

neil cole


author of *Organic Church: Growing Faith Where Life Happens*

foreword by francis chan

# church 3.0

upgrades for the  
future of the church



A LEADERSHIP  NETWORK PUBLICATION

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## introduction

# what about this book?

## shifting from church 2.0 to 3.0

*It is impossible for a man to learn what he thinks he  
already knows.*

—EPICTETUS

DID YOU EVER have a silly song in your head that you wished you could get rid of? It happens to us all. Some songs are so contagious that if one person hums the tune for two minutes, soon everyone in the room will be humming or thinking about the same song.

Chip and Dan Heath tell of an interesting Ph.D. study conducted at Stanford in 1990 based on a simple game of tapping songs.<sup>1</sup> There were two roles for people to play in this experiment: “tappers” and “listeners.” The tappers were each given twenty-five well-known songs such as “Happy Birthday to You” and told to tap the melody on a table. Listeners were to guess the name of the song. It sounds simple enough.

In the experiment, a total of 120 songs were tapped out. The listeners guessed right on only 2.5 percent of the songs. The listeners succeeded in guessing the right song 3 tries out of 120. What was remarkable about the study, and what merits repeating

the story here, is that the tappers were asked to predict their success prior to tapping. They estimated that the listeners would figure it out 50 percent of the time. How could they be so far off? That is what is so interesting in the study.

The problem is that when the tapper taps, she is hearing the song played in her head. You can't do the exercise without hearing the song; try it. The listeners, however, do not hear the song in their head; all they hear is a collection of random taps as if someone is trying to tell them some encrypted message with Morse Code.

Tappers were amazed how hard it seemed for the listeners to figure out the tune. When they guessed wrong on a well-known song such as "The Star Spangled Banner," they would just look at the listener in a flabbergasted way, as if the listener were stupid.

The Heath brothers concluded: "The problem is that the tappers have been given knowledge (the song title) that makes it impossible for them to imagine what it's like to lack that knowledge. When they're tapping, they can't imagine what it's like for the listeners to hear isolated taps rather than a song. This is the Curse of Knowledge. Once we know something, we find it hard to imagine what it is like to not know it."<sup>2</sup>

In many ways, I believe we evangelical Christians suffer from the curse of knowledge. Not that knowledge is evil or a bad thing to have, but it can prevent us from learning something new. How many times have you tried to explain something new to someone, only to watch his eyes glaze over with inattentiveness and then hear him say repeatedly, "Yeah, I know. I know." You know the person doesn't really know, but try convincing the person of it. This is the curse of knowledge preventing someone from hearing something new. It happens all the time.

When it comes to explaining some of the remarkable changes that are coming with Church 3.0, we simply must address the curse of knowledge before we can go much further. For hundreds of years now, we have all been operating under the knowledge of an old system, and it is all we have known. We have had the same song in our head for centuries. For you to even be somewhat open to the new ideas I am suggesting in this book, we need to address the fact that what you have known is not necessarily the only way to understand things in the Bible or the church.

I am not proposing that we dump the Bible and instead learn from sociologists and trendy pop thinkers. In fact, quite the opposite: I want us to seriously ask ourselves if what we have always assumed to be in the Bible is indeed there. You see, I think we have a song in our head when we read the Scriptures, and the result is that we hear what is playing in our head more than what is written on the page. We are thumping out the tune on our Bibles instead of letting the Scripture teach us a new song. We must set our minds free from the ancient songs that are rattling in our heads and read the New Testament as if for the very first time. Is it really possible? If we are bold enough to try, we can discover some interesting things. I want to challenge you to take that adventure.

The truth is, it will serve you well throughout this book to try to mute the songs in your head, the ones written by our church fathers, and look at the Scriptures with fresh eyes. For far too long, Christian leaders have claimed that an idea is “biblical” because they want it to be. In reality, all they did was simply tag on a few verses, often taken out of context, and put parentheses at the end of *their* idea. Doing this claims unfounded authority for ideas, but it also teaches a song. All of us have done this. We need to stop, so I am asking you for a little grace to listen to what I am saying in this book.

