

The GlobalChurch Project

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## Alan Hirsch

### Local Church Small Group Resource

This resource is designed to help your small group discussion. It's shaped to inspire you to consider new ways for understanding the mission of the church. Questions are organized in themes. Consider choosing the themes appropriate to your small group context. You don't need to cover all the questions. Allow for a time of response.

Small Group Preparation:

1. Video: Alan Hirsch, 22 minutes. Themes:
  - **The Forgotten Ways**
  - **Missional God – Missional Church**
  - **Missional Education**
  - **Birthing Movements**
2. Scripture reference: Matthew 28:18–20.
3. Participants are encouraged to bring their own journals or writing materials.

## Beginning the conversation

Consider the questions suggested below to start the conversation for your small group. They'll consolidate the content of the video, after you've viewed it.

1. What were the major themes in Alan's responses?
2. How does Alan describe mission?
3. Discuss the difficulties of the content. What was difficult to understand? Was there anything you would like to clarify with the group?
4. Theological method: How is Alan's theology informed and shaped by his practical ministry? What approaches does he take in understanding God in the context of his day-to-day experiences and ministry?

## Going deeper

Explore the major themes raised in the video. Critically engage with Alan's theology. Consider the questions that respond to the issues raised in your preliminary discussion.

1. **The Forgotten Ways:** When Alan looked at movements that changed the world, why did he look at The Early Church and the Chinese church? What were these test cases for? What was Alan trying to describe?
2. **The Forgotten Ways:** Alan defines missional church as: "...a community of God's people that defines itself, and organizes its life around, its real purpose of being an agent of God's mission to the world. In other words, the church's true and authentic organizing principle is mission." (The Forgotten Ways, 82). Discuss.
3. **The Forgotten Ways:** What are the 6 elements that come together to create "Apostolic movements"? (mDNA = missional DNA)
4. **The Forgotten Ways:** "All great missionary movements begin at the fringes of the church, among the poor and the marginalized, and seldom, if ever, at the center. It is vital that in pursuing missional modes of church, we get out of the stifling equilibrium of the center of our movements and denominations, move to the fringes, and engage in real mission there. ... when the church engages at the fringes, it almost always brings life to the center." (30). Discuss.
5. **The Forgotten Ways:** "The church with the best programs and the 'sexiest' appeal tends to get more customers." However, "We plainly cannot consume our way into discipleship. All of us must become much more active in the equation of becoming lifelong followers of Jesus." (45). Discuss.
6. **The Forgotten Ways:** "The movement that Jesus initiated was an organic people movement, not a religious institution. This must seep into our imaginations and reinform all our practices. (54). Discuss.
7. **The Forgotten Ways: Element 1: Jesus is Lord.** How is this belief at the heart of all missional movements? In what sense are they literally Jesus movements? How does this confession hold everything together?
8. **The Forgotten Ways:** Discuss the following quotes: "At its very heart, Christianity is therefore a messianic movement, one that seeks to consistently embody the life, spirituality, and mission of its Founder." (94) "'Jesus is Lord' is a radical claim, one that is ultimately rooted in questions of allegiance, of ultimate authority, of the ultimate norm and standard for human life. Instead, Christianity has often sought to ally itself comfortably with allegiance to other authorities, be they political, economic, cultural, or ethnic." (99)
9. **The Forgotten Ways: Element 2: Disciple Making.** Why are movements deeply and profoundly committed to disciple making through reproduction? Why must disciple-making embody the message of Jesus as it draws people to Christ and makes them like Christ? And discuss the following quotes: "The quality of the church's leadership is directly proportional to the quality of discipleship." "Discipleship is primary; leadership is always secondary. And leadership, to be genuinely Christian, must always reflect Christlikeness and therefore...discipleship." (119)
10. **The Forgotten Ways: Element 3: Missional-Incarnational Impulse.** God is a missionary God and the church is a sent (missionary) people. The church is to reflect the incarnation of Christ in its presence, proximity, powerlessness, and proclamation. So, how would you define "missional-incarnational impulse"?
11. **The Forgotten Ways:** Discuss the following quotes: "It is Christ who determines our purpose and mission in the world, and then it is our mission that must drive our search for modes of being-in-the-world." (143) "Start with the Church and the mission will probably get lost. Start with mission and it is likely that the Church will be found." (143). "The early Christians were not focused on the church but rather on following Jesus and doing His mission, and the church emerged from that." (143). "Anywhere people gather for social reasons could be a good place for missional engagement." (145)
12. **The Forgotten Ways: Element 4: Apostolic Environment.** How would you define "apostolic leader"? Does it exist today, and, if so, how is it expressed? Why do we need more than just pastors and teachers today (why do we need apostles, prophets and evangelists too)?

