

Growing Together

David Lyon, UK Leaders Conference 18 Sept 2021

Acts 13:2-4, HCSB As they were ministering to the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, “Set apart for Me Barnabas and Saul for the work I have called them to.” Then after they had fasted, prayed, and laid hands on them, they sent them off. Being sent out by the Holy Spirit, they came down to Seleucia, and from there they sailed to Cyprus.¹ **14:21-28** ...they returned to Lystra, to Iconium, and to Antioch, strengthening the disciples by encouraging them to continue in the faith... When they had appointed elders in every church and prayed with fasting, they committed them to the Lord in whom they had believed... From there they sailed back to Antioch where they had been entrusted to the grace of God for the work they had now completed. After they arrived and gathered the church together, they reported everything God had done with them and that He had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles. And they spent a considerable time with the disciples.

1. Introduction

Today's invitation said that: “**In the present context of such widespread misunderstanding, we will look at how apostolic ministry functions amongst the churches, and in partnership with their elderships, so that the Body of Christ can be built up in readiness for His return.**” At first sight, this may seem rather a niche topic? Concerned more with our internal organisation than the great needs of the world? Or even the great needs of the church? And since this is our first gathering together in months, and our time is precious, some may wonder whether it's the most pressing issue we face right now?... So, let's state at the outset: *nothing* could be more fundamental, vital or necessary. This is the great need of the church, and the world! God has set a day when Jesus will return to bring this Age to an end. The world urgently needs the good news of the Kingdom, which the church is here to proclaim and demonstrate. The church must be so missional and so well-built that multitudes can be saved, rapidly added, discipled and sent-out. We must come to maturity, and Jesus has determined that this cannot happen *without the proper functioning of apostolic ministry. So this really matters. It is the issue of our day!*...

2. Background

It's almost fifty years since Arthur Wallis convened a gathering with six younger men (including Bryn Jones),² during which a recognition of 'present-day' apostolic and prophetic ministries took place, and from which a movement emerged which was to change the expression of Christianity in the UK and elsewhere.

Such recognitions weren't unique, even in the 20th century. Eg, amongst early Pentecostal groups, the Apostolic Faith Church (founded 1908), Apostolic Church (1916) and Latter Rain Movement (1948) all believed God was restoring these Gifts, and recognised apostles and prophets amongst themselves. Elsewhere, others like (Anglican) Roland Allen (1868-1947) and (Brethren) GH Lang (1874-1958) were challenging denominationalism and arguing for the need for a return to apostolic

¹ And then to the southern Galatian cities of Pisidian Antioch (13:13-52), Iconium (14:1-4), Lystra (14:8-20) and Derbe (14:21) - a round journey lasting about two years.

² Seven gathered in 1972 (Arthur Wallis, Peter Lyne, Bryn Jones, David Mansell, Graham Perrins, Hugh Thomson and John Noble), and a further seven (George Tarleton, Gerald Coates, Barney Coombs, Maurice Smith, Ian McCullough, John MacLaughlin and Campbell McAlpine) joined the following year.

patterns (for Lang, “every departure from apostolic details is pregnant with calamities”).³ However, happening as it did *in the context of* the wider and burgeoning charismatic movement, what Wallis and the others instigated soon began to draw mainstream attention...⁴

For these men, there was a vital eschatological dimension. Their conviction was that *the church needed restoring*; the charismatic movement didn’t go far enough - new wine needed a new wineskin; a movement away from the structures of denominationalism and a return to flexible NT patterns, including - vitally - the ministries of apostles and prophets. There was no justification in embracing (1Co 13) Gifts of the Spirit whilst resisting the (Eph 4) Gifts of Christ. Moreover, since apostles and prophets are given “until” and *so that* the Church *reaches unity and maturity* (Eph 4:12-13), a restored church *depended upon* the recovery of these ministries. But, a restored church was *not an end in itself*: it was the instrument through which God would **extend His Kingdom** across the nations and usher-in **the return of Christ**... It’s into this conviction and movement that we happily trace our roots and heritage.

But the claims of Bryn, Arthur Wallis and those who began to relate together (including Keri, Terry Virgo, Barney Coombs and others) did not go unchallenged!... In many quarters the very concept of modern-day apostles was fiercely contested: for evangelicals, the fact that we now have the epistles means we don’t need more apostles;⁵ whilst for others, claims of apostleship were ‘red flags’, warning of the dangers of spiritual authority. So, these pioneering men - to whom we owe so much - often paid a high price for their convictions. But over the succeeding years they proclaimed, published and outworked their beliefs and began to see expressions of apostolic Christianity emerging and growing in the UK and overseas...

Now, fifty years on, the pendulum has swung!... Across many parts of the church the need for apostles is no longer contested; they are understood to be contemporary and necessary. And in others ‘apostolic-type’ ministry is welcomed, even if there is a reluctance to name and identify apostles. What were once our ‘distinctive’ convictions may now be less so - which *may* be a good thing, a mark of progress. **But great caution is needed:** with this more widespread general acceptance comes the danger of diluting the specifics and compromising *vital biblical principles and patterns*. In many places ‘apostle’ is used simply as a label to *express seniority*, or given to a pastor who oversees a *large church* (and therefore ‘must be apostolic’). Others regard someone who *thinks strategically* as being apostolic; or someone with a *cross-cultural* ministry. And in other places the outworking of (so-called) apostleship has resulted in expressions of hierarchy and authoritarianism that would’ve been unknown in the early church, and we’re left wondering what criteria for recognition have been used? Elsewhere, discussions of ‘apostolic anointings’ on people or churches are in danger of eclipsing or negating the need for genuine *apostles*! So, whilst we rejoice in the more widespread conviction about apostles, we know there is still some way to go...

None of this is to suggest we have a monopoly on revelation, or have perfected the outworking of our convictions! But *we have seen something, and our voice is greatly needed*. And right now - perhaps more crucially than ever in the last fifty years - **another generation of us must rediscover and express afresh how apostolic ministry best functions amongst the churches, and in partnership with their**

³ GH Lang, *The Churches of God* (London: Paternoster, 1959), 39.

⁴ Hocken also notes that unlike some earlier attempts, the Restoration Movement gave scope to these ministries without institutionalising them. Peter Hocken, *The Glory and the Shame: Reflections on the 20th Century Outpouring of the Holy Spirit* (Guildford: Eagle, 1994), 78.

