

# The Ubiquitous Gospel:

What Happens To The Local Church When The Gospel Goes Global?





How The Internet Will Challenge The Church At Its Deepest Level

# **PART1: THE CHALLENGE**



# THE UBIQUITOUS GOSPEL

- The gospel is now ubiquitous, it is now almost everywhere geographically (except a few extreme situations such as Saudi Arabia and N. Korea)
- The gospel is also now available on every media platform imaginable: radio, TV, print, magazines, film, video, satellite TV, satellite radio, the Internet, mobile phones, flash drives, Internet radio, theatre, live music, performance arts...
- The gospel is no longer just preached by an ordained clergyman in a local church, licensed by a bishop, who in turn is approved and appointed by the King! (Which was the situation for thousands of years)



## **YOU CAN NOW:**

1. Make a faith commitment to Christ online
2. Make Christian friends on Facebook
3. Read and study the Bible from a website
4. Hear first-class preaching on YouTube
5. Get worship music on Spotify or iTunes
6. Send out prayer points on Twitter
7. Find a Christian wife or husband on [ChristianMingle.com](http://ChristianMingle.com)



## **MINISTRY (You can now..)**

1. Do any of numerous Internet-based bible college courses or distance-education seminary courses
2. Get a legal, valid ordination certificate online
3. Write a book and get it published on Amazon
4. Register as an online 501c3 Christian ministry
5. Recruit volunteers via [ChristianVolunteering.Org](http://ChristianVolunteering.Org)
6. Collect donations via [Paypal](http://Paypal)
7. Send the money to missionaries in Africa that you met online and who sent you a video about what they do..



## **WITHOUT:**

- Going to a local church – ever
- Being baptized
- Taking communion
- Belonging to a denomination
- Teaching Sunday School or taking any responsibility
- Meeting with a pastor
- Actually meeting another Christian face-to-face
- Giving to a local church on a regular basis



## **DISCIPLINE?**

1. You can sleep around and do drugs and still get away with it because no-one knows you except through your FB profile
2. You can preach, teach and believe almost any doctrine that you like with minimal correction.
3. You can verbally abuse people online and then “vanish”
4. You can drift away without anyone seemingly noticing or caring
5. You can make outrageous prophecies and rip-people off by the thousands with very little likelihood of any serious legal action ever.



## WHY SHOULD I?

1. Go to church when I can just worship at home?
2. Go to the prayer meeting when I can tweet my prayer points?
3. Accept local church discipline when the world is my church and I have Christian friends everywhere?
4. Give 10% of my income when I can get the same wonderful information for free on YouTube?
5. Believe your theology over my own theology or Prophet Bob's theology?
6. Ever bother with church membership or denominational loyalty?
7. Put up with church politics and gossip?





## **BESIDES....**

1. I don't want to pay for church buildings!
2. It's the people that are the church not the organization.
3. I don't like traditional religion.
4. There is no difference between clergy and laity - so I don't need the clergy and everyone's a missionary, so I can share my faith online all over the globe.
5. Church is boring and I don't have the time and I am tired on Sundays and I can do Internet church late at night and drink coffee!



# WHAT PEOPLE DO NOT WANT

- More rules and obligations
- Any intrusion on their privacy or personal lives
- Having to pay for information “which should be free”
- Any restriction on their ability to choose their information / beliefs /lifestyle
- Anything that “wastes their time”
- Anything that makes prior claims on them
- One-way communication by authority figures
- The Internet indulges this kind of selfish spirituality!



## **WHERE IS THIS LEADING?**

- To narcissism, vanity, and self-absorption
- To isolation, and to idiosyncratic self-assembled faith
- To instant intimacy followed by instant rejection
- To theological lawlessness and spiritual anarchy
- To resistance to criticism, feedback and accountability
- To a complete lack of denominational authority
- To multiple theological sources in any local church
- To Bible teaching becoming a freely available commodity of no necessary commercial value



# DENOMINATIONAL COLLAPSE

- Denominational loyalty began to collapse in the 70's with the rise of independent mega-churches
- Denominational pronouncements on life and doctrine were being widely ignored when I began my ministry in the 80's and as people embraced new theological movements as lay leaders.
- The Internet has completed the demise of the theological role of the denomination as the laity can get their theology from almost anywhere. Who cares what the Archbishop thinks?
- The most important role of some denominations is now the clergy retirement plan and health benefits!