Be noble-minded, like the Berean people in Acts 17:10–15: “Now these were more noble-minded . . . for they received the word with great eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see whether these things were so.” Having learned the Old Testament and the song of the rabbinical teachers for years, suddenly they were hearing some remarkable truths that countered all they had been taught for centuries. They checked the Scriptures with eagerness to learn and find out what was said. They were not closed-minded; they were noble-minded, and there is a difference—a big one.

You will probably find, at some point in this book, that what I am sharing jars your sensibilities because it may be a radical departure from all you have known about church. It is possible that I am not reading the Scriptures well. Then again, it is possible that the song we have been taught to sing is not really prescribed in the Bible. It may be a good song, but there could be

other good songs, perhaps even better ones. Be eager to search the Scriptures with a noble mind, but only if you have the courage to discover that you may not have been dancing to the right tune.

## **upgrading the operating system**

Computer software upgrades can be a blessing and a curse. They come with fanfare and promise. Sometimes they deliver on the promise; at other times, they deliver nothing but headaches.

The software is often updated in secrecy and then released to the public without any true testing of how the changes will interact with third-party products. You may be the one to discover that the upgrade doesn't work with the important systems you rely on every day. System patches and new plug-ins are released to try to mend the problems after the fact. For this reason, many experts suggest that you wait several months to adopt a new upgrade, so that others can be the lab rats that either find the cheese at the end of the maze or become trapped in the process. Once the early adopter rats are happily consuming a wealth of fresh cheddar, then you can safely make the switch.

What would happen if everyone stopped upgrading? The consequence would make a poor upgrade seem like the greatest breakthrough since the light bulb. Why? If we stop upgrading, we stop growing, learning, and becoming better. We need to improve, all the time. Granted, this leaves us with the potential for poor-quality upgrades, but that is better than no upgrades at all.

For some reason, the church is always the slowest to upgrade. Our conservative religious nature, which borders on superstition, tends to make everything sacred (especially things that are not meant to be so) and therefore untouchable. The result is that the church is often left behind, and soon irrelevant. When a ministry is blessed by God, we consider it His endorsement of the method. Long after the method is out of sync with culture and out of step with any good results, we still consider it God's way and keep it going—often for decades or even centuries. Making changes in the church is often considered heretical and blasphemous. The sound of the eight lethal words of church management still echo in the boardrooms of the Western churches: "But we've never done it that way before."



In software, as in the church, some upgrades are routine and minor, aimed at making the system a little better equipped to face the challenges of the day. Usually, a new feature or two, along with necessary patches, are added to the same basic system. In those cases, the upgrade usually bears the same first digit but is a fractionally higher number; the move is from 2.3 to 2.4, or maybe from 2.3 to 2.3.1.

Occasionally an upgrade changes the entire system. When blended technology, lessons learned by experience and testing, and breakthroughs in computer technology itself all demand a new system, patches and added features are not enough. The old system must be scrapped and the new one put in its place. Those upgrades are demarked by a change in the first digit of the software—from 2.7 to 3.0.

Of course, there is a learning curve that comes with this new upgrade, but the new advancements are so valuable that they make the learning worthwhile. A short time after this occurs, an entire industry can step up and make the old systems and hardware that supported them entirely obsolete. Stores discontinue the old technology as the whole industry moves forward. Remember DOS and floppy disks?

A good upgrade does a few things. It makes operation simpler and more intuitive. It also is more powerful in accomplishing all its important tasks. Finally, a good upgrade opens up the software to whole new markets that would never have tried to use the product in the past.

There have been two major upgrades in church formation, since Acts, that have changed the entire system. The first occurred dramatically during the rule of the Emperor Constantine. The church shifted from an underground, grassroots, organic movement to a more institutionalized organization. I believe the second is occurring now.

