

THE EPIC SOLUTION:  
A CALL FOR DECENTRALIZED EVANGELICAL MISSIONAL COMMUNITIES

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## THE EPIC SOLUTION

As mentioned in a previous paper, “The Epic Problem,” the twentieth and early twenty-first century church initiatives, programming, and activities are not working in terms of kingdom advancement or transforming lives. Accordingly, a redefinition of church is necessary. An entire shift in the paradigm of organizational structures must occur in order to support maximum intentionality in three areas: discipleship (growing in Christ), evangelism (sharing in Christ), and missional activity (serving in Christ). Furthermore, the deployment of decentralized missional communities must occur for maximum impact. This approach creates an empowering environment where participation reverses and 80-90% of members become active instead of passive. Furthermore, the approach aligns with all the major kingdom movements of history. The fancy name for these communities is “Decentralized Evangelical Missional Communities” (DEvMC) or Freedom Communities for short. This paper will specifically address the questions of what exactly these communities are and how they work.

### What are Freedom Communities?

Freedom Communities are “Decentralized Evangelical Missional Communities” (see Appendix for DEMC illustration). The following defines each of the four words. First, to *decentralize* an institution means to “distribute the administrative power or functions (a central authority) over a less concentrated area” and to reorganize into “smaller more autonomous units.”<sup>1</sup> The Old Testament paradigm was “centripetal; the flow was toward the center.”<sup>2</sup> In other words, currently the local church is often similar to the temple in the Old Testament and requests

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1. Dictionary.com, <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/decentralized?s=t> (accessed April 30, 2013).

2. Timothy J. Keller, *Center Church: Doing Balanced, Gospel-Centered Ministry in Your City* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012), 147.

attendance to a building or event.<sup>3</sup> Alternatively, the New Testament is “centrifugal – moving outward from the center.”<sup>4</sup> Within a New Testament paradigm, the church is the body of believers regardless of locale (Eph. 4:4, 12; Rom.12:4-5, NASB).<sup>5</sup>

Second, *evangelicalism* is a “movement in modern Christianity, transcending denominational and confessional boundaries, that emphasizes conformity to the basic tenets of the faith.”<sup>6</sup> Theologically, evangelical Christianity stresses the sovereignty of God, divinely inspired Scripture, and salvation by an act of “unmerited divine grace received through faith in Christ.”<sup>7</sup> The technical term denoting the form of evangelicalism inherent within Freedom Communities is “neo-evangelicalism” represented by individuals such as Billy Graham (do not confuse this term with the Barthian construct of neo-orthodoxy).<sup>8</sup> The term neo-evangelicalism rose from a desire to distinguish itself from fundamentalism, which focused on purity to the point of worldly separation leading to a lack of willingness to share their faith.<sup>9</sup>

Third, the term *missional* originated from the Gospel and Our Culture Network (GOCN) while attempting to engage the Western world through the lens of a mission field.<sup>10</sup> Dave Earley provides a good working definition for mission in Freedom Communities. Earley explains that it

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3. Dave Earley and David Wheeler, *Evangelism Is: How to Share Jesus with Passion and Confidence* (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2010), 351.

4. Keller, *Center Church: Doing Balanced, Gospel-Centered Ministry in Your City*, 147.

5. Unless otherwise noted, all Bible references are taken from the New American Standard Version (1995 update), Lockman Foundation.

6. R. V. Pierard and W. A. Elwell, “Evangelicalism,” in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Walter A. Elwell, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001), 405.

7. *Ibid.*, 406.

8. *Ibid.*, 408.

9. *Ibid.*

10. Alan Hirsch, *The Forgotten Ways* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos, 2006), 81.

“is not something the church does for God; it is rather the church getting in sync with the heart of God and cooperating with the activity of God.”<sup>11</sup>

Fourth, the word *community* has a very specific meaning as it pertains to the Freedom Movement. The definition of a community is an assortment of fifteen or fewer individuals, both Christian and non-Christian, who gather in culturally relevant locations such as cafés, parks, schools, offices, homes etc. Accordingly, Freedom Communities provides a distinction between an organism and an organization.<sup>12</sup> Dave Earley and David Wheeler allude to the importance of recognizing a distinction between the two by stating, “If we view a church as existing in a separate location from which we live (an organization), then it becomes easy to ignore...the Great Commission.”<sup>13</sup> Accordingly, Freedom Communities focus as an organism, which is a community that exists where we live, work, and play, rather than focusing on an organization, which is a separate location from where believers live.

