

How a Move of God in Northern Ireland Provides the Blueprint for Reclaiming Cities

Pastor Alan Scott says the key to seeing revival break out in a city is for ordinary believers to partner with God in both the supernatural and the supernarrative—to operate in the gifts of the Spirit and to understand how their everyday life fits into God’s grand story. He saw both these things happen at his former church—Causeway Coast Vineyard in Coleraine, Northern Ireland—and as a result witnessed a move of God break out in a historically divided and secular city. When that happens, even a Starbucks can become a site for the supernatural.

During that move of God, one of Scott’s friends was at a coffee shop when he met a young man whose partner had just come to faith. He told the young man, “Hey, here’s what’s going to happen. I’m going to pray in a moment. A wind is going to come into this coffee shop. It’s going to swirl around you. Then you’re going to know that God is real, and you’re going to give your life to him.”

The young man, skeptical, shrugged and said, “OK.”

The two bowed their heads to pray together, and the moment Scott’s friend began to pray, a mighty wind came into the coffee shop and swirled around the young skeptic. Immediately, he gave his life to Christ.

“It’s kind of easy bringing people to Jesus when that kind of stuff is breaking out,” Scott says. “But that kind of stuff is a product not of a sudden movement of God but of a gradual movement of His people going after the city, changing the

atmosphere of the city. When that kind of climate takes root, it makes everything a little bit easier.”

Scott knows from personal experience. He first came to Christ through an awakening in his community, helped usher in a move of God at his first church and is now eagerly contending for the Spirit to work through his new church in Anaheim, California.

It’s not going unnoticed. Pete Greig, the founder of the 24-7 Prayer Movement, says: “When Alan Scott speaks, I try to listen. Where he leads, I try to follow.”

For Scott, community-shifting transformation won’t be accomplished by scheduled revivals or frenzied church meetings but rather by years of diligently sowing seed into a city.

“Every church thinks their city is hard to reach, and every city is hard to reach—when we stay in the building,” Scott says. “But it’s amazing how open people are when we actually move beyond the services into our communities. People are desperately open. They’re desperately looking for life change. [Christians] can start there. They can start with the people around them whom God is moving in.”

Scott spoke to *Charisma* about his experience with moves of God, his journey from Northern Ireland to Southern California and how believers can be the catalysts for spiritual renewal in their cities.

Moves of God

Scott wasn’t raised a Christian. In fact, he says, he was a teenager before he ever met a Christian. But that all changed after his brother became a follower of Jesus. And his brother wasn’t the only one coming to Christ in his city.

“Suddenly, there was—a ‘move of God’ would be too strong, but definitely something stirring in our community—where some

skinheads and some punks became believers,” Scott says. “One of them happened to be my brother, so I watched the transformation of his life, slightly intrigued and slightly afraid.”

At the same time, one of Scott’s friends began attending a Christian youth organization and invited him to join. Scott began attending, until one night he got saved during a screening of the 1977 miniseries *Jesus of Nazareth*. He says he was “absolutely arrested” by what he saw on screen and—despite not knowing any of the sinner’s prayer etiquette—decided to follow God because “what I saw on the screen is real and I need that in my life.”

By the time he was 27, Scott and his wife, Kathryn, were co-founding and pastoring the Causeway Coast Vineyard in Coleraine, Northern Ireland. They learned a lot during those early years of ministry.

“I think it’s the same for any pastor,” Scott says. “We always think it’s about building the church, and then you realize, *Actually, Jesus was forming me. I am the project, and all these things that are happening around me are designed to create something within me.*”

Coleraine, a coastal town of approximately 25,000, enjoys influence belying its small size thanks to 3 million tourists who annually visit the famous Causeway Coast. When the church was founded, Scott says the town’s Protestant and Catholic communities were sharply divided, a situation which was only growing more tense with time. Though Scott’s initial focus was on growing and developing his small church community, his entire paradigm shifted during a church leadership retreat.

During that time, Scott felt God impress upon his heart, “If you’ll go after the lost, I will look after the church.”

“As church planters, we’d been trying to build the church, and it really isn’t our job to do that,” Scott says. “Jesus said,

‘I will build my church.’ ... That was the seminal moment for our church, because we began cultivating an outward focus: to go out and engage the lost, to get churchgoers to think beyond the building and develop ministries—[from] healings on the street to compassion ministries. To desire to pursue the Father as He was pursuing the lost.”