13. **The Forgotten Ways:** Discuss the following quotes: "Apostolic leadership...is always present in periods of significant missional extension." (151) "Without apostolic ministry the church either forgets its high calling or fails to implement it successfully. ... If we really want missional church, then we must have a missional leadership system to drive it--it's that simple." (152) "Apostolic ministry calls forth and develops the gifts and callings of all of God's people. It does not create reliance but develops the capacities of the whole people of God based on the dynamics of the gospel." (164)
14. **The Forgotten Ways: Element 5: Organic Systems.** How does Alan describe "organic systems"?
15. **The Forgotten Ways:** Discuss the following quotes on organic systems: "A living systems approach seeks to structure the common life of an organization around the rhythms and structures that mirror life itself." (182) "...church must structure itself around the natural ebb and flow of the believer's life. Existing relationships with believers and nonbelievers alike become the very fabric of the church." (185) "Structures are needed but they must be simple, reproducible and internal rather than external." "The function of leadership is to grow structure, not impose it." (186). "We need to let go of a static model of church that is based primarily on congregation, programs, and buildings. In its place we need to develop a notion of Christian community...which...is more flexible, adaptive, and responsive to change." (199). "Organic multiplication begins a whole lot slower than addition, but in the end it is infinitely more effective." (209) "In a sense the gospel, too, travels like a virus. It is 'sneezed' and then passed on through further sneezing from one person to the other. All that is needed are the right conditions and the appropriate relationships into which we can 'sneeze.'" (211)
16. **The Forgotten Ways: Element 6: *Communitas (Not Community)*.** How is "communitas" different to community (moving from friends and associates to comrades, who express a different kind of love)? You may want to look at the 4-minute video here, to see the difference: <http://www.vergenetwork.org/2011/09/27/alan-hirsch-communitas-not-community-video/>
17. **The Forgotten Ways:** Why does communitas happen when we are put into situations of chaos, danger, disorientation, marginalization, and challenge? Why should such "community forged in change and disruption" be normal for the people of Christ?
18. **The Forgotten Ways:** Discuss: "Experience tells us that a church that aims at ministry seldom gets to mission even if it sincerely intends to do so. But the church that aims at mission will have to do ministry, because *ministry is the means* to do mission. Our services, our ministries, need a greater cause to keep them alive and give them their broader meaning." (236)
19. **The Forgotten Ways:** Discuss: "One of the most missional things that a church community could do is simply to get out of their buildings and go to where the people are--and be God's redeemed people in that place in a way that invites people into the equation!" (240). "We need to hit the road again. We are the people of the Way...." (241)
20. **The Forgotten Ways:** According to Alan, why has the church forgotten these 6 elements?
21. **The Forgotten Ways:** How does Alan describe the habits and practices that sustain such missional DNA in church life and witness?
22. **The Forgotten Ways:** Discuss how each of these 5 leadership gifts serves the mission and vitality of the church? And how is each gift expressed today? *Apostle, prophet, pastor, teacher, and evangelist.*
23. **Missional God – Missional Church:** Discuss what it means to be a "missional church"? Why doesn't the church have its own mission but, instead, join in the mission of God?
24. **Missional God – Missional Church:** What does Alan think is most misunderstood about what it means to be a missional church?
25. **Missional God – Missional Church:** How does the church sometimes domesticate or water-down the idea and practices of "missional churches"?
26. **Missional God – Missional Church:** What are the growing edges in the missional church conversation?

