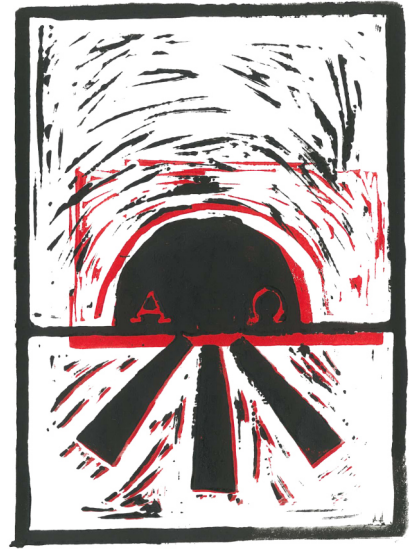


God is Enough

the alpha and omega of church

A summary and discussion starter



Introduction

- Patterns of ministry are changing
- Technology and contemporary forms of work and leisure impinge upon times that not too long ago were sacrosanct
- As we respond to these changes there will be many occasions when our patterns of life and ministry need to change
- We are liable to fall into some common traps

Question: What would you describe as the big 'pitfalls' in church life?

Part A: Common pitfalls congregations face as they work through daily life together

1. Go with what you've got

Each individual has gifts and plays a part – body metaphor

- Grow together
- Recognise each other's true value
- Grow into God-given capacities
- We are capable because we're called together by God, and who has decided to use us in his world-changing plans

Question: What would you need to be able to grow in your capacity to serve?

2. Behave like you want to become

- Waiting until others arrive before changing is self-defeating
- Try out some changed behaviours before they are necessary
- Change is tricky...and often difficult. Therefore, it will take time and the application of God's gifts
- Wait for one another
- Live in love
- Learn to withdraw and worship and return to daily life as a witness
- Yearn after God
- Hear what God has told us and respond

- Identify and put in place the change that will be completed by God
- Yearn for change, seeking to empower others, yet be patient and help spiritual roots grow deep and strong

Questions: What is God calling you to be? What small change can be made to start the journey there?

3. Don't focus just on Sunday

- It's a trap to think that a polished worship service will win people
- Worship is primarily about hearing and receiving God
- Desire to see Jesus
- Seek to glimpse God's greatness, not to turn worship into a performance
- Offer up praise
- Do not set out to attract others, but let our activity make sense of the Gospel
- Use Monday to Saturday to declare that God really is good

Questions: What have you found attractive in key Christians' lives? How could you emulate this?

4. Grasp your calling

- Seeking a 'hook' to get people in is a trap, i.e. marketing church so that others will be tempted to visit, stop, and stay
- We risk destroying trust when our real purpose becomes apparent
- "As the Father has sent me, so I send you!" – So, go!
- We are God's mission – we are 'sent ones'
- Tell and re-tell that Jesus has risen from the dead
- Our role is a humble one – we are emissaries
- Look for opportunities to grow alongside people in relationship

Question: How would humility and confidence work in your life?

5. Don't try too hard

- Release people to devote their time to ministry and outreach
- Avoid trying to make things happen
- Keep worship and interaction with people as the focus
- Be honest about our vulnerabilities with God and each other
- Become strong through our weaknesses
- Don't seek position
- Don't hold to structures
- Mission is not to sustain a structure
- Love God, love each other and the world around us

Activity: Think of three substances that are durable even if soft.

Question: How can this way of being be translated into Christian living?

Part B:

Reasons why we may have hope as congregations, churches, and the Church

1. God is the God of the upside-down kingdom

- Are we disheartened by decline in Christianity and losing numbers?
- Hope is in the character of God, who is the God of an upside-down kingdom
- God's church is not the usual pattern where the strong rise and then dominate the weak. Rather, the God who is strong provides us strength

Activity: Try and name as many 'surprising' heroes of the Bible (i.e. those ones whom you would not normally expect to figure).

Question: What does God do through them?