⁵ Such notions may be based on the false idea that the task of the NT apostles was epistle-writing, and hence complete with the closed canon of Scripture.

elderships, so that the Body of Christ can be built up in readiness for His return.

Why? Because the world urgently needs the church to be all that God intends!

We've been "born into the Kingdom for such a time as this" (Esther 4:14); His hand is on your life for significance and great purpose. And now it's vital that we "take hold of that for which Christ Jesus has taken hold of us" (Phil 3:12) - that our vision is wide enough and our convictions deep enough, and that we "press on" towards what we've seen...

2000 years ago the world was "turned upside down" by Jesus and His young church (Ac 17:6). The world of that day was characterised by ambitious and often oppressive political powers, empty religions, legalisms, the worship of many gods, sexual immorality, exploitation of the poor... and was in urgent need of Good News. And into *that* culture Jesus came, lived, died, rose, ascended, poured-out His Spirit *and sent-forth his church*. And this Spirit-filled church - inspired and thrust forward by her apostles; guided, discipled and cared-for by her elders - began immediately to impact and transform every society into which she was planted...

Now, 2000 years later, in a world in greater need than ever, and with a gospel as powerful as ever, it's the task and destiny of the church - with her apostles and her elders - to once again turn the world upside down and make a greater impact than we've ever imagined. Let's be in no doubt: **the Spirit-filled church - led by her apostles and her elders - is the hope of the world!** And discovering how we will best make that impact is paramount. And I think it begins with standing back and taking a fresh look at *who we are*: What exactly *is* the church? What is an apostle? What is an elder? We must see things as God sees them. So, let's draw together the biblical evidence and paint a picture that will help us see some of the implications and applications *for us* at this time.

3. What is the Church?

Let's start by asking: What is the church? To what do we belong? Who is it we are leading and caring for?... Let's try and grasp what the NT tells us, starting with what happened when *two of the biggest questions imaginable* were first asked and answered:

Mt 16:15-19, HCSB "But you," He asked them, "**who do you say that I am?**" Simon Peter answered, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God!" And Jesus responded, "Simon son of Jonah, you are blessed because flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but My Father in heaven. And I also say to you that you are Peter, and *on this rock I will build My church*, and the forces of Hades will not overpower it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth is already bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth is already loosed in heaven."

Acts 2:36-38, 41 HCSB. Therefore let all the house of Israel know with certainty that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Messiah!" When they heard this, they came under deep conviction and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles: "**Brothers, what must we do?**" "Repent," Peter said to them, "and be baptised, each of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit... So those who accepted his message were baptised, and that day about 3,000 people were added to them.

The church - *ekklesia* - is God's 'called-out' people; all who've responded to the revelation that Jesus is Lord and Messiah, by repenting, being baptised and receiving the Holy Spirit. Jesus is building His Church on the "rock" of this revelation. It's the community of all who've been "born from above" and entered the Kingdom (Jn 3:5) - "new creations" in Christ, for whom "the old has gone and the new has come" (2Co 5:17). This church is the outcome of Christ's earthly ministry, and is now the focus of His heavenly intercession (Heb 7:25), and she is so dazzling that multiple pictures are needed to begin to describe her!...

She is the **Body of Christ (Eph 1:23)**, Ro 12:5, 1Co 12:27, Col 1:24), totally secure under His headship (Eph 1:22). The church is the fulfilment of God's eternal desire

for a man in His image (Ge 1:26), a body He can inhabit by His Spirit (Ge 2:7). It's a Body full of His gifts, anointings, abilities; where every member is placed and arranged by God, just as He wants (**1Co 12:4-6ff**), so that at all times we have all that we need, whether in full-bloom or in seed-form. Jesus has ascended, but His ministry continues; He *still has a Body on earth* because He still has work to be done - proclaiming and demonstrating His Kingdom, and preparing the way for His return!...

In the church all nations are joined together in Christ and become “one new man” (**Eph 2:15**) - a *new type* of humanity (lit: ‘new species’). This is the **family** (household) of **God** (**Eph 2:19**, 3:14), in which male and female, black and white, young and old stand together as co-heirs, and as a glorious prophetic declaration that God is reconciling and restoring all things (Ac 3:21), beginning in His church (Eph 1:9-10). This is the *family* of God, never a clique, and always ready for growth and new birth, because God is restoring sonship (Ro 8:14-16) putting the lonely in families (Ps 68:6).

Ephesians 2 tells us the church is the earthly **dwelling-place of the Spirit**. As we’re built *God’s way* - on the foundation of apostles and prophets, with Christ as the Cornerstone - so He makes His home amongst us by His Spirit (**Eph 2:20-22**). And His presence distinguishes us (Ex 33:14f); we stand out like a city on a hill (Isa 2:2), a beacon of life, hope, healing. Distinct from every other people. It means *whenever* and *wherever* we’re gathered together Jesus is with us (Mt 18:20). God is present and anything is possible! (Mt 19:26). It means our gatherings are dynamic. It means an abundance of charismatic gifts and fruit. It means power and purity. This House of the Spirit is “an awesome place”; God is amongst His people, and for multitudes it is destined to be the very “gateway to heaven” (**Ge 28:17**)...

This church is the **Army of God** (**Eph 6:11**), under the command of Christ, and the “gates of hell” cannot prevail against her (Mt 16:18). Jesus has given us authority to “bind and loose”, so that God’s Kingdom comes on earth as in heaven (Mt 16:19, 18:18). And, through this unconquerable people, as we continue the mighty works of Jesus (Jn 14:12) - healing the sick, driving out demons, demolishing strongholds, raising the dead, and announcing Good News - God is evicting the squatter and restoring His world! The outcome is beyond doubt: Jesus is King of kings and Lord of lords and of the increase of His government there will be no end (Isa 9:7)!...

This pure and powerful church is attaining (growing into) “a stature measured by Christ’s fullness” (**Eph 4:14**). This **fullness** (*pleroma*) is the abundance, completeness, entirety of Christ! All the fulness of God is in Christ (Col 1:19), and all the fulness of (God in) Christ is *in His Church* (Eph 1:23, 3:19, 4:13)! He’s held nothing back, given us all of Himself; Jesus lives in His Church in all His glorious might and power!

We are the **Bride of Christ**, putting-off old ways and putting-on new ones (Eph 4:22-24); becoming ever-more spotless, beautiful, radiant, dazzling (**Eph 5:25-27**) and ready for our union with Him (Rev 19:7f, 21:2,9) and our ministry together in the Age to Come! (**1Co 6:3**)...