27. **Missional God – Missional Church:** What are the positive characteristics of US culture, which make it open to experimentation, innovation, pioneering, risk, and trying new things (including in mission)?
28. **Missional Education:** What challenges face theological education today? How does it need to adapt and change in the light of financial, cultural, political, legislative, ministry, and missional pressures?
29. **Missional Education:** What are ways theological and ministry training can equip people for mission in the world today?
30. **Missional Education:** Why is pain a great teacher? Why shouldn't we ever waste a crisis?
31. **Missional Education:** How can theological colleges be servant organizations that serve the church, the needs of the world, and the mission of God?
32. **Birthing Movements:** Why are movements so crucial to the course and direction of history?
33. **Birthing Movements:** Have a look at the "100 Movements" website, and discuss what the movement is doing and why? <http://100movements.com/>

## Application

Ensure the discussion is specifically drawing on your local setting. Make sure the discussion is relevant to the lives of faith for your small group. Encourage relevant and thoughtful examples from each participant.

1. **The Forgotten Ways: The Forgotten Ways: Element 1: Jesus is Lord.** Is this belief at the heart of your church and ministry? Are you a "Jesus movement", focused on Christ and his mission and his way?
2. **The Forgotten Ways: Element 2: Disciple Making.** Are you committed to disciple making through reproduction? Does your disciple-making embody the message of Jesus as it draws people to Christ and makes them like Christ?
3. **The Forgotten Ways: Element 3: Missional-Incarnational Impulse.** How are you and your church reflecting the incarnation of Christ in your presence, proximity, powerlessness, and proclamation?
4. **The Forgotten Ways: Element 4: Apostolic Environment.** Does your church empower, train, release "apostolic", and pioneering leaders? Is your ministry releasing all these gifts: pastors, teachers, apostles, prophets, and evangelists?
5. **The Forgotten Ways: Element 5: Organic Systems.** "We need to let go of a static model of church that is based primarily on congregation, programs, and buildings. In its place we need to develop a notion of Christian community...which...is more flexible, adaptive, and responsive to change." (199). Discuss what this means in your ministry and church.
6. **The Forgotten Ways: Element 6: Communitas (Not Community).** Does your church experience community or communitas? Are situations of chaos, danger, disorientation, marginalization, risk, and challenge drawing you into deeper mission and "communitas"?
7. **Missional God – Missional Church:** Is your church or ministry open to experimentation, innovation, pioneering, risk, and trying new things (including in mission)?
8. **Missional Education:** How would you change theological education and ministry training, so that people are better equipped for ministry and mission today?
9. **Birthing Movements:** Is your church or ministry an institution or movement? Is it a monument or a movement? What would it mean to become a movement, like the Early Church?

## Informing community

Facilitate the space for your group to respond to the discussion. You might consider this section as a personal time of written journal responses to the following questions.

1. What is God encouraging me, our small group and our community, to do?
2. In response to the issues raised in the video, what are areas I want to ask God for forgiveness in? How do I need to change? What does God want me to stand up for?
3. How do I need God to minister to me and my community, for us to better engage with the contextual issues of our community?
4. How can I gain a better understanding of mission today? What do we ask that God would do in our hearts?

## Prayer

Spend time in prayer over what you've learnt.

Invite the ministry of the Holy Spirit to clarify, heal, and inspire change for your participants and communities.

## Links

**Website:** [www.theglobalchurchproject.com](http://www.theglobalchurchproject.com)

**Book:** Graham Hill, *GlobalChurch: Reshaping Our Conversations, Renewing Our Mission, Revitalizing Our Churches* (IVP Academic, 2015)