Causeway Coast’s first step was to bring peace to its polarized community. Scott says parades were an area of significant tension in Northern Ireland, stoking division and escalating violence within a region. That year, before a key parade, police asked Scott if his church would come attend the event. When Scott asked why, the police officers told him, “We can see that when you show up, there happens to be a change in the atmosphere.”

From there, the church began serving wherever God gave them favor—eventually ministering everywhere from hospitals to public schools to branches of government.

One key initiative that paved the way for revival was the church’s healing ministry.

“We really invented a simple model in the community,” Scott says. “We erected a banner that says, ‘Healing.’ We got out four or six chairs, and we literally waited for people to take a seat, [even] in the rain or in the freezing cold. As we did that, God had this beautiful way of showing up and transforming lives.”

People began getting healed. In a small town like Coleraine, news travels quickly—and thanks to its tourist traffic, news travels far. Healed people brought their friends to be healed too. Scott recalls that once a busload of soccer players pulled up to the healing banner, ready to see the team injuries healed.

“I had people from all over Ireland and even beyond Ireland come,” Scott says. “I saw every conceivable cancer

healed—sometimes really dramatically, most of the time really slowly over a period of time. But it never gets old. It's just an amazing thing to watch God do what no one else can do."

The supernatural started but didn't stop with healing. In October 2013, a prophetic voice told Causeway Coast, "This month you have seen on average three people a day come to faith. It has astounded you, but I tell you that from this day you are going to see between five and 10 people a day coming to faith." The following week, 35 people came to faith. By 2014, Scott says "a significant move of God" took hold in Coleraine, and thousands of people came to faith. Scott says for a time, 56 to 70 people started a relationship with Christ each day. During that time, Scott says the Holy Spirit gave ordinary people prophetic words, words of knowledge and dream interpretation. He believes this move of God is at least somewhat duplicable and the result of reaping a long-sown harvest.

"When you sow a seed in the community over a period of time—the long haul, spending every week on the streets ... it actually begins to alter the calling of the city," Scott says. "It begins to change and blooms this beautiful receptivity to the community, where it's just easier for people to come to faith."

Called to California

Alan and Kathryn Scott never imagined they'd leave the Causeway Coast Vineyard. After all, their years of work were finally shifting the atmosphere of the entire community, and they loved their brothers and sisters in the church there. But the Lord had other plans for the Scott family.

"For a long time, Kathryn had sensed God speaking about us living in the U.S. at some point," Scott says. "I thought it'd be maybe after our kids had gone to college and all that. But then we were in the gathering, and very clearly the Holy

Spirit began to speak and say, 'I want you to build an altar again. It's time to pioneer again.' Honestly, you tend to tuck those kinds of things away, but from then on, it was like prophecy central. Everywhere I went, people prophesied over us. Initially, I didn't want to hear it—we were loving the community there and loving what God was doing. Who would want to leave something like that? It's what we dreamed of and desired for years. But the Lord kept speaking into it."

In June 2017, the Scotts moved to the U.S.—without any clear plan of where to go next or what God was calling them to. Their young daughters weren't in school. Neither parent had a job. They grieved the loss of their Coleraine community. Scott calls it the "usual Jesus story": "He says, 'Come, follow Me,' and He doesn't tell you where or what or who. So we just followed Him."

In December, the Anaheim Vineyard—the original Vineyard Church founded and pastored by John Wimber—announced its then-lead pastor, Lance Pittluck, was retiring. The Scotts were invited to seek the pastorship and by February 2018 were installed as the new lead pastors of the Anaheim Vineyard.

"John Wimber has this beautiful statement where he says, 'The economy of the kingdom of God is quite simple: Each new step in the kingdom costs us everything we have gained to date,'" Scott says. "That's been the reality for us. As we take another step in the story, it's going to cost us. Everything we've gained, every breakthrough, all the territory and all that the Lord has done, we have to surrender at His feet again as we take our next step into His story."

Scott admits he was initially nervous taking over such a historic and well-established church, but he says the Anaheim Vineyard welcomed his family with open arms. In a way, he says, both pastors and community alike needed this change.

"The church had been in decline for quite a long time, and so

people were really desperate for hope,” Scott says. “We’re now living in California, where it’s brown most of the year, but if it rains for a few days, the ground and the mountains around us turn green almost immediately. It’s been a little bit like that in the transition. People were just desperate for a little bit of hope, and as we engaged in that and brought what Jesus has given us to the table, you can see the hope bloom around us.”