### **The Gospel Core**

At the very core of Freedom Communities is the Gospel. Many, if not all Christians nod at the importance of the Gospel. However, in actuality, an epidemic of gospel denial exists within Christianity. Timothy Keller provides a masterful juxtaposition of the gospel and religion in his book, *Center Church: Doing Balanced, Gospel-Centered Ministry in Your City* (See Table 2). Keller defines religion as “I obey; therefore I am accepted,” and defines the gospel as “I am accepted by God through Christ; therefore I obey.”<sup>14</sup> Accordingly, Keller suggests there are three

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11. Earley and Wheeler, *Evangelism Is: How to Share Jesus with Passion and Confidence*, 345.

12. For more information, see G. Bulley, “What Is Church,” in *Introduction to Church Planting* (Alpharetta, GA: North American Mission Board, 2000).

13. Earley and Wheeler, *Evangelism Is*, 351.

14. Keller, *Center Church*, 63.

ways to approach God. First, an individual can reject God through irreligion, by completely avoiding and ignoring God.<sup>15</sup> Second, an individual can also reject God through religion, by avoiding God and presenting a moral righteousness to God by obeying God's law to earn salvation.<sup>16</sup> Third, an individual can accept God through the gospel, by allowing God to provide righteousness through Christ (1 Cor. 1:30; 2 Cor. 5:21).<sup>17</sup> Richard Lovelace suggests, "Many...have a theoretical commitment to this doctrine [gospel], but in their day-to-day existence they rely on their sanctification [holiness] for their justification [acceptance]...drawing their assurance of acceptance with God from their sincerity, their past experience of conversion, their recent religious performance or the relative infrequency of their conscious, willful disobedience."<sup>18</sup> George Barna supports Lovelace's hypothesis with recent research that claims that 54% of self-described Christians, 18 or older, "believe that if you are a good person, or do enough good things, they can earn their way into Heaven."<sup>19</sup> Based on Keller's definition, over half of the self-described Christians in Barna's research are rejecting God through religion. Clear distinctions between moralism and the Gospel must occur with proper application to the Christian life. Freedom Communities apply the Gospel to life in a deep, meaningful way by avoiding moralism and simultaneously communicating and appropriating grace by connecting the identity of believers with Christ, which necessarily leads to obedience.

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15. Keller, *Center Church: Doing Balanced, Gospel-Centered Ministry in Your City*, 63.

16. Ibid.

17. Keller, *Center Church*, 63.

18. Richard F. Lovelace, *Dynamics of Spiritual Life: An Evangelical Theology of Renewal* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1979), 101, 211-2.

19. George Barna, *Maximum Faith: Live Like Jesus* (Ventura, CA and New York: Metaformation Inc. and Strategenius Group LLC, 2011), 37.

### The Three Purposes

Freedom Communities are intentionally limited to three purposes. The three purposes encompass growing, sharing, and serving. Although the concepts may seem overly familiar, the execution strategy of Freedom Communities is unique to modernity, relevant to postmodernity, and aligned with the wisdom of Scripture.

#### Growing

First, the concept of “growing” within the context of modernity consists primarily of reading the Bible, engaging in prayer, learning didactically in Bible studies, and listening to a sermon on Sunday morning. The inherent risk associated with the modern view of growth is not a lack of information, but a lack of integration. A postmodern society is not only thirsty for knowledge, but also desires assimilation of the knowledge to address issues of meaning and purpose.<sup>20</sup> Accordingly, the strategies for growth must address both information and assimilation. Freedom Communities address the concern in two ways. First, Bible study is not didactically based information disseminated from a human teacher to a recipient: an outside – in approach. Rather, in Freedom Communities, the individual reads the Bible in light of an orthodox commentary and then a facilitator asks questions regarding the Holy Spirit’s teaching of the recipient: an inside – out approach. Second, Freedom Communities do not ignore, outsource, or combatively confront issues around the unhealthy actions of believers: an outside – in approach. Instead, facilitators extend empathy and inquiry to assist individuals in discovering the unhealthy beliefs and thoughts that lead to the unhealthy emotions and actions. Once the believer re-aligns the unhealthy beliefs and thoughts with Gospel message that a believer’s identity is in Christ, then God’s Truth provides the power to resolve the unhealthy emotions and

