

FROM HOUSE TO HOUSE

Growth of the Church in Homes

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Preface

I wrote this book in Portuguese in 2005 to describe and stimulate the growth of the kingdom of God in Brazil. These simple concepts have spread all through Brazil and to other countries.

Now my wife Jacqueline and I will be splitting our time between the U.S. and Brazil, and we want to help in the multiplication of disciples and churches in the English speaking world. Hopefully, this book will encourage disciples of Jesus to use who they are and what they have for God's glory and the salvation of many.

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Introduction

The Mustard Seed

This story began in Manaus, on the Amazon River. Actually, it began in Jerusalem, but, for us, everything became clear in the five years we lived in Manaus.

We always knew that the church was Jesus' people, not an institution or a denomination and certainly, not a building. We always knew that the primitive church met in homes. However, in reading the New Testament passages about the church, there was an automatic shift to the modern ecclesiastic situation with church buildings, rows of pews and people in dress clothes leading the worship on a front stage, centered around a pulpit.

It was in Manaus that we awakened to the possibility of the modern church being like the church in the beginning, even in the locale and style of its meetings. The terrific difficulty of the Manaus church to take care of the material and administrative aspects of the work gave us a growing desire to live spiritual lives without these obstacles or worries. We saw that none of those cares were absolutely necessary for the growth and well-being of the church. It was a heavy and unnecessary load that contradicted Jesus' promise that his burden would be light. The weight of the physical part of the work of the church took away the joy of the Christian life, leaving only demanding schedules and tasks.

When we returned to Sao Paulo, we started all over again—with nothing and nobody except for the sure presence of the Lord Jesus. There was only the two of us, Jacqueline and me, because we decided not to recruit any other disciples that were already serving the Lord. The goal was to make new disciples and promote greater

growth of the kingdom of God.

For the first two months, it was just us in our Sunday worship: Jacqueline looking at me and I at her. No one else, but we were constantly praying for God to open doors of opportunity. This he did, and, as always, way beyond our expectations. In fact, the Lord led us to the most productive phase of our lives.

We're living the parable of the mustard seed: a beginning so small and seemingly insignificant that leads to great results. What no one could see happening in our living room and in our hearts is now visible in numerous lives and locations.

1

The Master's Plan

Jesus not only wants his church to grow, but he also furnishes the plan and method to reach the whole world. In Matthew 28:18-20, the Lord affirms his total authority and guarantees the final result of the world-wide mission by means of his spiritual presence. He orders his followers to make new disciples who will follow only him. These new disciples are to be baptized, and the newly baptized are to be accompanied with teaching and encouragement until they are obeying all that Jesus desires of them. Without a doubt, what he most wants is that the new converts succeed in making other disciples. By these means, there will be spiritual multiplication: disciples making disciples and all following Jesus as the only Lord and Master.

It's important to note that Jesus does not give a command to evangelize or start churches. The goal is not just to preach the good news of salvation but primarily to help people become Jesus' disciples. Instead of trying to establish churches, the plan is to increase the number of baptized disciples (with continuing teaching after baptism) which the Lord himself will add to his church, his spiritually created people.

One presupposition about putting into practice the plan of the Master is the use of houses. Anyone who reads the New Testament will see that the early church met in homes and didn't have special buildings for their meetings and activities. Unfortunately, this fact is forgotten in modern practice, and one of the first things done is to find and rent (or buy or build) a place for the new church's use. What had no importance in the first century has now become a top

priority.

The customary use of homes as places of learning and worship is clear both in Jesus' personal ministry and in all the history of the church in the book of Acts. Jesus' "headquarters" was a house in Capernaum (Mark 2:1). The Jerusalem church grew "from house to house" (Acts 2:46-47, 5:41-42). The same is seen in the beginning of the works in Philippi, Thessalonica and Corinth (Acts 16:15, 17:5-7, 18:7-8). The conclusion is the Master's plan for the salvation of the world includes using what everyone has: a place of residence.