Within the first six weeks of leading Anaheim Vineyard, Scott says the church’s attendance doubled “pretty much overnight.” He openly wondered whether it was simply a honeymoon period, but Bill Johnson—pastor of Bethel Church in Redding, California—prophesied to Scott that the transition would be free of difficulty and opposition. So far, Scott confirms, he’s been right. And as he’s gotten acclimated to Southern California, he’s noticed something stirring among the charismatic churches of the West Coast.

“Kathryn and I felt a sovereign push to step into a story He is specifically writing in Southern California,” Scott says. “He didn’t tell us what that story was; He just invited us to move to be part of it.”

Recently, Jeremy and Katie Riddle announced they would be joining the Scotts as co-pastors at the Anaheim Vineyard, taking oversight of worship, prayer and creativity. Scott lists the Riddles, Bethel Church and Bridgetown Church in Portland, Oregon, as examples of God writing a story on the West Coast that goes beyond the church building.

“I think the Spirit of God is doing something,” Scott says. “I think it’ll look quite different and will have ingredients of the supernatural, empowered ministry and community formation, and it’s so beautiful. ... There’s definitely something on the West Coast that is flourishing. I think often the media presents California, as it did with Ireland, as, ‘Here’s a community that’s hard to reach.’ But I think those are the

ones where God stores the treasures. It's often in the places of darkness He stores great treasure."

Even before Scott moved to town, he was influencing his West Coast neighbors. In the book *Scattered Servants*, Bridgetown Pastor John Mark Comer says Scott's work in Coleraine influenced Comer's own work in Portland.

"Very few leaders think like Alan Scott," Comer says. "Even less live like Alan Scott. His wide, expansive vision of transformation, not just for churches, but for entire cities, hits a deep nerve in my soul. ... Seeing Alan's community in Northern Ireland cast a vision in my mind of what could be here in America. But being with Alan is what's sparked a desire to open up every moment of every day to the Spirit's work in my own city. This is a voice we need to hear."

But for now, Scott says he and his family are thrilled to simply be part of the Anaheim Vineyard and its rich Spirit-filled heritage. He describes it as "living the stories." And he thinks God has a powerful destiny still in store for it.

Church and City

Scott says the most important step to changing the atmosphere of the city is cultivating both an outward focus and a servant's heart. The former requires leaders to critically examine which church systems or structures push focus inward rather than stretching the body out. Scott says it's one of the first things he had to change after becoming pastor of the Anaheim Vineyard.

"The natural drift of life is inward," he says. "Particularly when something's in decline, we begin to look at what's going wrong and we try to preserve it. We try to maintain it. We have this posture that looks towards the past and tries to reclaim that. So we grow increasingly insular. But our hope is always this outward journey. It's always building towards what the Father is doing beyond this. That's what stretches us,

allows us to grow and then really creates spiritual formation.”

Living outwardly means abandoning the scarcity mentality, feeling liberated in Christ to give everything away—even your life—if that’s what He demands. After all, as Wimber said, every new step requires the loss of every previous gain. It means following Christ in both the supernatural and the supernarrative. Many charismatics are already quite good at living out the supernatural. Dream interpretation, prophecy and healing all serve both the body and the community. But Scott acknowledges some believers aren’t ready to do healings under a banner in the middle of the street. Other times, it’s simply not appropriate.

For those times and people, Scott suggests living in the supernarrative—finding how your story fits into God’s story.

“Start where you are,” Scott suggests to readers. “Most of you will be in your workplace, and that’s a place of kingdom expansion. God is at work in our work and you should recognize how to partner with Him. ... The supernarrative is the recognition that work itself is holy and honorable to the Lord—learning with Him in that area to say, ‘OK. I’m a barista today in Starbucks. What is the kingdom narrative that is unfolding here? What is God doing through this workplace?’”

Once that’s done, the other main step to community change is cultivating a servant’s heart. Scott cautions against becoming the city’s Pharisees, policing the city into a state of faux holiness and shaming people into forgiveness. Rather, he recommends adopting a father’s heart: speaking hope, life and compassion into the city’s residents and praying for its ultimate restoration.

“We come as partners to the city,” Scott says. “We come with a servant’s towel around our arm. We look at the needs and the dreams of the city, and we learn how to unlock that together.

I don't think it's a conquest thing."

When ordinary believers stop trying to do their own thing and lean into God, Scott believes they may be surprised at how much He's already doing in their city.

"The truth is, He's been working in our community all along," he says. "Instead of trying to get Him to do what we want Him to do, how about we just go join Him in what He's already doing?"

Joshua Olson *is a freelance writer for Charisma.*

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