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20. McRaney, *The Art of Personal Evangelism*, 127.

actions (Luke 6:43-45). In other words, God's Truth sanctifies the believer (John 17:17). Charles Colson and Nancy Pearcey support the approach by answering the question, "How do we redeem a culture? ...from the inside out. From the individual to the family to the community, and then outward in ever widening ripples." Accordingly, the overarching inside – out approach to growth in Freedom Communities not only appropriately addresses the procurement of orthodox information, but also the assimilation necessary for transformational living to impact the world.<sup>21</sup>

### Sharing

The second purpose of Freedom Communities is sharing. Sharing the Gospel message is a critical part of the Great Commission. Jesus commands each believer to "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit" (Matthew 28:19). Unfortunately, the vast majority of evangelism over the last couple of centuries has centered on institutionalized programmed events, which have included evangelistic crusades, revivals, concerts, special Sunday morning services etc. However, the Institute of American Church Growth (IACG) suggests that only 17 percent of all conversions occur from evangelistic events, yet the organized church continues to spend more financial and human capital on evangelistic institutional programming than others form of evangelism.<sup>22</sup> The research provided by the IACG also shows that between 75 and 90 percent "of new believers come to Christ through a friend or acquaintance who explains the Good News on a one-to-one basis."<sup>23</sup> Accordingly, Freedom Communities take a decentralized approach to sharing the Gospel. Granted, the prospects of sharing one's faith can be daunting, but Freedom Communities

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21. Charles Colson and Nancy Pearcey, *How Now Shall We Live?* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 1999), 308.

22. William Fay and Linda Evans Shepherd, *Share Jesus Without Fear* (Nashville, TN: B&H, 1999), 12.

23. Ibid.

eliminate the fear by employing a no-argument approach to purposeful evangelism. Within modernity, personal evangelism historically focused on scaring nonbelievers out of hell and using reason to overcome objections by employing sound argumentation.<sup>24</sup> Both approaches entail significant risk. First, regarding scaring nonbelievers out of hell, imagine a man courting a wife by putting a gun to her head and telling her that if she does not join him in a an eternal relationship, then he will kill her. Of course, she would likely concede, but the risks associated with building any form of healthy future relationship are significant. Thus, it seems reasonable that the Apostle Paul “never in his letters explicitly uses hell as a means of stimulating unbelievers to repent.”<sup>25</sup> Second, the problem with using argumentation to convince a nonbeliever to believe is that, not only is it quite uncomfortable for the believer, but it also causes the interlocutor’s defense mechanisms to increase, which actually undermines the chance for evangelistic success. Alternatively, Freedom Communities utilize a no-argument approach to sharing the Gospel that addresses life’s meaning and purpose. It utilizes empathy and inquiry to assist the nonbeliever in discovering an identity in Christ and thus, experience the fruit of the Spirit (i.e. joy and peace). In other words, by emphasizing inquiry over argumentation and significance over threats, the method and the Gospel effectively address the questions a postmodern world is asking.<sup>26</sup>

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24. Will McRaney Jr., *The Art of Personal Evangelism: Sharing Jesus in a Changing Culture* (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2003), 116-18.

25. Douglas J. Moo, “Paul on Hell,” in *Hell under Fire: Modern Scholarship Reinvents Eternal Punishment.*, ed. Christopher W. Morgan and Robert A. Peterson (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2004), 109.

26. For a comparison between modern and postmodern evangelistic approaches, see McRaney, *The Art of Personal Evangelism: Sharing Jesus in a Changing Culture*, 127-31.



