



# Multigenerational **Family** Communities

DICK SCOGGINS

## “Houston, we have a problem...”

**T**hat phrase came to mind when I was teaching a European group of young adults in Amsterdam in 2002 on planting house churches. The problem was that the word “church” was just a total turn-off to this young generation. So I suggested that we look for other words to capture the essence of the Jesus communities in which nurture and transformation were normal as well as discovering and developing in one’s calling. I threw out a phrase that I was experimenting with in my small communities in England and very much liked: “Jesus families.”

A woman in her mid-20s shook her head and blurted out, “Too much pain.” I noticed the nodding of many others in the room. I realized that the problem was much bigger than I thought: I had thought we merely needed to find a usable term for these types



*Dick and his wife Catherine have extensive church planting experience in the U.S. and have spent many years coaching church planters to the Muslim world. In 1992 he joined with George Patterson and wrote **Church Multiplication Guide**. Dick has also written **Planting House Churches in Networks, Building***

*Effective Church Planting Team and Transformational Ministry. His books and Manuals are available on his website, [www.dickscoggins.com](http://www.dickscoggins.com) and have been translated into several languages. He moved to Los Angeles in 2010 and has started work with a new effort called “The Guild” which will focus on training up a new generation of apostles. You may contact him at: [dick@dickscoggins.com](mailto:dick@dickscoggins.com)*

of communities, but instead found out that the very foundation of the kingdom of God—the family—was so damaged that the concept was unusable. So how do we build the kingdom of God (Kingdom Communities) when the foundation is so damaged?

I grew up in a non-Christian home which fell apart in the late 1960s when I was in my first year at university and when such family failure placed a black mark by your name (“Don’t marry someone from a divorced background—they will just get divorced!”). The next six years of my life were shaped by that brokenness and despair until I finally found Jesus, who began a journey of healing for me. This included getting reconciled to both my parents and working within the family I had, not an ideal family. God, by His grace, brought that healing through the woman who became my wife as well as through a mentor, an older Christian man who was my father’s age. Thirty-seven years later I continue on that road of healing and wholeness, still married to the wonderful woman that God gave me, and linked by family to my spiritual father through my son, who married his granddaughter.

I realized from that wake-up call in Holland in 2002 that I had been on a special journey helped by others which led to my healing and having a legacy of a healthy family to pass on to my children. I really did not choose the journey, but God placed special people in my life, and I grabbed hold of them like a drowning man.

It was this experience in Amsterdam that opened my eyes to just how badly the Western world has been

fragmented. I had been living in England for eight years at that point after coming to faith in New England in the mid-1970s.

The city in England where my wife and I lived had an excellent evangelical church, and my wife and I often went there. But I realized that it was a church which embraced the Good News for the 1970s and the people there reflected that. They were all my age! My wife and I very much liked the church, but it was pretty clear that they did not have good news relevant to the younger generation since few of that generation came. As I traveled more widely, I realized that in Europe and America most churches had “marketed” themselves to a specific audience. Those that attended did so because the church was meeting their needs. But this was usually to a pretty narrow audience (homogeneous unit principle!).

My mind went back to a book I had read some years before by Chuck Colson, *Against the Night*. In that book he refers to those he calls the “new barbarians.” In this book Colson foresees these new barbarians, who embrace a radical individualism governed by selfish interest, as a greivous danger to Western culture. When I read this book, I felt it was a bit of an exaggeration and yet too insightful to ignore. But my 16 years in Europe convinced me that this book was indeed prophetic, and Colson was not overstating the danger. It was in this flash of insight that I got in Amsterdam and the reflections after it that crystallized the next era of life for me that I embraced by moving to California from England in 2010.

Perhaps because of my broken family, God’s familial nature and plan spoke strongly to me as I began to follow Him in the 1970s. I was captivated by the Genesis story where God pursues mankind through families, from Adam and Eve, through Noah, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and my favorite, Joseph. I was impressed early by God’s declaration to Abraham that “in you all the families of the earth will be blessed” (Genesis 12:3, NASB). Through the rest of the Old Testament and into the New, God pursues mankind through families. In Ephesians 3:15 Paul speaks of God as the Father of Mankind, and “through Him every family in heaven and earth derives its name” (food for more thought on the heavenly families!). Family is not some construct that man designed. Earthly family reflects the very image of God’s heavenly family!