And because of all this, the church is God’s “**masterpiece**” (**Eph 2:10**); His finest work, His greatest creation and through which He is not only extending His Kingdom *on earth*, but His manifold wisdom is being made known to rulers and authorities *in heavenly realms* (**Eph 3:10**). This is His “**eternal purpose**”, the “purpose of the Ages” (**Eph 3:11**); this is what He had in mind when He created all things! God’s eternal purpose is a Body and Bride for His Son, a House for His Spirit, an Army for His Mission and a Family for His world - a *people for His purpose*! What a Masterpiece! Nations will stream to her (Isa 2:2), powers will bow down (Eph 1:22), and angels look-on in wonder (1Pe 1:12)...

What is the church? The most significant people on earth and the most breathtakingly creation in the cosmos! *This* is what we're part of - and it's our immense privilege to lead and care for such a people. Never think any less. Don't ever think your task doesn't matter. Don't ever say you don't have what it takes. You are *not* the organiser of the next best local church in town. You are *not* the administrator of next Sunday's service. You are playing your part in leading the church of Jesus Christ!

4. What is an Apostle?

The Bible tells us God has placed apostles "first" in His church, alongside prophet and teachers (**1Co 12:28**), so what does this mean?... What is an apostle? Let's again try and paint a picture, starting with the NT's 'first mention' of apostles.

Mt 9:35-38 HCSB. Then Jesus went to all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom, and healing every ['every kind of'] disease and every sickness. When He saw the crowds, He felt compassion for them, because they were weary and worn out, like sheep without a shepherd. Then He said to His disciples, "The harvest is abundant, but the workers are few. Therefore, pray to the Lord of the harvest to send out workers into His harvest." **10:1-2** Summoning His 12 disciples, He gave them authority over unclean spirits, to drive them out and to heal every [every kind of] disease and sickness. These are the names of the 12 apostles... **5** Jesus sent out these 12 after giving them instructions... **7-8** As you go, announce this: 'The kingdom of heaven has come near.' Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those with skin diseases, drive out demons. You have received free of charge; give free of charge.

As Jesus began building His church, He appointed Twelve "apostles" (Mt 10:2). The word is *apostolos*, from the verb **apostello** meaning to 'send out' or 'send forth'. There are other words for 'send', but *apostello* emphasises the relationship between the one who sends and the one sent, with the sense of *commission* and *authorisation* - the sender entrusting and empowering the one he sends to speak or act on his behalf.

Jesus is the First and Greatest Apostle (Heb 3:1), commissioned, authorised and sent by His Father, and here in Matthew 10 He begins to commission, authorise and send others. Mark tells us He designates them *apostolos*, so they might "be with Him" and He might "send them out" to preach, and that they might "have authority to drive out demons" (Mk 3:13-15, cf 6:7).

Take great note of the context: the commissioning in Matthew 10 is part-and-parcel of what happened at the end of chapter 9. Jesus has been through "all the towns and villages", proclaiming and demonstrating "the good news of the kingdom" and "healing every kind of illness" (Mt 9:35). He's been "moved with compassion" for multitudes of sheep without shepherds (Mt 9:36, cf. Mk 3:7ff) - 'moved in the inward parts', a *gut reaction* to what he saw. He saw crowds of people "weary and worn out", "harassed and helpless" (NIV), "distressed and downcast" (NASB), "worn and weak" (NLT); a mass of humanity *in great crisis*. And so He knows "the harvest is abundant but the workers are few" (Mt 9:37). There is huge need and huge opportunity; they're one and the same. And it's *into this situation* that Jesus appoints the Twelve and so begins to "send out workers into His harvest" (Mt 9:38), and they go with His commission and His authority to continue what He'd started. As the Father sent Him, so He sends them (Jn 20:21), authorising them to do exactly what He's just done - proclaiming and demonstrating the Kingdom!... **Apostleship** is birthed in the context of Jesus's **compassion** for the world, the good news of His **Kingdom**, and the abundance of the **harvest**. Apostleship and Mission go *hand-in-hand*!...

These "**apostles of the Lamb**" (Rev 21:14) formed a unique apostolic group of "eyewitnesses",⁶ appointed by Jesus during his earthly ministry. But after His

⁶ Hence their number needed to be re-constituted after Judas's betrayal (Ac 1:21-22).

ascension He began to give *other apostles* to His church (Eph 4:10-11), including Paul, James (Gal 1:19), Barnabas (Ac 14, 4:14), Apollos (1Co 3:4-5ff, 3:22, 4:6,9), Silas and Timothy (1Th 1:1, 2:6-7) and others.⁷ And *the context was the same*: the expansion of the mission required an expansion of the apostolic company. And Acts shows the firstfruits of this ministry, not least the establishing of strong churches (Ac 14:22, 15:41, 18:23), which grew daily in number (Ac 16:5), so that vast geographic areas were saturated with the gospel (Ac 9:31, 19:10)! It's stunning to read that within a few years of his commissioning Paul had "fully proclaimed the good news from Jerusalem all the way around to Illycrium [NW of Greece]" and could say "I no longer have any work to do in these provinces" (Ro 15:19, 23)!...

And because we've *not yet* reached unity and maturity, Jesus is *still giving* apostles to His church, as an expression of His grace (Eph 4:7ff). Like the other fivefold ministries, they're 'Gifts of Christ', meaning not just gifts *from* Him, but gifts *of* Him - aspects, portions *of Himself*. Jesus is coming close, giving Himself to His beloved church.

If we are to "test" apostleship (Rev 2:2), what criteria should we use? What are the **biblical hallmarks**? Alongside Acts, it's Paul's letters in particular that show these hallmarks. And whilst Paul is pre-eminent amongst post-ascension apostles (and others may 'fall short' when evaluated alongside him), it's nevertheless *his* life, ministry and writings the Spirit has recorded for us. So, bearing this in mind, and appreciating *all apostles are different*, what do we discover?...