## Serving

The third purpose of Freedom Communities is serving. Christian service has historically aligned with the organization in two specific ways. First, and the most lethal, is the expectation that it is solely the job of paid clergy to serve. The unspoken (and sometimes adamantly spoken) rule is that serving is the responsibility of the pastor and tithing is the responsibility of the congregation. Unfortunately, neither solution is working. The clergy make hospital visits and care for hurting people, while the laity attends church programming and 94% admit to not tithing.<sup>27</sup> The devastating result is a perpetuation of consumerism while simultaneously contributing to the high-risk nature of pastoral employment.<sup>28</sup> A second way serving aligns with the organization is through sanctioned programs such as community projects, food banks, or servant evangelism initiatives. These projects are often beneficial to the community and to the participants. However, the risk exists that church members only identify service with institutionally approved programs. Alternatively, the serving initiatives modeled by Jesus were significantly different in that neither was His service contingent upon funding nor was His service authorized by an institution. Christ's service was a denial of self that served both believers, as shown in Jesus's example of washing the disciple's feet in John 13, and nonbelievers, as shown in the story of the woman at the well in John 4. Jesus's method to determine the type of service to render consisted of joining God in the initiatives the Father had already begun as evidenced by His comments: "Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of Himself, unless it is something He sees the Father doing" (John 5:19). Accordingly, Freedom Communities do not look to the institution to serve them or to a sanctioned program to serve

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27. Barna, *Maximum Faith: Live Like Jesus*, 39.

28. For a plethora of statistical evidence regarding the high-risk nature of pastoral employment, see H. B. London and Neil B. Wiseman, *Pastors at Greater Risk* (Ventura, CA: Gospel Light, 2003), 20, 86, 172.

other believers and nonbelievers. Instead, the individuals within the Freedom Communities look to join God in His initiatives while simultaneously connecting the Gospel when serving others. In other words, not only is service another way of *growing* through intentionally denying self, but also another way of *sharing* the Gospel. The method of service within a Freedom Community focuses on both the external and internal needs of society. Externally, the focus pertains to the practical and physical needs of believers and nonbelievers. Examples may include offering transportation, providing financial assistance, or helping create a resume. Internally, the focus pertains to addressing the spiritual and emotional needs of both believers and nonbelievers. Examples may include taking time to listen, extending empathy, and providing encouragement. The powerful implications of decentralized service are a Spirit directed deployment of millions of Christians to a hurting world.

All three purposes of the Freedom Communities, growing, sharing, and serving, are highly focused in order to engage action and avoid the passivity of consumerism. All three purposes relate to a postmodern world by joining God in His initiatives. Finally, all three purposes support a Scriptural view of a body of believers that actively live and breathe as an organism rather than an organization.<sup>29</sup>

### **Servant Leadership**

The deployment of the Freedom Communities depends on biblically based servant leadership. Bill Hybels, mega-church pastor of Willow Creek Community Church, admits:

Although many preaching-centered churches attract large crowds, their impact on the community is often negligible. The church is packed for an hour on Sunday, but empty during the week. Sermon junkies tend to stay in their comfortable pews, growing ever more knowledgeable while becoming ever less involved in the surrounding community. Conversions are rare because there's little outreach. Community experience is

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29. For more information, see G. Bulley, "What Is Church," in *Introduction to Church Planting* (Alpharetta, GA: North American Mission Board, 2000).

shallow....The body is being fed and satisfied in a corporate teaching setting, but that's about all that's happening.<sup>30</sup>

Hybels continues by proposing that the solution rests primarily in leadership.<sup>31</sup> Unfortunately, George Barna observes that “our seminaries don't train leaders,” and “the people who fill positions of leadership in churches are, for the most part teachers...but not leaders.”<sup>32</sup>

Accordingly, what little leadership training occurs within the local church exists in the form of leadership seminars, weekend training, and other forms of didactic learning. Alternatively, *the* top priority of Freedom Community deployment is the training servant leaders through an initial eight-week mentorship with continued development throughout the life of the Community. The mentoring process focuses on a combination of information and experiential learning with an emphasis on leading, not learning about leadership.