## **church 1.0**

The first-century church was Church 1.0, with its minor differences. The Jerusalem church would have been the original Church 1.0. Antioch would be Church 1.1. The Galatian churches, started in the first journey of Paul and Barnabas, would

represent Church 1.2. Corinth would represent a change to 1.3, as Paul added some patches to how he approached church. The Ephesian church would be Church 1.4. And so the changes went on, through two centuries of church life, kept simple and organic by oppression and persecution from ten Roman emperors. Heresies emerged and were purged. There was the establishment of regional bishops and institutionalization of some of the forms of Christianity during this period, but overall the church remained a grassroots, marginalized movement under the heat of intense persecution.

All that changed in 313 A.D., when Constantine declared that the empire would not only tolerate Christianity but restore to the church all lost property. He was the first “Christian” emperor; Christianity went instantly from the margins to the mainstream, and everything changed. Christianity became the state religion, and the church did not change much from that point on. This was the shift to Church 2.0 and all its eventual variants.

## **church 2.0**

Over the centuries, after Constantine, the Western church evolved in many ways, but none has been a significant systemic change. There was establishment of both the Roman Catholic Church and the Eastern Orthodox Church, and for hundreds of years there were very few changes. The Reformation split the Western church into the Roman Church and the volatile Protestant church, or Church 2.1. In spite of the differences, the institutional system remained mostly unchanged. The Reformation set loose (and persecuted) the Anabaptists, but this was just a change from Church 2.1 to 2.2. Whether the church adapts to reach coal miners in eighteenth-century England or postmodern pilgrims in the twenty-first century, most of the changes have been patches and plug-ins to the Church 2.0 system. Whether you are talking about high church or low, Pentecostal or Reformed, the church has remained in the 2.0 range of upgrades. From Baptist to Brethren, from Mennonite to Methodist, the changes in the system are relatively untouched over the centuries. Music or no music? Pipe organ or electric guitar? Whether seeing tall ceilings with stained-glass windows, or

meeting in a box building without windows, the actual system of church has gone relatively unchanged.

You have the priests or pastors, the Sunday service with singing and a sermon, the weekly offering, the pulpit with pews, and the church building. These have been constants since the fourth century. Even if you move the whole show into a house instead of a church building, if the system hasn't changed you have only shrunk the church, not transformed it. Changing the style of music does not upgrade the system. Turning down the lights and turning up the volume is a simple patch to the same old system. Choirs and hymns or praise bands and fog machines, kneeling, or standing are miniscule changes to the system. Sermonizing with topical messages or expositional ones is not changing the system; it's making minor adjustments. Sunday schools or small groups as secondary learning environments are not a systemic change at all, just a variation on the same old operational system.

Although most of the advances to Church 2.0 over the centuries have been plug-ins and patches to the same old system, there have been anomalies along the way. Usually, these anomalies are the result of rampant persecution driving the church back to the old default system. One could say that these are examples of going back to the Church 1.0 system, because their 2.0 system crashed in the face of extreme heat. The radical Anabaptist churches are an example. The Chinese house church phenomenon is also a departure from the expression of the Church 2.0 system. These experiments are really not the norm and have not, to date, influenced the church as a whole in any permanent fashion, except perhaps to say that they are part of the learning that has led to this new operating system—Church 3.0.

### **church 3.0**

I believe that the second major shift is occurring now, in our lifetime. Many people want to go back to the beginning again. As much as I am enamored of what I learned about the church of the first century, we simply cannot go back; we can only go forward. Granted, if we went back it would be a vast improvement on where we have been more recently. I have to ask, though: Could we do even better than Church 1.0? Some may find even

such a question as this heretical. It is only a question, but it bears consideration.

Could we actually improve on the first-century church? A careful study of Acts reveals that even in the first decades of the church there was profound improvement as people learned from experience. Why not seek more improvements today, building on the foundation of two thousand years of mistakes? I believe it is possible. I think we can see the awesome impact and rapid spread that the first century saw, but we also can benefit from two thousand years of learning and use today's technological advances.

