries and businesses is a season of uncertainty, pressure, testing, lack, need and endurance. And many ministries and businesses don't survive those tumultuous years.
- C. Our first 5 years are now in the history books and not only have we survived, we have grown and have become even more resolute in the vision that gave birth to this community in the first place. And for this we must boast in the kindness and grace of God. And we must celebrate the labors of those who have given so much at such a high cost to see this vision established. These next few months are to be a season of intentional reflection and remembrance as well as a season of "dreaming" as we hear what the Lord is saying over this city and our role in the future advance of the Gospel in the South Pacific.
- D. In these months we must carefully set our hearts to understand what the Lord has done and is doing in our midst. Because in the same way that passion, zeal and commitment was no guarantee of our survival in the first 5 years, so also can we say that our survival of the first 5 years does not guarantee our faithfulness in the next 5 years. And this is what the word of the Lord is for us as we move into 2011: "set your heart to the mandate and pursue faithfulness as a family." We can't do His part and He won't do ours. We must discern what He is saying and then invest our time, energy and finances unto that end.

### **II. ANTIOCH AS A MODEL OF WHAT THE LORD IS DOING IN OUR MIDST**

- A. The community and ministry we see in Acts 13 in the city of Antioch is the clearest New Testament picture of what the Lord is doing in our midst. There are five different ministries that made Antioch what it was. These are five mandates for us here in Tauranga. They are general Biblical mandates for healthy community but they are also specific to our assignment to foster the convergence of the prayer and missions movement. Acts 13 contains the anatomy of an apostolic community built on the foundation of prayer and worship. And the Spirit is emphasizing them to us now as we move into the next phase of building here in Tauranga. These mandates and ministry expressions will become very pronounced in the next season as we respond to the grace of God that He is giving so lavishly to us and as a new season of "building" begins.

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Now there were in the church at Antioch prophets and teachers.....<sup>2</sup> While they were ministering to the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, “Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.” <sup>3</sup> Then after fasting and praying they laid their hands on them and sent them off. (Acts 13:1-3)

1. **Prophets** - The gift of prophecy and the office of the prophet. Prophets ask “What is the Lord saying to us now?” and declare it to the people. The prophetic/apostolic ministry is what the church is founded upon. In our modern church contexts the pastor is the foundation of the church. This isn’t Biblical. The pastoral ministry is to compliment the prophetic and apostolic. We must contend for this in our midst. Paul said that we were to earnestly desire the “greater gifts” but “especially that you may prophesy” (1 Cor. 14). Prophecy connects the hearts of the people with the heart of the Lord in the present tense. And the prophetic is to spearhead community.
2. **Teachers** - The gift and office of the teacher expounds upon what the Spirit is saying through the prophets through the written word. Antioch was sustained by a diligent, consistent, faithful exposition of the written word. A community that is led by the prophetic and apostolic that doesn’t honor the great need for the consistent public exegesis and exposition of the written word will not be healthy. And vice versa, the teaching ministry that doesn’t honor the great need for the apostolic and prophetic ministry is not healthy.
3. **Prayer** - As we’ll see later the ministry of prayer is what made Antioch famous. The vibrant commitment to adoration and intercession is what sustained and energized the community and made it what it was. We will never see the impact like we see from Antioch if we don’t see the value of the ministry of prayer. This is and will always remain our primary ministry assignment as a community. Prophecy, teaching and apostolic sending will all ebb and flow in different seasons and the Lord will have us focus on different ministry assignments with various commitment levels. But the place of prayer and worship will always be our “one necessary thing.” In the midst of revival and in the mundane we must fight for the place of prayer and simple devotion to Jesus.
4. **Fasting** - There are places in the grace of God we cannot and will not go apart from fasting. Not because it earns us those places but because it tenderizes our hearts to receive that which we normally resist and are comfortable to live without. The call to fasting is the call to resist the temptation to live comfortable without things that the Bible declares to be in reach. Fasting is not an option any more than prayer, teaching or prophecy is. If we don’t give ourselves to the spirit of fasting we’ll live without it and if we live without it that means we’ll live without a host of other great gifts (Mark 9:29).
5. **The organic Spirit-led commissioning of apostles** - One of the ministry mandates of Antioch in the heart of God was to nurture and commission apostolic laborers full of the power of the Holy Spirit. Antioch didn’t exist for the sake of Antioch alone. Antioch existed for the sake of the nations. The prophecy/preaching, teaching, prayer and fasting was a catalytic combustion that resulted in the sending of the very apostle Paul. If we desire the caliber of leaders we see in the book of Acts we must set our hearts to labor to the standard set forth in the book of Acts (which is Antioch). The sending from Antioch was not formalized or institutionalized - it was organic and Spirit led.