The church in homes emphasizes what it really is—Jesus' people. It's not a building or an institution or hierarchy or a denomination. Instead of saying "we go to church", we correctly understand and practice "we are the church". When a building is called the church, there exists a huge spiritual detour. What Jesus built (Matthew 16:18) is not a material construction but the creation of a group of people totally dedicated to him.

In Jesus' words "I will build my church", the essence of his plan is clearly seen. The Lord creates a new people to take his message and life dynamic to the whole world. Making a careful analysis of each word of this phrase (in reverse order for emphasis) is worth our time:

"church"

The new people that follow Jesus, called by him to accomplish God's eternal purpose. The church is not an institution or something abstract; it's the people saved by the Savior, those who obey the Lord and make other disciples who likewise follow him.

"my"

The church belongs to Jesus and to no one else. The Lord is insulted when people create new churches with assorted names and doctrines. What's the right church? The answer is easy: Jesus' church.

"will build"

Jesus promised to make what did not exist before: a body of people dedicated to him from all the nations of the earth. The church

didn't exist in the Old Testament; it's part of the New Testament brought by Jesus. When Jesus uttered these words, he was in the middle of his earthly ministry, with his death and resurrection still ahead. For us, this phrase is in the past tense: he did what he said he—he established his church. In fact, the book of Acts is the history of this new people made by the Master.

“I”

The personal pronoun defines who does what. As Jesus is one person, his church is one. There aren't many churches; there is only one (as there is only one Lord). In the midst of the religious confusion of modern times with all kinds of churches in competition one with another, Jesus' one church continues to be faithful to him and to him alone.

Today, the Master's plan continues. His church exists and does everything possible to help many others be disciples of Jesus. The church doesn't have its own agenda but follows completely the divine plan.

2

The Growth that God Wants

God wants the church to grow. He not only wants it, but he provides everything necessary for that growth. If the church isn't growing, it's because it's using methods and models that aren't from the Lord.

Jesus emphasizes the growth of the kingdom in almost all of the parables. In Mark 4, Christ gives four parables, and three spotlight growth and multiplication. For example, the seed planted in good soil yields on the basis of thirty, sixty or a hundred grains per one. In another story, a man plants with the certainty of a bountiful harvest, even though he himself can't control the process. Finally, the mustard seed, supposed to be the smallest of all, produces the biggest plant in the garden.

The obvious lesson is that the plan of God for the church is that it grows and that it grows a lot. The comparisons to the physical world that God created are instructive: God guarantees spiritual increase the same way he guarantees the functioning of the universe. Our part is just to plant the seed of the kingdom, which is the gospel; God takes care of the rest.

Sometimes it is said that the growth of the church is QQGO: quantitative, qualitative, geographic and organic. In other words, Jesus' people grow in number of disciples, in spiritual expression, in territory and in the functioning of all the members of the body of Christ. In all these areas, the use of homes facilitates the growth. There are more points of contact, more personal commitment, greater ease in beginning new works (even in other cities and states) and the involvement of everyone in the work of the Lord. In

house churches there's no "back pew" for people to hide or to be overlooked as there is in church buildings.

With church growth as God wants it, preaching the gospel to the whole world ceases to be an impossible dream and becomes what Jesus intended: a goal achieved. The explosive power of the Master's plan comes from the multiplication that is possible. Let's suppose that a couple makes, each one, one disciple per year. There will be the initial contact and teaching, the person's decision, his baptism and follow-up training. If the couple continues at this pace of each one making one disciple a year, and if the new disciples do the same, after just 20 years there will be 2,097,152 disciples and the church begun in the couple's home will mushroom to 174,762 house churches! All of this because of one couple following Jesus' teaching!

What's lacking to have this kind of growth? What's lacking is faith and confidence in Jesus and perseverance to obey without always seeing the results. The aforementioned couple will be sorely tempted to abandon their efforts because the initial results will be so few. After a whole year, there'll be just four people and after three, only 16. In a world of mega-churches, the tendency will be to become discouraged with such paltry results and abandon the simplicity of the Lord's plan in order to imitate other churches. However, all that is necessary is faithfulness, and God will give the growth.