Though not an 'eyewitness' like the Twelve, he has no doubts **he's seen Christ** and been commissioned, authorised and sent-out by Him (**Gal 1:1**, Ac 9:5), and in a wider sense it's his **revelation** of Christ that is the basis of his ministry (**Eph 3:5**). He's Christ's "**bondservant**" and knows he's "set apart" or "separated" for this work by the Spirit (**Ro 1:1, Gal 1:15, Ac 13:2**) - where the word is *aphorizó* meaning 'marked off by boundaries'. He is separated to His commission, entrusted with the mysteries of Christ (**Eph 3:4-5**, Col 4:3) and he carries a deep sense of **servanthood** (Ro 1:1, 1Co 3:5) and **stewardship** (1Co 4:1-2, Gal 2:7-8). He has a singular purpose: to see the Body built-up; to see Christ formed in His church; to see the Kingdom advanced in all the earth (Ac 20:24). Zeal for God's House consumes him and "endurance" is a hallmark of his apostolic work (2Co 12:12).⁸

He has the **grace and authority** necessary for founding and building-up churches (**Ro 1:5, 2Co 10:8**, 13:10, Gal 1:15), and these churches are the "seal" of his ministry (1Co 9:1-2). As a spiritual "**master-builder**" or architect (**1Co 3:10**), he measures everything against the plumpline of Christ and the House he's seen. And within that *great* task, he outworks a *particular* task (eg, "planting", "watering" or "building", **1Co 3:5ff**), perhaps to a particular place or particular people (Gal 2:7-8). And in this he will differ from other apostles. His work is *functionally* "first" (**1Co 12:28**); a foundational ministry (**Eph 2:20**), laying a foundation of Christ-centred doctrine (**1Co 3:10**), according to his revelation (Eph 3:5).

He values his relationships with **fellow-apostles** (Gal 1:18ff, 1Co 3:5ff) and the other Gifts of Christ, and he may be a 'hub' for a team of ministries, working together (Ac 13:13, Gal 1:2, etc) to build-up the church and equip its members for their ministry (**Eph 4:12**).

⁷ Others named or described as *apostolos* include Matthias (Ac 1:26), Andronicus and Junia/s (Ro 16:7), Epaphroditus (the Philippians' "messenger", Phil 2:25) and two "representatives" of churches at 2Co 8:23. The fact that Jesus appeared "to the Twelve" (1Co 15:2) and "then to *all the apostles*" (15:7) indicates a wider company than Twelve. And the fact that churches needed to test those who *claimed* apostleship (Rev 2:2) is evidence of other (true) apostles functioning amongst the churches.

⁸ It's unlikely that Paul regards "signs" *per se* as proof of apostleship (cf Mk 13:22, 2Th 2:9); his emphasis is equally on the *patience* and *endurance* with which he ministered.

As he outworks his commission, he develops a “**sphere**” of ministry and churches under his oversight (2Co 10:13, 15)⁹ and *within this sphere* he appoints elders to extend his fatherly care and government in each locality (**Ac 14:23**, Tit 1:5).¹⁰ He carries authority towards these churches and their elders (2Co 10:8, 13:10), and he involves them in his mission (Phil 1:5, see below). He’s a “**father**” towards them (1Co 4:15); he loves them deeply, feels for them intensely, and will expend himself for their benefit, enduring hardships and trials if necessary to see them mature (2Co 4:7ff, 6:4ff, 12:12). As *a father*, he has pledged them to Christ (2Co 11:2), which is precisely *why* he feels so intensely for them - he’s motivated by his vision of the Bride and his longing to see Christ’s fulness in a mature church (Eph 4:13, **Col 1:28f**).

What is an apostle? A servant and Gift of Christ, an expression of His great grace towards His church and His great compassion for the lost. He is commissioned and sent-forth to reveal Christ, advance the Kingdom and build the church on rock-solid foundations. He’s a man on a mission.

5. What is an Elder?

Many amongst us are elders, and I hope many others aspire to be. But do we realise what they are? Again, let’s paint a picture...

1Ti 3:1 HCSB This saying is trustworthy: “If anyone aspires to be an overseer, he desires a noble work.”

1Pe 5:1-4 HCSB Therefore, as a fellow elder and witness to the sufferings of the Messiah and also a participant in the glory about to be revealed, I exhort the elders among you: Shepherd God’s flock among you, not overseeing out of compulsion but freely, according to God’s will; not for the money but eagerly; not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock. And when the chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory.

An elder (*presbuteros*) is a man who has proved he’s **suitably-qualified** to lead and care for *God’s people*; he’s been judged “above reproach” (1Ti 3:2ff), meaning not that he never does wrong, but that he quickly puts it right. He stands with his wife, who is equally proven (cf 1Ti 3:11), in a marriage that is also proven (1Ti 3:4). He is an overseer (*episkopos*) and a shepherd (*poimen*) of the flock of God,¹¹ entrusted with **taking great care** of the most significant people on earth and the most breathtakingly creation in the cosmos - God’s Masterpiece - the Family and Army of God, the Body and Bride of Christ, and the House of the Spirit!...

His **appointment** is by the apostle (**Ac 14:23**, **Tit 1:5**) and approved by the church (1Ti 3:1ff), and it’s sealed *by the Holy Spirit* who “makes him” an overseer (**Ac 20:28**) - the word is *etheto* meaning ‘to put, place, lay, set, fix, establish’. Your eldership - an outcome of your life and marriage - has been determined by God. It may have come about through the agency of others - agreed by the Body, confirmed by the laying-on of apostolic hands - but the appointment of every elder was established, fixed, arranged and set *by the Spirit*! That’s why you know *in your spirit* those to whom you’re shepherds. It’s the Holy Spirit who establishes a man in his eldership.

Therefore, an elder is accountable to the Lord (**Heb 13:17**, 1Pe 5:4). And also to the apostle who laid hands on him and gave him his charge, as well as to his fellow-elders (**Ac 20:28-30**). He represents the apostle and conveys his heart; He knows and teaches the apostle’s gospel and doctrine (cf Ac 15).

Enabled by the Spirit, he plays his part in keeping the church turned-outwards, **mobilised for mission** and seeing beyond the locality to serve a greater, wider purpose. He leads and cares for the church in such a way that it is always ready to grow numerically, as the Lord of the

⁹ The word is *kanōn* (a ‘rule of conduct or doctrine’ or a ‘measured/defined area or province’) and is variously translated “area of ministry” (HCSB), “area of influence” (ESV), “domain” (NASB), “sphere of service” (NIV), “boundaries of the work” (NLT) and “sphere” (NKJV).

¹⁰ It’s also clear that Paul taught uniformly in the churches within his sphere (1Co 4:17, 7:17, cf 11:16).