Imagine if the apostle Paul could buy an airline ticket and be across the world in twelve hours instead of twelve years. Imagine what he would do with the Internet and the ability to see events unfold globally and instantaneously. Our ability to understand culture and translate languages today is built on two thousand years of mistakes along with the successes they produced. Perhaps more than any other benefit we have is looking in hindsight at how easily institutionalization took over the church. It was no longer people in relationship to one another, but an organized system. Armed with that knowledge, we can now move forward. The early church flew blindly into a trap of a religious hierarchical system that kept her in the dark ages for hundreds of years. History can train us for the future, if we listen to it. No, Church 3.0 is not a shift downward in church life or quality. It is an upgrade in every sense of the word, perhaps even rising above the early church. Why would we suspect that God is content with our going backwards? Why wouldn't He want us to grow and develop in better ways?

The best upgrades do a few things. First they allow greater power in what you want to accomplish, and Church 3.0 is a huge boost in raw spiritual power. Every part of the body of Christ can function at a much higher level. A second thing you may look for in an upgrade is to move to a simpler and more intuitive way of using the system. This upgrade to Church 3.0 is certainly that, in many ways. It is built on simplicity and potency bound together to increase speed and power in the influence that the church can and should have. Third, upgrades take advantage of the latest discoveries in technology and help you interact better with all the other electronics you may use. Church 3.0 is far and

away better at being fluid, mixing with multiple expressions of church structure, and overcoming the world's obstacles. Fourth, an upgrade should have greater capacity to accommodate much more information, functionality, and storage. Finally, some cool new features in an upgrade should significantly improve the system's performance and make it much more fun to use. Church 3.0 is so enjoyable that it is quite common for those who have made the switch to comment that they could never go back to the old system.

Do not be deceived into thinking that this is just another patch to the same old system; it is a radical change from the core of the church. Church 3.0 has rebuilt the function of the church in every sense, from the smallest to the largest capacity. Figure I.1, developed by Paul Kaak and me, demonstrates that the coming changes are polar shifts that will mean a fundamental change in church, from the core.

	<b>Church 2.0</b>	<b>Church 3.0</b>
<b>Seating when gathered</b>	<i>Rows</i>	<i>Circles</i>
<b>Environment</b>	<i>Anonymous</i>	<i>Intimate</i>
<b>Leadership source</b>	<i>Institutions of higher learning</i>	<i>Harvest fields</i>
<b>Growth</b>	<i>Addition</i>	<i>Multiplication</i>
<b>Results</b>	<i>An audience is attracted</i>	<i>A spiritual army is mobilized</i>
<b>Ministry practitioners</b>	<i>The ordained</i>	<i>The ordinary</i>
<b>Resources</b>	<i>Imported to the harvest</i>	<i>Discovered in the harvest</i>
<b>Primary leadership role</b>	<i>Pastoral teacher</i>	<i>APEST team</i>
<b>Learning lab</b>	<i>Classroom-based education</i>	<i>Trench-based education</i>
<b>Cost</b>	<i>Expensive</i>	<i>Inexpensive</i>
<b>Ministry setting</b>	<i>The meeting place</i>	<i>The marketplace</i>
<b>Success</b>	<i>Full seating capacity</i>	<i>Full sending capacity</i>
<b>Church posture</b>	<i>Passive: "Y'all come!"</i>	<i>Active: "We all go!"</i>
<b>Attraction</b>	<i>Felt need programming</i>	<i>Obvious life transformation</i>
<b>Model of church life</b>	<i>Academic</i>	<i>Family</i>

**Figure I.1** Contrasting Church 2.0 with Church 3.0

## **the change is not just coming; it is already here**

I am not a futurist. I am no prophet. This world has changed in dramatic fashion, right out from under us. God has already called a few brave people to lead the way with the church upgrades of the future. In this book, I list many shifts that must take place for the future of the church because I have seen them already at work. As a habit, I do not write a book until I have experienced what it is I am writing about. Having traveled all over the world, training national leaders on the ground doing the work, I must tell you that these upgrades are already put in place by the Lord for a time such as this. Read this book, not as some guy's wild vision for what could potentially happen, but as a report of what is already taking place. For me, the question is not "Will this happen?" but "Will you and your church be a part of what God is up to in these incredible times?"