At the same time, there will be another "difficulty": the couple will never see with their own eyes the hundreds, the thousands and finally the millions of converts. They keep on making each one a disciple per year and meeting in the home with a small group of people. At the end of twenty years each will have made twenty disciples of Jesus, apparently just a drop in the bucket in thinking about winning the world for Christ. But, what the couple can't see, Jesus sees: his church in all the cities and towns, in all the social strata, all over the country and being taken to all the countries of the world.

3

Spiritual Multiplication

Jesus' secret is spiritual multiplication: he began by himself and today is known throughout the whole world. He achieved this without financial resources, without radio and television interviews and with no need of the services of a public relations firm. How did he do it? He taught some, who taught others, who taught others and so on to the present day. In other words, he put into practice the principle of spiritual multiplication.

Spiritual multiplication happens when life in Jesus is transferred from one person to another and from one family to another. The means is the Great Commission of Jesus: make disciples, baptize and train. What someone receives from the Lord is not just for his own well-being; he should pass it on to others. For example, when Jesus called Simon and Andrew, he gave them new life for themselves, and at the same time, made them "fishers of men" (Mark 1:16-18). This "fishing" would benefit untold others.

Paul in 2 Timothy 2:2 gives a perfect example of spiritual multiplication. He writes that Timothy should remember all of his previous teaching. What Timothy learned from Jesus, by means of Paul, he should transmit to faithful and capable people who are able to do the same for others. After these faithful ones pass the teaching on to others, what will these "others" do? Without a doubt they will share the faith in Jesus with even more people (who will take it to others, who will take it to others, and so forth, in an endless sequence). What began with one, the Lord Jesus, ends up changing countless lives. However, each one gets personalized treatment because it's not "mass evangelism" but one-to-one relationships.

The gospel gets to the masses without being mass communication. The entire world is reached by working with one person at a time.

This way, there's little worry about going astray from the sound doctrine of Jesus. Since the method is personal (fitted to each person) and the whole emphasis is on following Jesus, the new disciples won't even think about obeying human traditions or false doctrines. On this point it's also easy to see the value of the use of homes: what happens there has no resemblance to what happens in man-made churches. Nobody would even think of recommending a doctrine or practice just because that's the way it is in other churches. Similarities between house churches and denominations in buildings just don't exist. Accordingly, all effort is directed to promoting growth, not to monitoring and controlling the brotherhood.

Spiritual multiplication produces explosive church growth. In fact, there's so much growth that only one person is able to supervise it all: the Lord Jesus himself. The church belongs to him, and he'll take care of it. When we, mere human beings, insist on compiling statistics and trying to control everything, we end up limiting the growth since our capacity is limited. Therefore, we don't have the obligation of knowing personally all the disciples or dictating the nature of the work to be done. We should hand all of that over to the Lord, and he, by the power of the Holy Spirit, will do much more than we can imagine.

“The Church in Their House”

The phrase, “the church in their house”, is routine in the New Testament. The reason? The church in its first centuries of existence met almost exclusively in private homes. History teaches us that it was the Roman emperor Constantine who built the first church building as a part of the construction of his new capital Constantinopolis (around 330 A.D.). Therefore, for 300 years, Jesus’ people met in their own homes. So, a phrase common in the New Testament is the naming of a disciple, completed by the words “and the church in his (or her) house.”

Some examples of the use of the phrase are Aquila and Priscilla in Ephesus (1 Corinthians 16:19) and later in Rome (Romans 16:5), Nympha in Laodicea (Colossenses 4:15), and Philemon in Colosse (Philemon 1:2) as well as similar phrases about Gaius in Corinth (Romans 16:23) and disciples in Caesar’s palace in Rome (Philippians 4:22). Each one served a real need by opening their home for the church. Without a doubt, one motive for the rapid expansion seen in the book of Acts was this use of houses. New works demanded faith, love and initiative, but they didn’t require financial resources to provide special places for worship and teaching.

In a certain way, the history of the church in the book of Acts is the history of the use of houses. From the beginning to the end, the people of Jesus used all of their resources for the growth of the kingdom of God, especially their homes.

Acts 2:2

The disciples meeting in a house when the Holy Spirit came upon

them.