¹¹ The *office* is “elder” (*presbuteros*, cf. Ac 11:30, 14:23, Tit 1:5) and the *task* is “overseer/ing” (*episkopos*, cf. 1Ti 3:1, Tit 1:7), involving the *work* and *activity* of a “shepherd” (*poimainó*). All three concepts come together at Ac 20:28 and 1Pe 5:1-2.

Harvest saves and adds people. He knows the church is God's instrument for reaching the world, and under his watch it will never be inward-looking. He will open doors, empower others and keep the mission uppermost in peoples' minds and prayers. An elder cares for a growing family, into which multitudes can be reached and added. He will never think the church he cares for is 'too big'!

He has **spiritual authority** to "direct the affairs of the church" (1Ti 5:17, Heb 13:17),¹² without lording it over people (1Pe 5:3). He feeds and guards the flock (Ac 20:28), keeping out false doctrine by his ability to handle and teach the Word correctly (1Ti 3:2) and discern and refute error (Tit 1:9).¹³ He sets an example for the flock (1Pe 5:4) in faith, hope and love, and in hospitality and missionary zeal. And as a **shepherd** he will do all he can to keep the flock together and will go after any who fall behind or go astray.

He is called-upon when people are sick, and because he's righteous his **prayers** are powerful and effective and bring healing (Jas 5:14-15). Likewise, his prayers for those emerging in leadership will impart gifting that helps them grow and develop (1Ti 4:14).

He is entrusted to make decisions about the **distribution of finance** (Ac 11:30), including the use of the tithe - which belongs to God - to support ministry and meet the needs of the poor. In his care of people and his handling of the tithes and offerings he is touching the "most holy things" (Ro 11:16, cf Ezek 44:13), and he does so with great care and respect and a healthy fear of God.

An elder is a **servant** and a **steward** (1Ti 3:5), and he works really hard in his task (1Ti 5:17), for as long as he is appointed.¹⁴ He serves the Chief Shepherd, who will reward him with a crown of glory (1Pe 5:4). There is no task, anywhere, that is more significant or noble; it is the greatest privilege, and many should aspire to it! (1Ti 3:1).

And in all these things, he is **part of a team** - an **eldership** - a company of brothers who *with their wives* have made it their priority to serve Jesus together, to develop friendships, stand together, pray together, sharpen one another, protect each other (Ac 20:28), eliminate competition and maintain unity. They are never divisive or divide-able; they honour and promote each other. They know they need each other. They embrace their differences in *gift* and *measure*, but they esteem their equality *as elders*. And it's *together* that they lead, care, guide, protect, pray, impart and will give an account...

What is an elder? He is a servant-leader, appointed by an apostle, affirmed by the church and established by the Holy Spirit, and entrusted with the noblest of tasks. I had the immense privilege of serving as an elder for 22 years in Living Rock Church, working closely with both Bryn and Keri during that time. It was my great joy to see lives changed, disciples made, and the church steadily grow. It was an honour to walk with individuals and families during some of the happiest and saddest of times of their lives. It was deeply rewarding to pray, plan, shape and outwork a vision with fellow-elders who have become my best friends. It was challenging and painful to face some losses, see some people leave, and handle some disappointments. And it was always such an honour to represent Jesus to the best of my ability. *It is the most noble of tasks!* However else you may earn your living, serving Jesus and His church by stepping-up into eldership is one of the greatest things you could do!....

The NT picture is very clear, and no alternative works better! Jesus is building His church to proclaim the good news of His kingdom and prepare the way for his return. She is His Body and His Bride. She is the dwelling-place of His Spirit. She is being built on the foundation of apostles and prophets. No other way will accomplish His purpose. Her apostles thrust her forward, advancing the mission. Her elders care for the many converts and watch-over the family as it grows. This is our Great Commission, and it's God's great answer to the world's great crisis. **The world needs church to be all that God intends!**

I'm convinced that unless we seek to see things as He sees them, we can never build together as He wants us to. Like Nehemiah, we must clear-away the 'rubble' of any smaller views, rise above any regrets or disappointments we may have felt, and be reminded of *who*

¹² The language of "watching over" in Heb 13:17 indicates that these "leaders" are elders.

¹³ The antidote to *false doctrine* is the appointment of elders able to teach *sound doctrine*; hence, in Ephesus (1Ti 1:3-4, cf 3:2) and Crete (Tit 1:9-11).

¹⁴ Eldership is a "task" undertaken for a season (1Ti 3:1), not a *gift for life*.

we are and what we're here for. **We are His church, with her apostle and elders, and every other precious part.** And we have a Great Commission! May zeal for His house and compassion for the lost consume us, and enable us to play our part in His eternal purpose...

6. Partnership

Having seen what the Word tells us about the church, and her apostles and elders, let's consider *how they work together* to build-up the Body and bring-in the harvest. What is the NT dynamic? How are things arranged?...

Phil 1:1-11, HCSB ¹ Paul and Timothy, slaves of Christ Jesus: To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, including the overseers [elders] and deacons. ² Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. ³ I give thanks to my God for every remembrance of you, ⁴ always praying with joy for all of you in my every prayer, ⁵ because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now. ⁶ I am sure of this, that He who started a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus. ⁷ It is right for me to think this way about all of you, because I have you in my heart, and you are all partners with me in grace, both in my imprisonment and in the defence and establishment of the gospel. ⁸ For God is my witness, how deeply I miss all of you with the affection of Christ Jesus. ⁹ And I pray this: that your love will keep on growing in knowledge and every kind of discernment, ¹⁰ so that you can approve the things that are superior and can be pure and blameless in the day of Christ, ¹¹ filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ to the glory and praise of God.