The specific style of leadership within Freedom Communities focuses on serving not directing and multiplying instead of maintaining. Eugene Peterson masterfully paraphrases Jesus's words regarding servant leadership: “Kings like to throw their weight around and people in authority like to give themselves fancy titles. It's not going to be that way with you. Let the senior among you become the junior; let the leader act the part of the servant” (Luke 22:25-26, *The Message*). The servant leadership training for Freedom Communities consists of a simple, duplicatable system of mentorship that deploys leaders to assist participants who are growing, sharing, and serving through disarming, empathy, inquiry, assessing willingness, and sharing Scripture for reflection. In opposition to an authoritative leadership style that offers advice,

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30. Bill Hybels, *Courageous Leadership* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002), 25.

31. *Ibid.*, 27.

32. Siemon-Netto Uwe, *Pollster* (Grand Rapids: United Press International, 2002), 27, [http://www.upi.com/Odd\\_News/2002/06/10/Pollster-Church-lacks-leadership/UPI-87871023747364/](http://www.upi.com/Odd_News/2002/06/10/Pollster-Church-lacks-leadership/UPI-87871023747364/) (accessed June 3, 2013).

demands compliance, and risks promoting a personal agenda, servant leadership focus on creating a safe environment of discovery, coalescing the community, and aligning the vision of the group. Finally, similar to the methods of growing, sharing, and serving, the style of leadership appropriately engages a postmodern mindset through empathy and inquiry rather than argumentation or convincing.

### **Sunday Morning Services**

Freedom Communities unite believers together to grow, share, and serve in small communities that are part of a much larger community or body. In fact, the Apostle Paul explains that the church consists of only one body of believers and each member of the body is actively involved in ministry (Ephesians 4:4-13). Accordingly, church happens when believers engage on a daily basis in growing, serving, and sharing in community with each other. If the biblical perspective of church is one body living in community, then what is the purpose of Sunday morning? Sunday morning has two distinct and important purposes. First, Sunday morning is for preaching the Gospel (1 Cor. 1:17, 21-23, Gal. 1:6-10, Mt. 4:17, Mark 2:2, Titus 1:3, Acts 8:9-13). The Greek word for preaching is κηρῦσσω and it means to publicly proclaim or make known a message everywhere.<sup>33</sup> The message of Christianity, of course, is the Gospel. Since the definition insists the Gospel message is to be heard everywhere, it cannot be limited to trained pastors on Sunday morning. However, to suggest that Sunday morning is not an appropriate time for trained pastors to proclaim the Gospel is absurd. Second, Sunday morning is for praising God in a community of believers. The writer of Hebrews references Psalm 22:22 by stating, “I will proclaim Your name to My brethren, in the midst of the congregation, I will sing Your praise” (Hebrews 2:12). Praising God must not be limited to Sunday morning as exemplified by Paul and

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33. Timothy Friberg, Barbara Friberg, and Neva F. Miller, *Analytical Lexicon of the Greek New Testament* (Victoria, BC: Trafford, 2005), 230.

Silas who prayed and sang hymns of praise to God in prison just before God sent an earthquake to open the prison doors (Acts 16:25-26). However, to suggest that praising God on Sunday morning within an assembly of believers is in some way inappropriate appears patently unbiblical. Accordingly, Freedom Communities encourage the whole body to participate in the proclamation of the Gospel and in praising God not just during the week, but also on Sunday mornings, regardless of the specific location or denominational preference.

### **Small Groups versus Freedom Communities**

Many churches have institutionalized small groups as part of their organizational programming. Similar to small groups, Freedom Communities meet periodically within a small community of individuals. However, this is where the similarities end. The differences between small groups and Freedom Communities are vast. For instance, small groups normally originate by gathering believers who attend a particular church building on Sunday morning into smaller assemblies through a process of signup sheets. Alternatively, Freedom Communities form by individuals connecting with believers *and* nonbelievers from the *surrounding community* without regard to the particular church building attended on Sunday morning. Table 1 summarizes fifteen significant differences between small groups and Freedom Communities.