All this to say that there is something happening, and it is a shift of global proportions. In the last couple of years, *Time* magazine, the *Los Angeles Times*, and the *Chicago Tribune* have published articles on the rising movement. A Japanese newspaper (with a circulation of 2.5 million) and the *Wall Street Journal* recently interviewed me about our movement. Each journalistic piece examined the large numbers of people leaving the old ways of doing church (Church 2.0) for new, more relational and viral churches less dependent on clergy and programs. Something is going on. We are at the start of a new movement.

## **what is this book about?**

This book is not a defense of organic church, because I do not feel the need to defend something that is natural and fruitful. Even though I am answering questions most often asked about organic church, I am not defending it; I am demonstrating that we can all do church better. Your church, no matter what kind it is, will do well to make some of the shifts mentioned in this book. Even if you must make small and incremental shifts, the ideas expressed here are all about becoming healthier, relating to one another more naturally, and empowering all of God's people on

mission together. If you are in a situation where virtually none of these recommendations can be employed, then at least you can be informed of what many believe is coming for the kingdom of God, all over the world.

This is also not a book saying why organic churches are better than the other kind. Anyone who knows me knows that I do not think the organic church is a model of church, but natural principles and processes that can and do work in any model. Organic church is a mind-set, not a model. It is a way of relating more naturally to God, one another, and the world in which we are all planted. When I refer to the organic church movement, understand that this movement is not strictly house churches, but churches of all sizes and structures. The movement has spread through diverse denominations and parachurch organizations. Granted, if you were to use our principles and processes from the start you would end up with a rapidly multiplying network of simple churches, but we are conducting training (every part of it) in established church structures, and it is just as relevant for those settings.

The goal of this book is simple: to look at several ways in which the church can accomplish its mission better in the future than it has in the past. The change to Church 3.0 is a shift from a program-driven and clergy-led institutionalized approach of church to one that is relational, simple, and viral in its spread. Instead of seeing church as something that serves its people, church becomes people who serve—God, one another, and a hurting world. The change is from an organization to an organism that is healthy and reproductive. Church is no longer a place to go to, but a people to belong to. Church is no longer an event to be at, but a family to be a part of. Church is not a program to reach out to the world, but a people that bring the kingdom of God with them into a lost world, with a contagious spirit.

In a sense, I am hoping to encourage us to open our eyes, look at a problem from another angle, and ask: If the Bible does not prescribe our current methods, can we do this better in another way? After doing just that for more than a decade now, and testing the process and ironing out the kinks, I am now putting forward some of what we have discovered. These upgrades have been tested and proven to be useful improvements for any

and all churches, not just house churches. This book will be helpful for any church to apply; in fact, I believe we are at a point where we must make these changes. It is time to upgrade or die.

In Part One I lay out some profound changes that are taking place in our world today, presenting unprecedented opportunities for the church if we can make changes that capitalize on them.

The rest of the book is designed to answer the questions of those who are curious about what is happening but cannot seem to envision another way of doing church. I am asked the same familiar questions about organic church everywhere I go. What do you do with kids? What do you do to keep rampant heresy from overtaking organic churches when there are no trained leaders? Do you ever meet in larger venues? This book will address these questions, and many more.

This is not, however, simply a book to answer these questions. I want to show not only that we have thought through the issues but that we can actually improve on what has been done in the past. If our goal is simply to do church the same way but in a smaller setting, we have done nothing. Frankly speaking, I would rather be in a dysfunctional megachurch than a dysfunctional house church, because there I can at least hide in the crowd. If this new movement isn't an upgrade, then all of us should quit. We are long overdue for an upgrade on how church is experienced.

Welcome to Church 3.0.



# what about the world we live in?

## from a village church to a global village

*The future has a way of arriving unannounced.*

—GEORGE WILL

NOT SINCE THE GREAT FLOOD of Noah's day has the world changed so rapidly as in the past twenty years. Population has increased at an exponential rate. Advances in technology have changed the very way we relate to one another. During the student revolt in Tiananmen Square, footage of a single man stopping a line of tanks symbolized the resistance. During the demonstrations in Freedom Square in Tehran in 2009, there was not one photo but thousands of posts on Twitter, Facebook pictures, and cell phone camera footage instantly sent all over the world. The entire world mourned as it watched a young woman, Neda Agha-Soltan, dying in the streets from a bullet wound. The world has become a smaller place, with immediate connection to anybody at anytime.