As Philippians 1 makes clear, Paul saw his relationship with *the church and its elders* as a “**partnership**” (v5). The word is *koinónia*, meaning ‘shared in common, contributory help, participation, fellowship in the spirit.’ And in verse 7 they are all his *sugkoinónos*, meaning ‘close companions, joint-sharers, partakers, or co-partners’. The church (“all the saints”), *including* her apostles and elders (and deacons), were *in partnership together*, bringing their respective gifts, tasks and callings together so the whole would benefit. What does the NT show us about *the way* this relationship is outworked? **What are hallmarks of this unique three-way partnership between apostles, elders and churches?** We've touched on some of these things, but let's look closer at *what we see* (and *don't see*) in the NT, and consider some implications and applications for us:

1: WE SEE MISSION, not maintenance. And this puts everything *in its proper context*. The NT timeline shows growth, movement, expansion, enlargement from start to finish. We see a rapidly-expanding work and the outward-looking perspective that made it possible. Jesus was coming back and the believers understood their task was to be *part of* proclaiming His gospel everywhere; **apostles, elders and churches are partners in mission...**

As we've seen, the first apostles were appointed by “the Lord of the Harvest” because He's moved with compassion for the multitudes and has a Kingdom to announce (Mt 9:35ff). The Great Commission (to “make disciples of all nations”) and the promise of power (to be “witnesses...to the ends of the earth”) were given to *the apostles* (**Mt 28:16ff, Ac 1:2-8**). Peter's first use of the “keys of the kingdom” unlocked a gateway and saw thousands saved and added (Ac 2:41). And it was as that first church “devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching” (Ac 2:42) that they continued to see new birth *every day* (Ac 2:47). Paul's calling then catalysed the mission into Gentile territories... Wherever we look, **apostleship and mission are intertwined**, and can only really be understood in relation to each other. The mission needs apostles. And no apostle is called to build something static, inward-looking, self-serving; we're called to mission, not maintenance.¹⁵

And as the apostle appoints elders in each place *they continue the mission* of saturating their locality with the gospel, and this releases the apostle to work into new areas or assist other churches. Ern Baxter describes this as the “second phase of evangelism” (after the initial apostolic work), in which the elders in each place now lead the church in day-to-day evangelism *by the flock*, so the church becomes the “evangelistic centre of that geographic area”.¹⁶ Thus, we see the gospel “bearing fruit and growing” in Colossae (**Col 1:6**) and “the Lord's message rang out” from Thessalonica into “every place” in the surrounding regions (**1Th 1:8**). The church in Antioch became a mission-base for Paul and Barnabas to evangelise Galatia (Ac 13-14); the Corinthians will help Paul enlarge his sphere into Macedonia and Judea (2Co 1:15-16) and the Romans were to assist him on his way to Spain (Ro 15:23-24). In

¹⁵ A lack of apostolic involvement causes churches to be settled and static institutions.

¹⁶ Ern Baxter, *God's Agenda for the Church* (Shippensburg: Destiny Image, 1995), 51-54.

these ways, churches are lifted-up into something bigger; their horizons stretch beyond their locality and into the wider world mission. (Also: it's vital we see that the NT pattern is *not* apostles helping churches plant churches, but churches helping apostles plant churches.) The NT churches were 'apostolic' - meaning not just that they were founded and cared-for by an apostle, but that they were *in partnership with him* in seeing his commission fulfilled. I don't think it would've crossed their minds to think otherwise.

It's harvesttime: need and opportunity are everywhere and workers are urgently needed. **And if there's anything that must define the next season it's our partnership together in mission;** apostles and elders and churches - all of us - *working together* to open new doors, welcome new people, plant new works and go to new places. It's not enough for the flock well cared-for, well-taught and well-organised... It's not enough to have our doctrines and convictions nailed-down. This is our day to reach our generation and see significant growth.

2. Integral to this, WE SEE CO-WORKERS, not competitors. There is "one body, one Spirit, one hope one Lord, one faith, one baptism..." (Eph 4:4) and the apostles took great care to keep this unity. Eg, three years after his conversion, Paul went to Jerusalem to spend a fortnight with Peter, simply to "get to know" him (**Gal 1:18**) - and it's recorded *because it mattered!* Several years later, he went again to present his gospel to Peter, John and James, who gave him "the right hand of fellowship" (**Gal 2:9**). The word is *koinónia* and it's "the right hand of *partnership*" (NLT: "they accepted Barnabas and me as their co-workers", GNT: "as a sign that we were all partners"). They recognised their respective spheres, but *as partners* with goals *that did not compete*. Paul and Apollos *both* ministered into Corinth (1Co 18:1, 19:1), and maybe Peter as well (1Co 1:12, 3:21, 9:5). And when Paul addresses the Corinthians' foolishness of comparing apostles he tells them "all are yours" (**1Co 3:21-22**); and they're impoverishing themselves by thinking otherwise. These apostles were "God's co-workers" (1Co 3:9), as were Timothy (**Ro 16:21**) and Titus (2Co 8:23) - always allies, never rivals.

The concept of 'co-workers' extends beyond the apostles to include churches, elders and many other individuals; they were **all involved**. So, when Paul and Barnabas returned from their first mission-trip they *gathered the whole church* together to hear first-hand the report of their success (**Ac 14:27**); they were partners, so the news was *for everyone to hear*. And when Paul and Barnabas went to Jerusalem to discuss the circumcision issue, they "were welcomed by the church, the apostles and the elders" (Ac 15:4, cf 15:22).

Paul asked *whole churches* to pray for him as he pioneered in new places (Ro 15:10, Eph 6:19, Col 4:3, 2Th 3:1) and ensured they felt *joined with each other* in a common cause by frequently sending greetings from one to another. And let's not miss the regular flow of people between Paul and the churches - some as messengers sent from one to the other (eg 2Co 8:16-18, Eph 6:22, Phil 2:25, Col 4:8, 1Th 3:6); others apparently joining his apostolic team for a time and then returning to one of the churches (eg Ac 20:4). Priscilla and Aquila are referred to as "co workers" (**Ro 16:3**), as are Urbanus (**Ro 16:9**), Epaphroditus (Phil 2:25), Clement (Phil 4:3) and many more little-known contributors to the apostolic work... As gifted as he was, Paul knew he couldn't succeed alone and so he had a large team of "co-workers" everywhere!

We're all in this together, and that's exactly how God has arranged things! That's the point: none of us has all that we need, but *as co-workers* - with the vast array of gifts and anointings amongst us - we can make significant advances over the next few years; praying, planning, travelling and ministering together. The potential amongst us is immense! Involving others and communicating more widely takes time and effort and may feel inconvenient, but we will do the Body and the Mission a great disservice if we don't draw upon one another as co-workers.