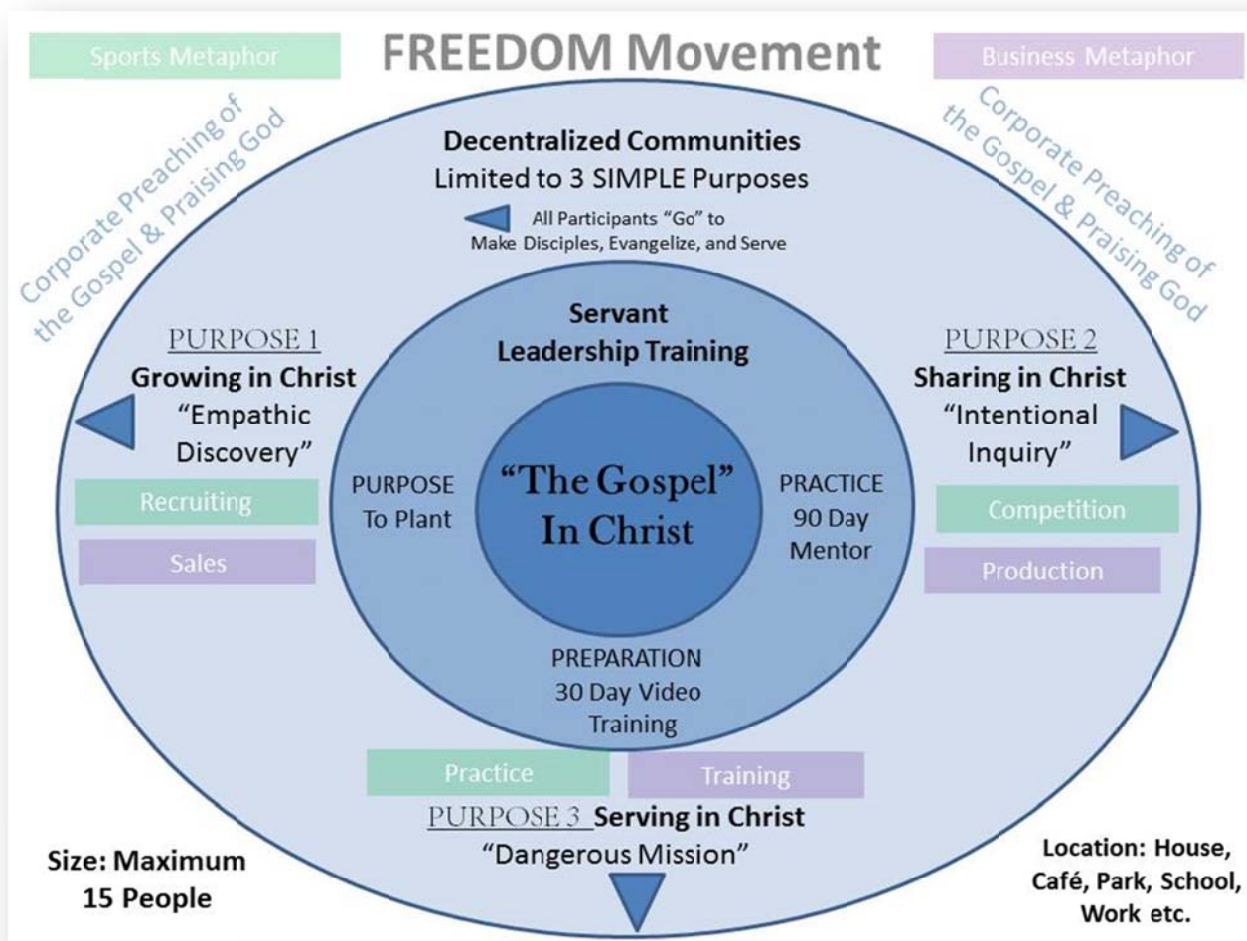
### **Conclusion**

A global redefinition of what it means to *be* the church is necessary due to the significant challenges facing the institutional church (see *The Epic Problem*). Accordingly, an entire paradigmatic shift regarding the organizational structure must occur. Freedom Communities offer a step toward a biblical solution that provides maximum intentionality with maximum impact. Within the framework of the three primary purposes – growing, sharing, and serving, Freedom Communities provide a vision for individuals *being* the church rather than solely *going*

to church. Freedom Communities empower individuals within the context of community to reverse the active-passive ratio. In other words, instead of 80-90% of members passively *going* to church, 80-90% of participants actively engage in *being* the church. The framework of Freedom Communities also aligns with every major kingdom movement in history, while simultaneously providing an environment for solving the crisis facing the institutional church without undermining the value of corporately preaching the Gospel or praising God, which are so valuable to the Protestant tradition.