What would you think if someone told you only fifteen years ago that your car would speak to you and tell you when and where to turn? What would you have said five years ago if I told you that I'd just "tweeted" you? I wonder what development will

come next year that will alter our vocabulary and our way of relating to one another.

Perhaps the institution most notoriously slow to change is the church. We are famous for resisting change, but we cannot afford to resist any longer. Our core belief in the Gospel itself and the consequent sanctification of believers is all about change, so we should be more welcoming of it. In the light of our Gospel truth and the constantly changing world, we simply must choose to make changes to take advantage of current global opportunities. We have not seen the same opportunities for the Gospel since perhaps the first century.

My mentor, Thom Wolf, often points out that the twenty-first century is quickly becoming the sister century to the first century.<sup>1</sup> There are remarkable similarities between them. In this chapter, I list six corresponding characteristics tying the first century to the current one that create opportunities and challenges for the church.

## **a single and dominant superpower**

For two hundred years, there was a type of peace on the planet, not because of the good nature of the people but because of the dominance of a world power that had no rivals: the Roman Empire. Historians have called that period *Pax Romana*, Latin for the peace of Rome. It was during this time that God stepped into the human world in the person of Jesus of Nazareth.

This Roman superpower actually benefited the spread of the Gospel in many ways. The first overseas missionaries were able to use their privilege of Roman citizenship to fulfill their missionary enterprise. Paul's Roman citizenship allowed him to be taken to Rome (at the government's expense) to proclaim his testimony to kings and ultimately the emperor himself. The Gospel was further advanced while Paul was under house arrest in Rome. There he was able to evangelize, train leaders, write letters, and fully accomplish his calling to bring God's word to the Gentiles. Finally, the persecution of Christians by the Roman Empire helped spread the flame of Christianity across the world.

Today, for the first time in quite a while, we are experiencing another time when a single government is the dominant power

in the world: the United States. Pax Americana has come, for better or worse. It has been anything but a peaceful time, but since the fall of Soviet Communism the United States has stood alone as the dominant force on the planet. The United States is not ruling over the rest of the nations, but it certainly plays a central role in important disputes. Wherever there is conflict, the United States tries to help settle the issue. Both the Israelis and the Palestinians call for the United States to do something when conflicts arise in the Middle East. Whether the United Nations sanctions it or not, the United States will police nations such as Iraq, the Balkans, and Afghanistan. We often do not carry this responsibility well, and “ugly American” is sometimes an earned sentiment, but our influence is definitely real even if it is not positive.

Today, having U.S. citizenship has some advantages as well. Being from the world’s only superpower does not make one popular, but it may open doors for advancement of the Gospel, and it will certainly afford some privilege.

## **a single, global trade language**

In the first century, there was a single language that became the common language of trade for the whole world. It was not often the first language of any people, but they learned to be proficient in it for the convenience of trade and communications around the known world. It was Koine Greek.

The first-century Christian leaders, notably Peter and Paul, took advantage of this linguistic opportunity to write letters that could be circulated globally and spread the Good News around the world in a language all could understand.

Today, English has become the common trade language of the world. Everywhere you go and in every nation of the world, English is spoken. A person who speaks English can find immediate opportunities for spreading the Gospel into a growing number of nations and people groups that are learning English in increasing numbers. Many nations will actually pay you a salary to go overseas and teach English, and a growing number of missionaries are taking advantage of this and using the Bible as their textbook.

## **technological advances create a global community**

In the first century, there was a new technology that made the world a smaller place. It brought together cultures, languages, and trade from various places in the world. This advance was so revolutionary that it has remained the bedrock of civilization throughout the rest of history. Chances are that you have relied on this technology even today without giving it a second thought: it is the road. The Roman roads were more than a series of verses in a book of the Bible describing how to receive salvation. They were an expanding network of highways linking all parts of the world to Rome. Remember the saying, “All roads lead to Rome”? There is truth to that, because it was from Rome that all roads found their beginning.