3. WE SEE HONOUR, without hierarchy. The NT picture is of partners and co-workers who understood and honoured a *God-given order* and *authority*. As we've seen, apostolic ministry functions "first" (**1Co 12:28**), to lay foundations upon which churches can be built and to appoint elders to lead and care for the flock, represent him and continue the mission. And this order involves *authority*. The apostle appoints elders; they have a task *because he's appointed them*; they're accountable to him and *he retains oversight and government* into the church after their appointment, bringing direction or correction where needed. Hence, eg, we see Paul's directives throughout his epistles, and his interventions in Corinth (cf 1Co

5:11, 2Co 13:2, etc) and his authorisation of Timothy's intervention in Ephesus on his behalf (1Ti 1:3-4), despite there being elders in both places.¹⁷

But this shouldn't be seen as a 'hierarchy' *in the sense of rank, relative importance, superiority and inferiority...* The church is a well-ordered, multi-gifted body - but all parts are of equal standing before God (1Co 12:24-25, **Gal 3:28**). Paul will be "mutually encouraged" when he visits the church in Rome (Ro 1:12). And there's no "lording it over" others by apostles (**2Co 1:24**) or by elders (**1Pe 5:3**)... In Christ's Body, *everyone* has a distinct and vital part to play (**Eph 4:16**) - we are on the same team, on the same pitch - *but* we have different roles and positions. And, vitally, some roles *require* and are *given a greater authority* in order to play their part properly (**2Co 10:8, 13:10**). There's God-ordained order and authority, and *it's real* not theoretical. There's headship and "submission" - the word is *hypotassó* meaning 'under God's arrangement'. There's equality *and* difference in the Body, and outworking this biblical order requires *all of us* to *submit* ourselves to *God's arrangement* for His Church (Eph 5:21, Heb 13:17).

Working in partnership requires us to honour our respective roles and the authority we carry. Apostles are not here to rubber-stamp our best ideas or to offer advice that elders can take or leave; they have authority (over the eldership) to build-up the church. Elders are not tasked with accommodating everyone's whims and wishes; they have a delegated authority to direct the affairs of the church (1Ti 5:17) and *continue what's been started*. One of the greatest burdens in an apostle's heart will be that the elders he's appointed lead in a way that's faithful to his gospel and mission, vision and values.¹⁸ And the church - the most breathtaking creation in the cosmos - is not here merely to watch or spectate; she is the Body of Christ - filled with ability, gift and potential - and should be alive with initiative and movement. Aspects of all this may at times be challenging or uncomfortable (perhaps even frustrating), but there is *always* great blessing in honouring God's order....

4. WE SEE THE HOLY SPIRIT, not human strategy. We cannot read Acts without marvelling at the way *the Holy Spirit* leads, directs and empowers *all the action!* These are *His mighty acts*, from start to finish. He immerses the Jewish believers in His life and power in **Ac 2**, and does the same with the Gentiles in **Acts 10**, empowering them to be witnesses (cf **Ac 1:8**). He sets apart the apostles for His work, and He sends them out (**Ac 13:2-4**). He makes the big doctrinal decision (Ac 15:28). He sets-in the elders (**Ac 20:28**). He oversees and directs the missionary strategy: transporting Philip (Ac 8:39), re-adjusting Peter's perspectives (Ac 10:19ff), re-directing Paul (**Ac 16:6-7**) and warning him of what lies ahead (Ac 20:22-23). And so on, and so on...

This is a story of *the Holy Spirit at work*, not a record of human strategy and strength. And the apostles, elders and churches *trusted Him* to lead and direct the action! They relied on Him, obeyed Him, had full confidence in Him, did what He urged them to do. Of course, they made plans; but were ready to adjust as He directed them. We rightly honour Peter and Paul and the other apostles, but in this great drama *it's the Holy Spirit who is centre-stage!* He's a Missionary: He loves the lost, He draws people to Christ, He does the inner work of regeneration, He moves us with compassion... And He's just the same today as He was then. He's no less compassionate, powerful, visible, audible...

And let's also take note that what He directed is *movement of people* that meet predominantly from "house to house" (Ac 2:46, 5:42, 20:20, 28:23, 28:30f, cf 1Co 16:19, Ro 16:5, etc). There's not a church building in sight! That's *how* the work advanced so rapidly (they made use of what they had, rather than waiting for what they hadn't). Acts is a permanent record of what can happen when we let the Holy Spirit do things His way: people are added daily, ministries are released, elders are appointed, and churches are planted in homes in every town and city.

¹⁷ The architect or master-builder is needed until the work is finished. Paul's intervention in Corinth is evidence of his *continuing government* into the church, and not (as some argue) because there were no elders there. The latter is inconceivable given Paul's practice elsewhere and the fact that he spent eighteen months in Corinth. We also note that the *refusal* by elder(s) to give the apostle access to the church is a violation of God's order and on record as such in the Word (3Jn 9-10).

¹⁸ As I recently heard, in another context: "The Architect knows and feels every detail of the building; he has conceived it, lived and breathed it, so that if anything is done that compromises what he has planned and intended, *it breaks his heart.*" Kevin McCloud, Grand Designs.

In this new season, we must be reliant on the Holy Spirit, not on our own strength and strategies. We can trust Him, and follow His lead; He will take us where we need to go. We can trust Him to envision, direct and protect people. He will help us re-discover ‘house churches’. He will enable us to grow together.

5. WE SEE RELEASE, not restraint. The sustained growth of the NT church was fuelled by the willingness of the churches, elders and apostles to let go of self-interest and *release people and resources* to the bigger purposes of God. Because they trusted the leading of the Spirit, and they knew it is more blessed to give than to receive (Ac 20:35). So, from the very beginning in Jerusalem, *money and property* was given to ensure no-one was in need (Ac 2:45, **4:34-35**). Then we see churches releasing substantial funds to help *one another*, first from Antioch to Jerusalem (Ac 11:30), then from Macedonia and Corinth to the Judean churches (2Co 8).

The church made *practical adjustments*, in order to release the apostles to focus on their calling (**Ac 6:1-7**); no doubt some were initially disappointed that the Twelve were no longer bringing their daily food, but their grasp of the bigger mission enabled them to adjust their expectations and make space for them to do what was most necessary (whilst also making space for seven others to step-up).

In **Acts 13:1-4** the Antioch church released two of their most substantial ministries, to be absent for two years, so others would benefit from their gift; and in **Acts 16:3** the elders in Lystra and Iconium release Timothy (one of their most promising young men), at Paul’s request, to assist him in his apostolic work.¹⁹ It can be hard to let people go, especially when we’ve invested in them and have plans, but there’s always great blessing in doing so...

In this expansive season, we must beware putting any restraints on what God is wanting to do. The Body we have the privilege of overseeing is filled with gifts, talents, anointings, burdens, callings; and the call of God is on many of them. We must **let the Body be the Body.** We must take off unnecessary restraints and release people and plans into the purpose of God! Our churches (His churches!) are bursting with creativity, initiative and potential; we must encourage it, nurture it and release it! We must trust the Holy Spirit and let the Body be the Body - without undue concern as to how we will administrate the outcome - confident that God knows what He’s doing!...