## APPENDIX

## Decentralized Evangelical Missional Communities (DEMC) Illustration\*



\* The above diagram represents a conceptualization of Decentralized Evangelical Missional Communities that intend to keep the current institutions of Christianity intact.

TABLE 1

Small Groups	Freedom Communities
<p><b>Institutionally Formed</b> Small groups normally focus on gathering believers who attend a particular church building on Sunday morning into smaller assemblies through a process of signup sheets</p>	<p><b>Individually Formed</b> Freedom Communities form by individuals connecting with believers <i>and</i> nonbelievers from the surrounding community without regard to the particular church building attended on Sunday morning.</p>
<p><b>Consumers</b> Churches often organizationally program small groups to assist members in maintaining a connection with the institution. Thus, members view small groups as a program to consume as long as they are “getting something out it.”</p>	<p><b>Producers</b> Freedom Communities originate from a vision of growing, sharing, and serving. Thus, participants view community life as actively giving, not getting.</p>
<p><b>Didactic Discipleship</b> Small groups talk about growth normally through the assistance of a curriculum based study such as a Beth Moore series, which focuses on content.</p>	<p><b>Relationship Discipleship</b> Freedom Communities create an environment of discovery of Scripture based on the circumstances surrounding individuals within the community.</p>
<p><b>Inward</b> Small groups almost exclusively focus on the group. Statistical research proves that 94% of Christians do not share their faith with nonbelievers.</p>	<p><b>Outward</b> Freedom Communities focus on the growth of believers and nonbelievers. A non-argumentative approach to sharing faith is a primary focus of the community.</p>
<p><b>Organized Service</b> If small groups focus on serving it is normally project based and organized through the institution often with an emphasis on getting others to come to the church building.</p>	<p><b>Prompted Service</b> Freedom Communities look for God’s movement, join Him in service He already began, and deploy service in light of individual’s passions and giftedness.</p>
<p><b>Religion</b> Small groups often attempt to control behavior, which may encourage obedience, but for the wrong reason – to obtain acceptance from God and the group.</p>	<p><b>Gospel</b> Freedom communities focus on the underlying beliefs that lead to behavior change knowing that acceptance leads to obedience.</p>
<p><b>Classroom Training</b> Small group leaders often have no training or the training consists of attending a weekend seminar to follow a small group curriculum or program.</p>	<p><b>Mentor Training</b> Freedom communities form after an eight week intensive mentorship that focuses on servant leadership and facilitating discovery and continues for the duration of the community.</p>
<p><b>Programmed</b> Small groups normally meet weekly and often have little contact throughout the week.</p>	<p><b>Relational</b> Freedom communities do meet periodically, but spend more time in relationship with their community throughout the week.</p>