Paul, Barnabas, Peter, and John all traveled on these roads. The Gospel came at a time when the word could spread more quickly and further than ever before because roads existed and enabled global evangelization to occur.

Today the incredible technological advances of the computer chip, telecommunications, satellites, and jet travel have shrunk the world. Because we are taking life one day at a time, the changes may seem to creep up on us unnoticed, but all our lives have changed in radical ways in just a decade. I will never forget watching the World Trade Center collapse, live on TV, on the morning of September 11, 2001. Because of Facebook, I am exchanging jokes with high school friends I haven’t seen in thirty years as if it were only thirty minutes ago that we parted. Today you can get a sales call in Massachusetts from an Indian woman in Delhi, selling a product made in Singapore for a company headquartered in London, on a telephone manufactured by a company in Japan that is financed by a sheikh in the United Arab Emirates. It is indeed a smaller world today.

The world is not just smaller; as Thomas Friedman pointed out, it is flatter.<sup>2</sup> Calling this new era (starting in the year 2000) Globalization 3.0,<sup>3</sup> he says: “[This new Globalization] is going to be more and more driven not only by individuals but also by a much more diverse—non-Western, non-white—group of individuals. Individuals from every corner of the flat world are being

empowered. Globalization 3.0 makes it possible for so many more people to plug in and play, and you are going to see every color of the human rainbow take part.”<sup>4</sup>

The rise in technology has created a world where we are all connected, but it also levels the playing field so that any one of us can have a voice. In a real sense, with blogs, YouTube, self-publishing capabilities, social network sites such as Facebook and Twitter, everyone now can publish thoughts and publicize them to a mass market without the help of a large company. There is potential for anyone with a good idea to make a difference.

Nations that once were closed to the Gospel are losing the struggle to keep the Internet at bay with their citizens. Radio broadcasts pass over walls that people cannot. We can board a jet and be on the other side of the world in less than a day. The opportunities for the spread of the Gospel have never been so remarkable.

## **relativistic philosophy**

When the world becomes smaller and people are more exposed to other religions, cultures, and philosophies of life, it is not uncommon for there to be a rise in relativism—a belief that truth is not absolute, but relative. This view is articulated as, “What is true for you may not be true for me.” This philosophical view grew during the first century, which was best summarized in the statement made by Pontius Pilate when he asked Jesus, “What is truth?”

Relativism ultimately leads to a corruption in morals and ideals. Like rust, it eats away at anything solid and eventually hope and reason are lost. Most people have a yearning inside for something substantial that relativism ultimately cannot satisfy. The New Testament Church was able to take advantage of this prevalent philosophy by offering the stability of real truth to a world of increasing despair.

Today, the philosophy of relativism is increasing at an alarming rate. It takes only a short time under such a framework for life to lose all meaning and darkness and despair to pervade all of one’s thoughts. The longer people live under such a philosophy of life, the more they hunger for solid ground beneath their feet.

This is what we have to offer. Most of us feel threatened by the doctrine of relativism, but we should not be afraid of it. Most people find it a convenient belief, but not a practical one. The despair it brings creates a ripe climate for the Good News of the kingdom of God.

## **pagan and occult activity**

The first century was rampant with the practice of paganism and superstitious worship of a plethora of gods. Paul ran into much of this on his journeys. It was evident in Athens, where he saw many idols erected to gods, and even one to the unknown god just to cover all bases (Acts 17:22–23). He ran into it again in Ephesus, where an angry mob rioted in the streets because their livelihoods were threatened by the number of people destroying their instruments of occult worship as they converted to Christ. He encountered many false idols in Athens and was provoked to anger and grief. Paul and Barnabas were worshipped as cult gods one moment and stoned the next in Lystra—from stardom to stoning in one afternoon.

Today the practice of Wicca, witchcraft, occult worship, and paganism is rapidly increasing among young people. They long to experience the spiritual world that they know exists. They have a deep yearning to worship and have unfortunately turned to the creation rather than the creator. The occult promises power, spiritual influence, and hidden knowledge, but it delivers enslavement to superstition and fear.