2. Jesus' body still has not been produced

- The easiest way to kill this hope, and the uncomfortable consequences it has for human power structures that wish to dominate and control, is to produce a body. The body was not produced

Question: If Jesus has been raised from the dead how does this change your outlook on life?

3. People keep on being changed

- It can be disheartening to hear the clear declarations dismissing Christianity as a relic of the past
- Keep your eyes open to see the many different things God does
- By sending the Spirit, the Father and Son have released the enlivening power that we cannot summon for ourselves

Activity: Share with each other a story of how God's Spirit has changed a life or brought hope in a hopeless situation.

4. The seeming contraction of Christianity in the west and north, balanced by huge growth in the east and south – often despite powerlessness

- We are not a minority, the church is growing in other parts of the world
- We have the chance to engage in open and generous fellowship with these parts of God's church

Activity: Research a church or denomination in a different country. Share what you have learned.

5. Still the best language for significant moments in life

- The general community infrastructure now provides an outlet for many of the social pastimes the church once fulfilled
- It seems that the liturgical set pieces, which mark the milestones of life, have also become less important for many
- Take hold of opportunities to draw alongside those in our communities who are experiencing a window to eternity, but do not have the language to describe, let alone respond well, to it
- Conversation begins with listening and is a shared experience. Many who perceive a window on eternity, but are bewildered by the experience, will value the opportunity to hear our take on what it signifies and how to move past a vague recognition to discover the God who dwells there. We have this knowledge and, with a bit of courage, can gently share what we know

Activity: Pull out a Prayer Book and read through a Baptism, Funeral or Marriage Service.

Questions: What 'phases' does it move through? How does it teach us to address God...or be addressed by God?

6. We are the only ones who can truly claim a national presence

- Civic and commercial institutions have been withdrawing from small communities for many years now
- Churches dotted throughout the suburbs and towns can claim national coverage

- It is tangible evidence of Jesus' promise to protect his church
- By preserving the relationships that nurture and encourage social cohesion, Christian people are very often loved and valued by their communities

Activity: Find a map of Australia. As a group work out all the different churches or congregations you have visited or know of and point them out on the map.

7. Connectedness is in our DNA

- Christians are connected
- One way we as the church can serve a community that desires local and global connection is to make our everyday activities, which nurture connection, visible and accessible

Activity: Play the game '6 degrees of separation'. Think of a famous Christian on the world stage (e.g. the Archbishop of Canterbury or the Pope) and then see what links you have through your Christian friends and their networks. See how many different ethnic or social groups you link through.

8. We have 'franchises' everywhere

- The distribution of congregations worshipping God throughout Australia would be the envy of most franchising businesses
- Congregations scattered throughout Australia are focussed on the quality of the relationships that they enable
- The congregations of the church in Australia are not uniform. Yet, they provide a deep and wide insight, for the many who are not disciples of Jesus, as to what discipleship means

Activity: Do some research and find a church community in another part of Australia and tell the group what they are doing and how they are bearing witness to God.

9. Those who have stayed are highly engaged...they have to be

- To decide to come to church requires an act of the will
- Even though the frequency of church attendance may be lower than in the past, adherence survives
- Those who choose to remain engaged do so because of overriding spiritual values
- We have an engaged and committed mob. Why else in this environment would people choose to come?

Activity: Tell the group why you are still engaged and committed.

10. There are green shoots everywhere

- It can feel as if we travel through a dry and inhospitable land where only the hardiest of specimens survive. Yet this is far from the truth. There are green shoots everywhere

Activity: Talk about some exciting new Christian endeavours you have seen or been part of...look for the tender new growth not necessarily the hardy tree!

Conclusion

As you conclude this study respond to to each of these questions

- *What is your call?*
- *Who is it that God has made you to be?*
- *What has God equipped you to do?*
- *Which part of his mission do you fulfil?*
- *What step to follow Jesus is before your feet ... and those of your church?*

God is enough!