

WHEN WE COME TOGETHER

Following Bible College, with a few years of youth pastoring under my belt, I was sent out by a denomination to establish a “home missions” church. In my zeal, I worked the community for two months. Going from door to door, I shared the news that we were starting a work in the area. On our first Sunday, seven people showed up, and the work began.

As a “Spirit-filled Pentecostal,” I began to build the church around my preaching gift, enhanced by an excellent music program. Over time, we slowly began to see numbers rise. I had set church growth goals, and we were on our way to establishing a thriving church.

An Incoming Message

God Speaks Just over a year later, I was up late one Saturday night putting finishing touches on the next day’s sermon. Praying and meditating, I felt the Lord desired to speak to me. As I grew still, He communicated some unsettling ideas.

He told me I was arrogant and proud to assume that my preaching would meet every person’s every need. I was surprised, because I counted myself to be humble and meek before the Lord. After all, I would spend hours in prayer each week in order to deliver the sermon powerfully.

The conviction was so strong that I asked the Lord what He wanted me to do. God directed me to get some sleep, do what I had planned for the next day, and we would discuss it the following week. Next morning I preached a sermon I had no desire to preach. I went home truly broken before the Lord and began a week of fasting and seeking Him.

That week, the Lord led me to I Corinthians 14:26: “How is it then, brethren? Whenever you come together, each of you has a psalm, has a teaching, has a tongue, has a revelation, has an interpretation. Let all things be done for edification.”

God’s Idea of a “Church Service”

For the first time, I saw what God truly desired in a “church service.” This revelation completely violated my faith and everything I had experienced in church, not to mention all my Bible training! The next Sunday, I stood before our congregation and read the Scripture. I told them that, the following week, they would be the ones responsible for any ministry. They should come dressed casually (heresy for Pentecostals!), and we would have lunch together.

The First Sunday

As the people arrived the following Sunday, they found the chairs in the sanctuary formed into a circle. The focus was not the pulpit or platform but rather the faces of their brothers and sisters. I stood up wearing my khakis and golf shirt, read I Corinthians 14:26 and

explained what would be taking place. Two solid minutes of silence passed before Sister Elaine, one of our dear old prayer warriors, began speaking... about death. I thought, "Well, this is going to be great!"

She spoke about the part of us that would live forever even after our physical bodies were gone. She spoke concerning hell and how its true torment was being separated from a loving God for eternity! Her final statement will forever ring in my ears! "If you do not know Jesus as your Lord and Savior, you are risking an eternity separated from the God that so lovingly designed and created you." Then she sat down.

More silence! But this time, a young 14-year old girl, named April, who was visiting, broke the silence with her weeping. I asked April if she knew the Lord. She responded, "No." I asked if she would like to receive Christ as her Savior. She nodded, and I asked for three ladies to pray with her.

Another lady began to weep. I asked, and she said yes! Three more ladies led her to the Lord!

Now what? Well, April's aunt began singing Amazing Grace. As the entire body joined in, you could sense the glory of God's presence. Truly, we had gathered in His name and He was in our midst! I found myself weeping hot tears. I expressed to the Lord how frustrating it was that I could study and pray all week, preach my guts out, and still have to beg people to come to the altar. The Lord

responded simply, "It is amazing what I can do when given the opportunity!"

That afternoon, we laughed and cried. Prayed for one another; shared one another's burdens. Worshipped. Broke bread with one another. No one left until mid-afternoon!

This experience forever changed my life and view of ministry. It did take a while to realize that my "career" was over. But once you taste the reality of a corporate expression, you cannot return to the former religious structures!

2700 NEW HOUSE CHURCHES IN UP, INDIA Around two years ago, Uttar Pradesh (previously a Hindu stronghold with its 175 million inhabitants) began to open for the Gospel. This had been preceded by many Northern Indian Christians' intense prayer. Since then, tens of thousands have come to faith; some 2,700 new house churches have been planted in Northern and Central India alone since January 2003. Around 1,800 church planters and house church leaders are involved in the UP Project - a long-term missionary initiative aiming to plant 1 million new churches by 2010. Pairs of church planters go to pray in villages, typically visiting ten villages each day. They introduce themselves to the mayor, and ask whether there is anything for which they can pray. They then pray, fast and preach the Gospel until they find a "house of peace"- one of the villagers opens his house as a house of prayer. This often happens following a healing or deliverance from demonic possession. When the first people come to believe in Jesus, they are immediately instructed on how to follow Him. There are already around 24,000 "houses of peace" in 4,000 of Uttar Pradesh's villages. These houses of peace are only called "house

churches” when the new believers seriously follow Jesus and have been baptized.

- Report from India