Acts 2:46

The first converts breaking bread from house to house.

Acts 5:42

Daily teaching of the gospel from house to house.

Acts 8:3

Disciples meeting in homes found by the persecutor Saul.

Acts 10:22

Preaching to Cornelius and his family in their home.

Acts 12:12

Prayer meeting the Mary's house.

Acts 16:15

Lidia's house serving as the base of operations in Philippi.

Acts 16:34

Baptisms followed by a before dawn banquet at the house of the Philippian jailer.

Acts 17:5

The house of Jason invaded in Thessalonica by those trying to arrest the missionaries.

Acts 18:7

The locale for teaching in Corinth transferred from the synagogue to the house of Titius Justus.

Acts 20:20

Paul's remembrance of having taught in Ephesus publicly and from house to house.

Acts 21:8

Place of contact in Caesarea, Philip's house.

Acts 28:30

End of the historical narrative with the preaching of the gospel by Paul in Rome, under house arrest in his own rented house

The use of our homes is one of the factors that the modern church should copy from the primitive church. Today, few new works are started because of the financial barrier to rent or buy a building or meeting hall. With the use of houses, congregations can be started at a fast pace and even several at the same time. All that is needed is to ask God to open doors of opportunity and then be ready to act when he does.

As a missionary strategy, the use of homes facilitates everything. Where there's interest, we can take the message. Where there are disciples, baptized and taught, we can begin the church (or better stated, the Lord already began it). We don't need to ask who will pay the rent for the meeting place or where we'll find a minister to lead the new work. The disciples of the locale will take care of the ministry, with their own resources and with their own faith and goodwill. Our part is pray, teach, train and encourage. The new disciples will do the rest, including opening their homes to house the coming together of Jesus' people.

The fast growth of the church in the book of Acts will be seen again when we use the same methods of the first disciples. The return of the use of the phrase "the church in their house" to our vocabulary will signal the end of stagnated growth and the beginning of an expansion like that of New Testament times.

5

From House to House

The church of Jesus grows and prospers “from house to house”. It did so in the beginning of its history, and modernity doesn’t take away the positive dynamics of house churches. These favorable factors continue to work.

There’s no magical formula to start new works. Since it’s God’s doing, the key is to trust completely in the Lord’s plan and in the power of the gospel. The way to do that is to pray and be ready for any opportunity. The question is: what is God going to do today? The secret doesn’t reside in human plans and strategies nor is there a need for statistics and bureaucracy. The Lord Jesus commands, and we, his disciples, obey and cooperate.

Initial contacts come in all different ways. We need to be alert for any conversation or action that calls favorable attention to the gospel. Christian love differentiates the disciples of Jesus and opens hearts and minds.

Once communication channels are open, the goal is to let Jesus speak through us. The way to do this is to base all studies and lessons on the four gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke and John). This way, new contacts hear directly from the Lord and become his authentic disciples, instead of just being convinced about the truth of certain points of doctrine.

The way that studies are presented should be participative and not directed (and much less, manipulative). The passage of the gospel is read one section at a time and everyone (disciples and non-disciples) comment on the meaning of the text. We act as coordina-

tors of the study, asking questions that stimulate participation and spiritual understanding. Our role is to help all to get to know Jesus and to make the decision to follow him. (When we follow outlines and study guides, the tendency is to “teach lessons” and not to make disciples.)

The questions asked should be “open” ones, and not the kind that has only one right answer. Our goal is to promote debate and interaction among all those present. We ask questions like: “In your opinion, why did Jesus say this?” or “This teaching of Jesus leads us to what kind of attitudes and actions?” Open questions have several possible answers, and how the group responds will determine the direction the study will take. If there’s a need for correction, it will be of the type: “Look at this verse again; are we saying what Jesus is saying?”

Doubts of the participants are invariably answered by Jesus’ words and never by religious doctrines and personal opinions. In this way, the effort is non-denominational and non-institutional. There is nothing to hide or to defend. All that Jesus teaches is to be followed. Spontaneously, people ask the big questions about sin, baptism, the church and so on and accept with open minds and hearts Jesus’ answers. Never are there harsh statements like: “That’s just your opinion” or “That’s the doctrine of your church”, because everyone knows that it is the word of the Lord.