6. WE SEE STRENGTHENING, not just starting. The apostolic work of the NT is not limited to initiating things; it also includes *strengthening* what’s been started. It’s a long-term approach. Paul spent considerable time in many places,²⁰ and travelled extensively - with fellow-apostles and prophets - with the explicit aim of simply *strengthening* things. Eg: In Acts 14 (the 1st Mission Trip), Paul and Barnabas returned to each place they’d planted churches in southern Galatia and “strengthened the hearts of the disciples” (**Ac 14:22**). In Acts 15-16 (2nd Mission Trip) Paul and Silas first “travelled through Syria and Cilicia strengthening the churches” (**Ac 15:41**) and then later Paul and Timothy travelled back to Galatia and “the churches were strengthened in the faith and were increased in number daily” (**Ac 16:5**). And then in Acts 18 (start of 3rd Mission Trip), Paul “set out, travelling through one place after another in the Galatian territory and Phrygia [ie: where he’d been in Ac 13-14 and Ac 16], strengthening all the disciples” (**Ac 18:23**) - it’s only one verse, but it was a journey of hundreds of miles, and took many months, and *the sole purpose was to strengthen churches* he’d already strengthened!

The words used are significant: In Acts 16 it’s *stereoō*, meaning ‘to make firm, solid, strong; to confirm, settle’. It’s the word from which we get ‘stereo’ (*combining* to enhance output) and it’s the word used when Peter stands alongside the lame man and lifts him up so that “at once his feet and ankles became strong” (Ac 3:7). When we’re *alongside an apostle* there’s a powerful, solidifying impact that brings growth! The word in Acts 14, 15 and 18 is *epistérizō* meaning ‘to make stronger, prop-up, buttress, uphold, support; establish’. It’s a compound of *stérizō* (‘fix firmly, buttress, strengthen’) and *epi* (‘apt or fitting’) and has the sense of strengthening what’s already there *to most suitably support what will follow*. God wants to strengthen us, to prepare us for *so much more!*

¹⁹ We take “the brothers at Lystra and Iconium” (Ac 16:2) to be the “elders” of Ac 14:21-23.

²⁰ Eg, a year in Antioch (Ac 11:26), eighteen months in Corinth (18:11), three years in Ephesus (19:8ff, 20:31), etc.

God has so much more planned for us. Let's build strength and **longevity** into all we do; preparing successors, **developing emerging gifts and leaders**, training future elders - doing all we can to see the church strong and strengthened. And let's do all we can to personally **stay strong** (prayer, worship, Word, tongues, fellowship) and take every opportunity to **be strengthened**. And let's be sure to embrace apostolic-prophetic input in all this. The harvest is abundant, and we must be ready! (Pr 14:4)

7. WE SEE AFFECTION, not apathy. And it's a vital hallmark of the partnership! As we read Acts-Epistles, we can't fail to notice the overriding *warmth* and *affection* of Paul's relationships with the elders and the churches. If apathy is '*lack of feeling, concern, emotions; indifference or impassiveness*', then what we see in the NT is the very opposite! The Galatians are his "dear children" for whom he is "in the pains of childbirth until Christ is formed" in them (**Gal 4:19**). He ministered amongst the Thessalonians "as a father...with his own children, encouraging, comforting and urging" them (**1Th 2:11-12**); and even "as a nursing mother tenderly cares for her own children" (**1Th 2:7**, NASB), sharing his life with them because he "loved [them] so much" (**1Th 2:8**). The Philippians are "in his heart"; he misses them "deeply...with the affection of Christ Jesus" (**Phil 1:7-8**). And when he says goodbye to the Ephesian elders there is much weeping, embracing, kissing and grieving (**Ac 20:37-38**)...

And what about the Corinthians!.... they too are "dear children" (**1Co 4:14**). He would "live or die" with (for) them (**2Co 7:3**) and has "abundant love" for them, even though they've caused him "great distress and anguish of heart and...many tears" (**2Co 2:4**). He will gladly endure suffering for them (**2Co 1:6**). He commends them and takes pride in them (**2Co 7:4**, 9:2). He longs to know how they're doing (7:6ff) and is deeply concerned they might be deceived (**2Co 11:1-15**). He hurts when they're in pain (**2Co 11:29**); in fact, his daily concern for them and the other churches weighs on him more intensely than any hardship (**2Co 11:28**). And he's "completely open" and vulnerable with them (**2Co 5:11, 6:11**), describing the "struggles on the outside, fears inside" he's battled (**2Co 7:5**), and he longs for them to reciprocate this degree of openness, vulnerability and devotion (**2Co 6:13, 7:2**)...

The NT churches grew daily and advanced their Great Commission in an environment of deep affection - and these two things are *not coincidental!* They were devoted to *koinonia* and grew daily *as a result* (**Ac 2:42**). When we really love one another, the Spirit knows we will really love those He adds to us - so He adds to us. Let's be sure to *invest sufficient time* in our relationships as elders, leaders and ministries together; as brothers, couples, families. How we relate *will* flow from the "head...down" into the whole body and result in great blessing (**Ps 133**); there's a *special growth* that comes not from our plans, or even from our evangelism, but simply from *being in harmony* together! If you are distant the church will feel cold; but if *you* are friends the church will be warm and vibrant. Make lots of time for this. Get together socially (to "get to know" each other, **Gal 1:18**); it shouldn't be 'business' every time we meet. Let's be sure to protect each other, speak well of one another, and care deeply for one another. God will bless that environment.

7. Growing Together

This is a really big moment; time for a new generation to be gripped with a revelation of how Jesus is building His church, to bring in His harvest. The Lord wants to give us so much more; to build churches amongst us into which multitudes can be added, discipled and sent-out! In this new, expansive season let's give ourselves to: prayer and fasting; communicating news and reports across our apostolic spheres; ensuring we let the Body be the Body by encouraging, empowering and releasing those under our care; coordinating our resources and planting churches; and - because fresh growth and new works will require expansion and enlargement of our leadership - let's seek to grow and develop in our gift, ministry and leadership. As we do so we *will* discover afresh how apostolic ministry functions amongst the churches, and in partnership with their elderships, so that the Body of Christ can be built up in readiness for His return!...

David Lyon
Sept, 2021