<p><b>Exclusionary</b> Often the purpose of small groups is to keep the church organization intact by connecting people from a local church relationally.</p>	<p><b>Inclusionary</b> The purpose of Freedom Communities is not to keep a specific church organization intact. The purpose is threefold – growing, sharing, and serving with both believers and nonbelievers.</p>
<p><b>Easy to Start</b> Most small groups with a church staff member asking the laity to volunteer to start or lead a group. Little or no training is required and the organization funnels participants to the groups.</p>	<p><b>Difficult to Start</b> Freedom communities have a rigorous mentoring intensive with ongoing support. Participant’s involvement is due to relationships built by the leader.</p>
<p><b>Maintaining</b> Small groups often end by fizzling out or maintaining the status quo in order to continue supporting the local institution.</p>	<p><b>Duplicating</b> Freedom communities, by definition, push against the status quo and move toward duplication of servant leaders utilizing the eight-week mentoring intensive.</p>
<p><b>Organization</b> Small groups often have a difficult time differentiating themselves from the organization. In other words, small groups are programs or studies to attend, not a life to live.</p>	<p><b>Organism</b> Freedom Communities are living and breathing entities that participate in being the church on a daily basis through growing, sharing, and serving.</p>
<p><b>Addition</b> Small groups often attempt to invite other individuals from the local church to the small group. However, the lack of training and focus on the outside community limits the ability to multiply.</p>	<p><b>Multiplication</b> Each participant of a Freedom Community is immediately involved in the three purposes and encouraged to begin building relationships for his or her own community through growing, sharing, and serving.</p>
<p><b>Informational</b> Most small groups encourage learning information from the Bible, Christian curriculum, or a small group study guide. Information is the focus, but integration into specific beliefs, thoughts, emotions, and actions often wanes.</p>	<p><b>Transformational</b> The focus of Freedom Communities is on the transformation of individuals by applying biblical principles to the specific beliefs, thoughts, emotions, and actions of each participant.</p>
<p><b>Centralized Support</b> Church members often call pastors asking for more programs and assistance. For example, “My son is struggling, do you have a youth group program to get him on track.”</p>	<p><b>Decentralized Support</b> Freedom communities do not ask for programs. Instead, the community and mentoring provide support. For example, “My son is struggling so I will learn to develop a safe environment with my son and facilitate his growth.”</p>

TABLE 2

Religion	The Gospel
<b>“I obey therefore I’m accepted.”</b>	<b>“I’m accepted therefore I obey.”</b>
Motivation is based on <b>fear</b> and insecurity.	Motivation is based on <b>grateful joy</b> .
I obey God in order to <b>get things</b> from God.	I obey God to get God – to delight and <b>resemble Him</b> .
When circumstances in my life go wrong, I am <b>angry</b> at God or myself, since I believe, like Job’s friends, that anyone who is good deserves a comfortable life.	When circumstances in my life go wrong, I struggle, but I know that while God may allow this for my <b>training</b> , he will exercise his fatherly love within my trial.
When I am criticized, I am furious or devastated because it is essential for me to think of myself as a “good person.” <b>Threats to that self-image must be destroyed</b> at all costs.	When I am criticized, I struggle, but it is not essential for me to think of myself as a “good person.” <b>My identity is not built on my performance</b> but on God’s love for me in Christ.
My prayer life consists largely of petition and only heats up when I am in need. My main purpose in <b>prayer is to control</b> circumstances.	My prayer life consists of generous stretches of praise and adoration. My main purpose is <b>fellowship with Him</b> .
My self-view swings between two poles. If and when I am living up to my standards, I feel confident, but then I am prone to be <b>proud</b> and unsympathetic to people who fail. If and when I am not living up to standards, I feel humble but not confident – I feel like a <b>failure</b> .	My self-view is not based on a view of myself as a moral achiever. In Christ I am at once sinful and lost, yet accepted. I am so bad He had to die for me, and so loved he was glad to die for me. This leads me to deeper <b>humility</b> as well as deeper <b>confidence</b> , without either sniveling or swaggering.
My <b>identity</b> and self-worth are based mainly on how hard I work or <b>how moral I am</b> , so I must <b>look down</b> on those I perceive as lazy or immoral. I disdain and feel superior to others.	My <b>identity</b> and self-worth are centered on the One who died for His enemies, including me. Only by sheer <b>grace</b> am I what I am, so <b>I can’t look down</b> on those who believe or practice something different from me. I have no inner need to win arguments.
Since I <b>look to my pedigree or performance for my spiritual acceptability</b> , my heart <b>manufactures idols</b> – talents, moral record, personal discipline, social status, etc. I absolutely have to have them, so they are my main hope, meaning, happiness, security, and significance, whatever I say I believe about God.	I have many good things in life – family, work, etc., but <b>none of these good things are ultimate things</b> to me. <b>I don’t absolutely have to have them</b> , so there is a limit to how much anxiety, bitterness, and despair they can inflict on me when they are threatened or lost.

\* The above table represents a brief comparison of religion and the gospel. See Timothy J. Keller, *Center Church: Doing Balanced, Gospel-Centered Ministry in Your City* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012), 65 [emphasis mine].

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