This style of learning leads all to be disciples of Jesus because of their being always in contact with him and his teaching. According to the Great Commission (Matthew 28:18-20), the next steps are baptism and more teaching after baptism. It all comes naturally by means of Jesus’ constant call for obedience and faithfulness.

Based on the example of the Ethiopian in Acts 8, it’s the new disciple who asks to be baptized and not the one who is teaching who decides when the person is ready. It was the eunuch and not Philip who asked: “Look, here is water. Why shouldn’t I be baptized?” It is the person on his or her own who makes the decision, without being hurried or pressured by the “evangelizer”. It’s the response of a “good conscience toward God” as in 1 Peter 3:21-22. The person confesses his faith, answering a question like “Who is Jesus for

you?”, and is ready to be baptized.

Since it’s immersion, baptism requires enough water to cover the body of the person being baptized. Water anywhere will do: river, ocean, lake, swimming pool, bathtub, portable pool for children. The person that helps with the baptism isn’t important; all disciples are authorized by the Lord to do the baptizing. The function of the person who assists is to see that the body of the person being baptized is totally immersed and then to help the person to safely get out of the water. The words spoken at the time of baptism vary (since there is no biblical record of such words). For example, Matthew 28:19 could be combined with Acts 2:38: “You are being baptized in the name of Jesus, in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, to receive the forgiveness of your sins and the gift of the Holy Spirit.”

The work with the new disciple doesn’t end with baptism; actually, it’s just beginning. Since baptism is a new birth, the newly baptized needs to learn how to put into practice everything that Jesus teaches. And this follow-up is normally a long process. Whether there are scheduled study times or just casual conversations, the new convert learns more about the Lord and changes his life according to what he’s learning. Everything improves: attitudes, actions, ways of thinking and expression.

The new disciple learns to follow Jesus in every situation: at home, on the job, in the neighborhood and at the meetings of the church. He understands that his life has an elevated spiritual purpose and that he should share the love of God with others, helping them to also become Jesus’ disciples. Follow-up with the new convert focuses on this new spiritual reality and includes subjects such as house churches (hospitality, praise, Lord’s Supper, offering, etc), personal devotion (prayer and Bible reading), the Christian home (marriage and children) and personal values and morality. The points of emphasis and the time spent on each will naturally vary according to the needs of each person.

The after-baptism experience should be dynamic, encouraging the new converts to make more disciples. Of all the good things that are part of the Christian life, this is what the Lord wants most. His

divine love wants to embrace more and more people. The new disciple shows in his daily life that he has the Lord's heart. Seeing him make other disciples will be the end of this phase of follow-up, even though the friendship developed will continue to be strong in the Lord.

6

The Church in the Home

The home church isn't any different from the church in a building: in its essence, it is the people of Jesus. However, in practical matters, there are various differences, of which all are positive for the church in the home. Jesus didn't design his church for cold and impersonal places. The Lord made his church to be God's family, and families live in houses.

Disciples are made by personal contact, and the life of the church continues in the same way. It's always informal and personal, never ritualistic or "ecclesiastic". When someone says the church needs to look like a church, the reference is not to an architectural style, but to a style of spiritual life. It was that way in the beginning of the church described in the New Testament and should be the same in modern times.

House churches take advantage of their homey atmosphere. It would make little difference to meet in homes if we had the same customs and furniture arrangements that are used in church buildings (pews or chairs in rows, use of a pulpit, leader standing at the front, wearing dress clothes, etc). Very differently, the home style unites the people present and makes all participants instead of spectators. In a house, it's easier to understand that we don't go to church but that we are the church.

The meetings happen every Sunday and other days when it is convenient to get together. During the week, the formats are varied according to the situation of those present. The styles also vary according to the purpose of the meeting (Bible study or time for prayer or time for praise or follow-up of new disciples or explana-

tions for new contacts and so forth.) Who is participating (men, women, couples, youth or children) also affects the way it's conducted. Not having to follow religious traditions and especially not repeating the phrase "We've never done it that way" gives complete freedom for every type of meeting and work.