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- B. None of these ministries are exclusive. In other words, don't ask which ONE you are called to. Community and ministry is organic. Though we all have some gifts more than other gifts its important that we understand that people move in and out of giftings and that we resist the temptation to make definitions that are inappropriate. Luke's point in making note of the different ministries wasn't to say that people were one or the other in gifting. And that's not the point here in Tauranga. The point is to recognize that this is how the Spirit crafted the first apostolic community in the New Testament after the dispersion took place as a result of the persecution that broke out in Jerusalem in Acts 7-9. These gifts ebbed and flowed and individuals moved in and out of giftings according to what the Lord was emphasizing in different seasons.
- C. Though there is many different expressions of ministry in Antioch, the primary message of Antioch is "prayer." The culture of prayer is the seedbed for live-giving prophetic ministry, teaching ministry, fasting and apostolic sending.
- D. The community and ministry at Antioch was crafted by the Holy Spirit and the leaders in that city in dynamic continuity with the model of community and ministry set forth by Jesus in Matthew 9.

**35 And Jesus went throughout all the cities and villages, TEACHING in their synagogues and PROCLAIMING the gospel of the kingdom and HEALING every disease and every affliction. 36 When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. 37 Then he said to his disciples, "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; 38 therefore PRAY earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to SEND OUT laborers into his harvest." And he CALLED to him his twelve disciples and GAVE THEM AUTHORITY over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and TO HEAL every disease and every affliction....5 These twelve Jesus SENT OUT, instructing them...(Matthew 9:35-38; 10:1, 5)**

- 1. Teaching v. 35a
  - 2. Proclaiming/Preaching v. 35b
  - 3. Healing v. 35c
  - 4. Earnest Contending Prayer v. 38
  - 5. Apostolic Sending v. 38, 10:1, 5)
- E. It's not enough to have a socially stable community. We need to get a higher vision than that. Acts 13 and Matthew 9 community and ministry is our standard. Many are satisfied if the social needs of people are met (which is an unrealistic expectation that no community has ever met) and if the outward operation of the ministry is functioning like all the other ministries. But other ministries aren't the Biblical standard - the New Testament is. It's important to note that Matthew 9 and Acts 13 mirror each other in that they present a Spirit-wrought community marked by signs and wonders with the indispensable foundation of prayer.
  - F. In Acts 6 we read how the apostles understood their role when their ministry and community were expanding because of supernatural increase:
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Now in these days when the disciples were increasing in number, a complaint by the Hellenists arose against the Hebrews because their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution [practical needs not being met because of the expansion]. **2** And the twelve summoned the full number of the disciples and said, "It is not right that we should give up preaching the word of God to serve tables. **3** Therefore, brothers, pick out from among you seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we will appoint to this duty. **4** But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word." **5** And what they said pleased the whole gathering, and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, and Philip, and Prochorus, and Nicanor, and Timon, and Parmenas, and Nicolaus, a proselyte of Antioch. **6** These they set before the apostles, and they prayed and laid their hands on them. **7** And the word of God continued to increase, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests became obedient to the faith. (Acts 6:1-7)