Vampires, Goths, magicians, and even Dungeons and Dragons are no longer found only in fiction but becoming a subculture of our society. They are becoming a part of people's lives. As when Paul traveled through the empire, today people are worshipping a multitude of gods and seeking spiritual enlightenment and power.

Paul took advantage of this religious curiosity. On Mars Hill, or the Areopagus, he presented the true creator to the epicurean and stoic philosophers of the day. We too can make the power and experience of the true kingdom of God attractive to people, just as it was in Ephesus when Paul brought the kingdom there.

## **sexual promiscuity, perversion, and chemical addictions**

Rome is well known for its drunken orgies. The combinations of wealth, power, relativistic philosophy, and pagan worship practices all lead to the spread of sexual immorality and perversions. It is commonly believed that the dissolving moral foundation contributed to unraveling the Roman Empire.

Today sexual perversion is rampant. There are multiple side effects of this ugly increase in sexual activity. Sexually transmitted disease is increasing in pandemic proportions. In our lifetime we are dangerously close to losing a great part of the population of the world's largest continent to AIDS. Unwanted pregnancy and abortion are abundant. There is still a trafficking of young women, who are held captive as sex slaves in parts of our world. Many fatherless children grow up to have little or no respect for authority and wreak great havoc on our urban neighborhoods.

The New Testament believers found the bondage of sexual immorality a difficult challenge, too. Sexual perversion always leaves broken and used lives. A life of sexual bondage and "throw-away" sexual partners will consume souls with darkness, sickness, and eventual lunacy, demonizing, and death.

Although these are all painful realities and harsh challenges, they also present us with opportunity. People who are victims of such ugliness can be responsive to the hope of freedom and forgiveness. Broken people are most receptive to the Gospel. The kingdom of God has hope of freedom, and forgiveness for such people.

## **aslan is on the move**

In the C. S. Lewis story of *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, the world of Narnia was enslaved to a cold and harsh hundred-year winter without Christmas. Just when things were at their worst, hope was born, through four young visitors who found their way to Narnia by way of a closet that was for a moment a portal between two worlds.

Change did not come easily. There was an epic battle between good and evil, with betrayal, loss of life, imprisonment, slavery, and ultimately redemption. As things started to shift, there was

a moment when good news started to spread. Winter started to melt away. Christmas returned. Green once again began to spring forth with blossoms and running streams and rivers set free from their icy imprisonment. The word spread: *Aslan has returned and is on the move.*

The long reign of darkness and bitter cold broke up in unprecedented ways. No one could even remember how it was before the White Witch cast her spell on Narnia. Buried deep in their souls, locked in a primal and intuitive sense, the inhabitants of Narnia knew there was something better. In their forbidden legends, they knew of a free Narnia and their creator Aslan, but none could dare hope in his return . . . that is, until the nearly forgotten prophecies started to come true and the rumor of his coming started to spread.

I believe we are seeing something tantamount to that same awakening in this day.

Throughout history we have seen glimpses of revival and awakening in specific regions and nations. We have seen God's people arise with renewal and a rebirth of the church, but it has always been localized. Today we are seeing something new that has not occurred since the first century. I travel around the world and meet people of many races, nationalities, and cultures, and I see something that is changing all at once and everywhere in God's kingdom. On a global scale, God is speaking simultaneously to His people and calling them to a new and fresh expression of His kingdom here on earth. It is a wonderful time to be alive.

In all of human history, there was no time that saw the kingdom of God spread as rapidly and as globally as the first century. Every Christian longs for the experience of kingdom life as described in the book of Acts. I am suggesting that we now live in a new century that has equal, if not more, opportunity for the spread of the kingdom. These are dark days, and darkness is when the light shines brightest. We must make changes ourselves if that light is to shine in this world.

We must realize that the church of the past is not equipped for the opportunities of the future. We must shift in our systemic core so that we can take advantage of the global opportunities we face. We must upgrade the church for this new age. It is time for Church 3.0 to rise and spread.