The Sunday worship includes five acts well-defined in the New Testament: sing praises, pray, hear the message of Jesus, take the Lord's Supper and give. Everyone participates actively. According to the Scripture, it's the men who conduct the meetings. However, this doesn't mean that the others do nothing—all of the five acts require the attention and participation of everyone present.

The arrangement of the place of meeting greatly influences the dynamics of the group. It helps a lot if everyone can look at everyone else, which is possible if the chairs (or sofas or whatever) are arranged in a circle or around a table. Such an arrangement encourages mutual edification and relationships of the type "one to another" taught in the New Testament.

In John 4:23-24 Jesus shows what is worship of God. God, being spirit, receives praise in a spiritual way from each one of his worshippers. The Lord's memorable phrase "in spirit and in truth" governs the worship of his church. "In spirit" indicates a spiritual form of expression, from our hearts to God and also reminds us of the Holy Spirit that dwells in us. "In truth" emphasizes the necessity of sincerity on our part and also faithfulness to the true teachings of the Scriptures.

Worships in homes need to follow Jesus' principles in every activity. Informality shouldn't annul spirituality, much less faithfulness to the Lord. Actually, the more intimate and direct communication stimulates all present to a more effective participation.

All five acts are engaged in every Sunday. The order they're done in is indifferent. Normally, it seems natural to start with songs and prayers followed by the message from the gospel and then the Lord's Supper and the offering. There's no hurry because with few participants the meeting doesn't take a lot of time.

Sing

We happily sing praises to the Lord and, in the process, we are spiritually encouraged. The New Testament mentions “psalms, hymns and spiritual songs”. Psalms are biblical passages that are sung, especially ones from the book of Psalms; hymns are human compositions addressed to God; while spiritual songs are also human compositions but with the purpose of motivating our spirituality. It’s a good practice to sing some of each type. Fast pace and happy faces make the singing better. However, the goal isn’t the quality of the music; what counts is spiritual expression of our faith and love. Everyone should be encouraged to put Bible verses to music or to compose new hymns and songs.

Pray

The prayers should be spontaneous and brief as Jesus teaches. They are directed to the Father in the name of Jesus. Each person is free to assume the posture that he desires although normally everyone stays seated (even the one who leads the prayer). The final prayer could be preceded by special prayer requests, each person making his own. A nice touch is to have this prayer with everyone holding hands, demonstrating the unity of the group.

Hear the Message

The preaching of the gospel guarantees the right direction for the worship. All listen and actively accompany the reading and explanations. Everyone is fortified in the faith and gives God the glory as they perceive the truth and the beauty of the Lord’s plan. The house church offers an intimate atmosphere, making possible the exchange of ideas and the use of questions and answers, practices that facilitate the learning process and increase the degree of commitment of all present.

Preferentially, the message should come from one of the four gospels. This way, Jesus’ people are always hearing the voice of their Master. As Romans 10:17 explains, the purpose of producing and deepening saving faith only happens with preaching that has the word of Christ as its basis.

The preacher of the message understands himself as one of the participants of the worship, not as someone who dominates the meet-

ing. This way, instead of standing up and asserting his authority by his posture, he stays seated, sharing the truth of Jesus, which is for all, including himself. The impact of the preaching is produced, not by the eloquence, bearing, clothes or gestures of the preacher, but by the gospel which is the “power of God for salvation”.

Take the Lord’s Supper

The Lord’s Supper recovers its aspect of a small meal in house churches. The two elements (unleavened bread and wine/grape juice) are taken in a simple way without any hurry. Many times, the group gathers around the dining room table. There is total concentration in Jesus and his death and resurrection. Since there are just a few present, each one can break off a big piece of bread and appreciate its flavor and texture. It’s the same way with the cup. (I asked my wife Jacqueline to create a recipe for unleavened bread that looks like bread and tastes like bread. She did so well that the recipe is being used all over.)