When we began starting house churches in Rhode Island in the late 1980s, it was for the purpose of learning how

to start underground churches in closed countries. After a few years of doing this, we felt we had learned what we needed, so we suggested to the house churches that they combine and become a large church. After all, America loves big! But at the meeting, several of the younger leaders, recent college graduates, said that in the house church they were able to watch parents interact with their kids and with other parents—it was church meeting like a family. They felt this was so valuable that, even with all its liabilities, they wanted to keep the church in the homes.

As we started house fellowships in England, myself and another older man, Ted, became the “grandfathers” to the group of 20-somethings. We found that “grandfathers” are able to bring healing and reconciliation to the

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brokenness between fathers and their children, so that the next generation can rebuild the foundations and start healthy families. The kingdom of God does not have to be built on broken foundations.

Ted continues this ministry to young men and women in England today.

After my experience in Amsterdam, I became convinced that if there is any hope for Western culture, it will only be as we heed the prophetic warnings of Chuck Colson, to turn away from self-centered, radical individualism, and focus intentionally on rebuilding the family unit in the West, where radical individualism is countered by multi-generational families which include grandfathers and grandmothers who are willing to lay down their lives for their kids and their legacy, and where the 55+-year olds stop focusing on themselves, but on their legacy of family which they will leave behind.

Jesus said “If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them” (John 13:17). So this past year my wife and I packed up our bags and moved from England to Southern California, where we have never lived, to join both our children in their families and their four children to learn how to build the Kingdom through multi-generational family. The early part of the journey has proved to be difficult, with one of the blessings being that my daughter and her husband have moved in with us with their first child (our fourth grandchild).

Building multi-generational family groups is not easy as you can’t escape your mistakes in your own parenting with your adult children and you can’t control how your kids interact with each other, or raise their children! Being a grandparent is not at all like being a parent. But

there are things you can do, like loving your grandchildren without needing to discipline them! The parents remain the parents. But the grandparents can give both the grandchildren and your adult kids a perspective that can only come with age—an ability to look back on previous generations and glean the good from them as well as look to the future and try to give perspective from a God with whom “one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day” (2 Peter 3:8).

The kingdom of God was never about individual salvation. The only time God said “it is *not* good” is when he created Adam without Eve. His evaluation? “It is not good for man to be alone” (Genesis 2:18). And so, God created Eve and they became a family. And even after they had fallen, God continued to pursue them: “Where are you?” He cries as He visits the garden after they had eaten of the fruit. God is not an individual, but a communal being, and he created man to be a communal being. God is the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob—a God of multi-generational families.

And the Old Testament is a story of God’s pursuit of man down through the generations of family. Even after the first siblings, Cain and Abel, have a breakdown of relationship so severe that Cain kills his brother, God never gives up on pursuing man through the unit He created them in—the family. We call Him “Father” and Jesus “Son” because family was not dreamed up by mankind, but was the pattern of God Himself, and we created in His image—the familial God.

In the West we need to acknowledge the brokenness that our selfishness and self-centeredness has brought, repent and turn to God asking Him to restore the years the locusts have eaten and restore our families to ones that

reflect our familial God! God will use many ways of doing this, so I am not suggesting that our pattern is to be copied by anyone else. But we cannot allow our culture to consume itself. We need to proclaim a Kingdom that is Good News and brings healing—one that reflects the invisible God.

So I have begun this new leg of the journey by shifting my life to the west coast of the USA, where I need to build into my children’s lives and their world. God has provided new young men here that I can “grandfather” just as I was doing in England. I trust that these will be perhaps the most fruitful years of my life as God allows me to pour my life into younger men. And I am not the

BUILDING MULTI-GENERATIONAL FAMILY GROUPS IS NOT EASY AS YOU CAN'T ESCAPE YOUR MISTAKES IN YOUR OWN PARENTING WITH YOUR ADULT CHILDREN AND YOU CAN'T CONTROL HOW YOUR KIDS INTERACT WITH EACH OTHER, OR RAISE THEIR CHILDREN!

only one. I have been in dialogue with others who are embarking on a similar journey. One of my close grandfather-type friends, with whom I have talked at length on this topic over the last four years, has relocated to Asia and his extended family has joined him. Like

me, he has found it difficult and with many challenges. But the kingdom of God will always be countered by forces of darkness. God has called some of us to follow this path to see where it will lead.

Matthew 7:24-28: “Therefore everyone who hears these words of Mine and acts on them, may be compared to a wise man who built his house on the rock.

And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and slammed against that house; and yet it did not fall, for it had been founded on the rock.

Everyone who hears these words of Mine and does not act on them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. The rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and slammed against that house; and it fell—and great was its fall.” 🌐



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