

Horizontal Christianity

God is not a fan of skyscrapers. The Bible says that in the days before Abraham, men tried to build a looming tower on the Babylonian plain. You know the rest of the story. God confused their language, frustrated their plans and scattered humanity (see Gen. 11:1-9). Instead of going vertical, they went horizontal. Instead of forming a big crowd, they went in all directions.

And instead of speaking one uniform language, they suddenly discovered cultural diversity. There were more languages being spoken at the Tower of Babel than you would ever hear on a New York City subway. The confusion must have been deafening—and there were no translators! *What's happening? ¿Que paso? Hva skjedd? ??? ?????????? Was ist passiert?*

God revealed in that moment that He wants us to build *out*, not *up*. He confirmed this in the New Testament, right before the early followers of Jesus experienced a linguistic miracle on the day of Pentecost. Jesus said: “You shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth” (Acts 1:8, NASB).

That seems clear enough, but human beings tend to crave the Babylonian model. The disciples continued to build the church in comfortable Jerusalem—until persecution scattered them throughout Judea and Samaria (see Acts 8:1). They had to leave the familiar. Soon a healthy congregation had been planted in what is now Turkey.

Within a few years, the gospel had spread to Greece, Italy and North Africa, and Paul set his sights on Spain. God was building His kingdom horizontally.

We often think of God as a *builder*. But do you know Him as a *scatterer*? The same Christ who said, “I will build My church” (Matt. 16:18) also said, “Go therefore and make

disciples of all the nations" (Matt. 28:19). His ways are not our ways. He builds to reach humanity with His love, not so humanity can see our impressive structures.

I believe God is in a scattering mode these days. America's churches are in flux. Denominations are dying while others are being reborn, reconfigured and painfully overhauled. Many Christians feel confused and unsettled. We are being required to scrap our Tower of Babel blueprints because God has very different plans. As I go through my own painful shifts, the Lord is telling me to make these changes:

Make disciples, not crowds. I've enjoyed many opportunities to preach in nations such as India, Nigeria and Indonesia. There are big audiences there—and it's tempting for a guy to think that he's making an impact if he can get 10,000 people to jump and shout for an hour.

The roar of an audience can be deceiving. I can have a more lasting influence if I invest my life in a handful of leaders—and then let them touch the crowds. If I want to make more than just a shallow impact, I must do more than deliver drive-by sermons. In the kingdom of God, less is more.

Build relationships, not customers. The apostle Paul—the ultimate horizontal builder—wasn't into market share, audience manipulation or any of the other stupid gimmicks employed to build monstrous "ministries" that really don't help people.

Paul didn't hypnotize people to get offerings—he suffered beatings for them. In this new season of the church, there will be a no-tolerance policy for anything fake or phony. Church leaders must be genuine. Hucksters have been put on notice: Stop the circus and get off the stage.

Inspire character, not ego. Just as God opposes tall buildings, He also resists pride. No wonder He is scattering the charismatic movement! Somewhere along the way we forgot that the Holy Spirit empowered us so we would take the gospel

to the world. We elevated people in true Babylonian style, forgetting that the only way *up* in God's kingdom is *down* the path of humility.

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