Give

In churches in homes, the people of Jesus learn by experience the truth of the words of the Lord: “It is more blessed to give than to receive.” The Sunday offering becomes a joyful demonstration of love to God. In the New Testament, the amount to give is not stipulated, and each person contributes according to his or her measure of prosperity.

One advantage of meeting in homes is that the church doesn’t have bills to pay or any other regular expenses. This way, the offering can be used in its entirety for the work of the Lord, making more disciples and showing the love of God in the lives of other people. One of the subjects of conversation at the end of the worship is what will be done with the offering. Everyone is free to suggest uses and to help decide which one will be chosen. It could be a missionary trip or the purchase of Bibles or groceries or medicine for someone in need. Whoever had the idea can take the money and see that it’s used as purposed. Happily, all present participate in all aspects of the financial life of the church.

Another positive point of house churches is the possibility of

reaching all social and economic classes. The people that accept the invitation to come to a home are relatives, neighbors, co-workers and other acquaintances, normally all from, more or less, the same life situation. They feel at home with one another, especially since the purpose is spiritual. The proliferation of churches in homes will reach all social-economic levels: from working class neighborhoods to exclusive condominiums, from rural areas to high-rise apartment buildings in the big cities.

Churches in homes incarnate all the message of salvation in Jesus. The atmosphere of family and togetherness confirms the message about loving God and loving one another. Biblical phrases like “family of God”, “family of faith”, “house of God” and “spiritual house” aren’t empty or abstract. They portray the visible reality of the people of Jesus.

The American Dream

(In the original edition of the book in Portuguese, this chapter was called “The Brazilian Dream”, as the will of God is the same for all nations.)

The Lord Jesus and his followers unite in the goal of making disciples of all nations. What the Lord wants determines what the church wants. Another program or agenda doesn't exist. The growth of the church is priority number one.

Unfortunately, it's rare to see this priority in the practice of the modern church. Instead of being Jesus' people, the church copies the tendencies of the religious world. It tries to achieve growth, which only comes from God, by means of human tactics and strategies. It shouldn't be surprising when there's frustration because of the meager results, and even when there's visible growth, the lack of spiritual consistency is discouraging.

The only solution is to be what Jesus wants us to be and do what Jesus wants us to do. His dream becomes ours: disciples made, baptized and trained in all the nations of the world. How do we reach this goal? The answer is to leave off human religious practices and incorporate completely Jesus' method.

The world dream becomes the dream for the nation where we live. The American dream that we share with Jesus is that there will be churches in all the states, all the counties, all the municipalities and all the neighborhoods. The goal includes every place where there are people, giving all Americans the opportunity to participate in the life of the people of Jesus.

As Acts 1:8 shows, the work started in Jerusalem and expanded to Judea and Samaria and eventually got to the “ends of the earth”. That’s the way it will be with us. We begin where we are (our “Jerusalem”) and then expand to the whole town or city, the region, the state, the country and even foreign countries. We always look for open doors: people who want to know about Jesus, regardless of who they are and where they live. Given the simplicity of the use of homes, all locations are possible to begin new congregations. Faith, love and goodwill are the only requisites; God will do the rest.

Today we reedit what the apostle Paul described in 1 Corinthians 3: one plants, another waters, but the growth comes from the Lord. What really matters isn’t our competence or human strategies but God who gives the growth. Instead of limiting the work by thinking about what we can’t do, it’s a whole lot better to start where we are and with our present conditions and see what the Lord will do.

In this way, we will witness the fulfilling of the “American dream”. The dream will become reality by the great power of God working through his faithful sons and daughters: disciples made, homes opened, salvation guaranteed—total victory for the Lord and his followers.

Jacqueline's Recipe for Unleavened Bread

In a bowl combine 1 cup of flour, a pinch of salt, a pinch of sugar. Cut in 2 Tablespoons of butter or margarine. Add $\frac{1}{4}$ cup of water to make a soft dough. Shape dough into a ball, then flatten it out in a circle on an ungreased cookie sheet (about 6 inches in diameter). Bake for 10 minutes at 375 , then turn it over and bake 10 more minutes. It should be cooked throughout and gently golden brown.