# OUR INFORMATION IS NO LONGER UNIQUE!

- The UNIQUE informational role of the local church is rapidly diminishing to almost zero.
- If people have a theological question they tend to ask Google, instead of asking their “busy” pastor!
- The local church pastor is competing for theological influence with John Piper, Joel Osteen and Bob Jones
- The *unique* selling point of the local church is now COMMUNITY and not COMMUNICATION



# THE MEANING OF CHURCH

- The meaning of church is deeply connected with the meaning of human persons and also with what it means to be a Christian who is in the process of becoming like Jesus.
- If we are just biological computers with finite life-spans then information is enough and we can do church in cyberspace.
- If we are relational and eternal spiritual beings meant to share agape love in the presence of Jesus Christ, in the power of the Holy Ghost, then we need truly church, other believers and spiritual authority.
- Church needs to treat Christians as if they are important relational and spiritual beings and not just as brains in a pew!



How The Local Church Can Reinststate Its Place In The 21<sup>st</sup> Century

# **REINSTATING THE CHURCH**



## **WHERE IS CHURCH UNIQUE?**

- Life Rituals: weddings, baptisms, funerals, dedications
- Architecture, glory, quiet spaces, retreat centers etc
- Connection to history and tradition, family experiences
- Communal Prayer
- Anointed worship / Presence of God
- Community support during catastrophe
- Small groups of faith where people can pursue God together
- A feeling of being personally known and cared for





## **WHAT I THINK PEOPLE WANT**

- Friends, prayer-partners, spiritual encouragement
- Seminar style-teaching esp. on the difficult topics.
- Powerful experiential worship and altar ministry
- A sense of connection with the pastoral team
- Supportive pastoral and biblical counseling
- Life-coaching on a 1:1 or small group basis
- Prayer for healing, exorcism, house-cleansing etc.
- Life rituals: baptisms, weddings, funerals etc.
- To be part of an amazing story of God's glory



## **SOME RADICAL ADJUSTMENTS**

- Preach to connect and to transform not just to inform.
- Preach longer! Preach until you get a tangible result!
- Focus Sundays on powerful worship and on prayer for the sick and on hearing from God directly in fellowship with others.
- Put complex topics on a website or in seminar-style in-service courses and not on Sunday morning.
- Regularly pray for people and lay hands on them and get them to experience God's very personal touch in their lives. Pray publicly, powerfully and with authority.
- Deliberately create community and spiritual relationships



## **LISTENER-IN-CHIEF**

- In cyberspace no one really hears you scream, the modern soul is almost totally uncared for, this is a need the local church can meet!
- There is a **DESPERATE** need to be deeply listened to, over a long period of time, to be taken seriously and to be known deeply for one's life story. The pastor should be chief-listener and also train others in how to listen to souls.
- The pastor who truly listens will gain great loyalty and influence
- You will of course have to discern out the neurotic attention-seekers
- Stephen Ministries offers great training in supportive listening



## QUESTIONER-IN-CHIEF

- People grow when they are questioned about their spiritual life “Who do you say that I am?” “Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?” “What are you doing here Elijah?” “Adam, where are you?”
- When people know they are going to be asked how they are going (and listened to deeply) they spend all week making sure they have grown in that area!
- People WANT to be questioned in an appreciative manner (not interrogation) in order to unlock them, unblock them, and set them free in the Spirit.



## **CRAZY-GUY-IN-CHIEF**

- Be an example of really bold “way-out-there” faith
- Peter walking on the water, going to the Gentiles etc.
- People will only grow as far as they see their leader growing and its got to be really **OBVIOUS** to them
- Tell adventure stories, stretch their boundaries
- Demonstrate real power in prayer and healing etc
- Be a living example of God turning up in real time
- Be much more real than a pixel!



## EXPERIENCING GOD

- We want to experience God at church, powerfully, tangibly, for real and we cannot get this on the Internet.
- We want to walk out of church feeling great and knowing that God spoke to us personally and directly and healed us, saved, us, changed us or opened Heaven to us.
- We want to have our prayers answered
- We want to experience God's love in community
- We don't mind very long services if this happens
- We will tithe and give generously if this happens



# THE GLORY OF THE STORY

- We go to church to be part of the story of God's glory
- A traditional story of ecclesiastical history for some
- A story of "out-of-the gutter" redemption for others
- A story of community involvement / evangelism
- A story of world-wide missions for some churches
- A story of inner-healing and soul searching
- A story of spiritual victory over demons
- What story can we offer that is better than the online story? How can we connect that story with biblical truth?



## A DEEPER WORK

- Church can do a far deeper work in the lives of Christians than the Internet ever can!
- Our focus needs to be **TRANSFORMATIONAL** not just **INFORMATIONAL** because the Internet is so good at information and will make us irrelevant in seconds.
- We need to set clear, strong goals for doing a deeper work in the life of every congregant and adopt highly relational, personal, experiential and faith-challenging methods to effect this deeper work.





## MAKING THE SHIFT

- If God doesn't show up then the Internet will absolutely decimate the local church and send it broke.
- Church needs to eventually shift to being very human, very spiritual, very connected and deeply transformational as these are the unique points that will differentiate the local church from the computer screen.
- Doctrine is still vital but needs to be reframed as part of our equipping for the amazing adventure of living in Christ.
- Ministry training needs to focus on being able to make things happen just as Jesus did: "heal the sick, cleanse the lepers" -- the pastor needs to be able to make stuff happen by the power of God!



## **MAKING THE SHIFT - 2**

- No strategic plan can make this shift possible!
- We need to spend bulk time with God and get a far deeper anointing, powerful agape love and a commitment to growing human souls into the glory of God.
- We ourselves have to value community more than privacy and be more open to our congregants.
- We have to reframe the task as spiritual participation in a divine story and not as merely dumping information into minds in order to get out correct beliefs.



# HOW CAN LOCAL CHURCHES USE THE INTERNET?

- The Internet is not all bad! It can also be a force for good in the local church and help to build community and direct people to helpful information.
- Put the most complex topics online (e.g. an explanation of the Trinity)
- Put things people will never remember online (church schedules etc)
- Put sensitive “non-pulpit” topics online (teaching on sexuality)
- Create (moderated) FaceBook pages and discussion areas
- Use it to create “buzz” and report feedback from faith adventures



## **FACE TO FACE + CYBERSPACE**

- Cyberspace is useful to create continuity between physical face-to-face meetings e.g. to send out invitations via FB or daily bible verses via Twitter feeds.
- Webinars can be part of the in-service training modality in churches where staff may work from home or travel constantly.
- Brief (4 weeks or less) online in-service courses via a LMS such as Moodle can be useful in membership orientation, gifts analysis, elder board training, worship team planning, stewardship teaching etc.



## REFRAMING INFORMATION

- Put the information online and make it ubiquitous for the church – in as many formats as possible, in their mail, on FaceBook, on Twitter, on their phones, MP3 players, iPods, computers, DVDs etc.
- Teach the congregation how to evaluate and filter information
- Realize that information *by itself* rarely produces much transformation
- Therefore create spiritual faith experiences and deep relationships that shape people into the image of Jesus Christ.
- Focus the bulk of the pastoral and lay leader resources on doing this deeper work.



# ABOUT CYBERMISSIONS

## Using the Internet As The Fishing Net!

[Globalchristians.Org](http://Globalchristians.Org) [Cybermissions.Org](http://Cybermissions.Org) [NewTestamentPrayer.Org](http://NewTestamentPrayer.Org)

This PowerPoint is now available online at: [www.cybermissions.org/articles/](http://www.cybermissions.org/articles/)

21615 Berendo Ave. (Suite 400) Torrance CA 90502 Ph: 310-783-1510

Email John at: [digitalopportunities@gmail.com](mailto:digitalopportunities@gmail.com)

**John Edmiston is available for speaking engagements and for consultancy work relating to the Christian use of the Internet.**