

Growing Churches

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[0 : 00] ...mark against it as well, which I will explain a little bit later.! I want to do a rather rapid review of some of the things that we've looked at! in a couple of previous messages.

So, hopefully, let's see if our lovely new screen. Yeah, that's very clear, isn't it? You can all see that well. Growing Christians is the starting point.

We had a message on that. This is the expected norm that Christians should grow, just as we would expect a baby to grow, so we rightly expect any Christian to be a growing Christian.

Likeness to Jesus Christ is the hallmark of a growing Christian. Marks of the presence of the Holy Spirit, the fruit of the Spirit in people's lives. Equally, just as we'd be worried and distressed and alarmed, if that little girl didn't get any bigger.

We feel the same way about a professing Christian who carries on showing too much of the marks of the old life.

[1 : 12] Sobering is quite a challenge. Test yourselves. See whether you be in the faith.

Are you following the Lord Jesus Christ? Is he your growing purpose, desire, goal, likeness to him? How do Christians grow?

And one, I believe, completely non-negotiable ingredient is being part of a biblically endorsed church.

I need to say this because there are many Christians who've given up on the idea of church.

They've become disillusioned. Or they've been hurt.

Or they've been burnt out. A couple who were extremely influential in the early days of my being a Christian.

[2 : 14] Met them recently and they just said, We love God, but we're not going to church. We love God. I don't think it's a question of a personal choice.

I don't think it's a negotiable issue. I feel deeply sad for them. Because there are so many aspects of being in a church which are crucial to being able to grow as Christians.

We need to be amongst others, to be with one another. So we looked at the biblical church on the 3rd of May. That's so four weeks ago.

And this will be on the church website. You can look at all this. I'm not going to go into the detail here apart from just refresh your memory on the things we looked at. Biblical churches need foundations.

A definite belief. It is a gathering of the saints. I like that phrase. You know I don't mean by that, especially holy people.

[3 : 28] But I do mean people who have been set apart by God just exactly as we were hearing about the Thessalonian church there. He said, We know that you've been chosen by God because the word of God came to you in power.

But their lives were changed. And they gathered as the chosen people of God. The church offers a message of saving grace.

Wonderful, unchanging gospel. And it also offers a message of changed lives. Which is a rich testimony. Which attracts and can repel.

But it certainly is not without power. These are the foundations of biblical churches. The structure is spoken of most clearly in the New Testament.

The Bible isn't silent on these matters. The lordship of Jesus Christ is paramount. There's an identified belonging. Which is why we believe in church membership.

[4 : 40] And why we are looking forward to Ruth coming on board next Sunday. We look for qualified leaders. As we've been talking about the matter of eldership.

We look for model serving. As we heard last week in the issue of diakonos. Diakonos. We look for recognized roles to be filled. This is not peripheral. This is critical. This is essential. This is appropriate and right. And where there is lack in those areas. We need to pray. That that would be supplied. So at this time we are praying. That God would raise up people. In the special roles of diakonosing. And as we are also looking for strengthening of eldership. By the appointment of an assistant pastor. There are things that churches do. We meet together on the Sunday.

[5 : 44] For public worship. We look forward and we spend quite a percentage of our time. Considering the matter of sound teaching. The Bible is a big book.

And whilst there is straightforwardness. And directness about it. There is also complexity. That has to be grappled with. And constantly we need to be aware.

Of the issues to do with sound teaching. And how that is in contradiction. To unsound teaching. Of which there is plenty. There was in the first century.

There is plenty around today. There has been 20 centuries of opportunity. For the devil to sow seeds of error. That is a constant problem.

And one we need to grapple with. Dependent prayer should be a hallmark of a church. It is lovely for us as we meet together on a Sunday morning. A few of us meet together for prayer.

[6 : 42] What a great way it is to start the day. To once again recognize our need of the Lord. Baptism and communion. We're looking forward to the baptism pool being used very shortly again now.

And I want to just give you that encouragement. That if you've. If this is an issue that you should be addressing. That this is part of the obedience of the church.

That we should be baptized. And that we should be together for communion. We meet twice a month for communion here. And we have the next one next Sunday morning. At 10 o'clock.

Growing churches. Please pick up on that. Issue of biblical churches. Because that's what I'm addressing today. I don't want to be talking about all sorts of other churches.

That there might be out there. I passed a spiritualist church in Edward Street yesterday. I've even taken a picture of it. I was going to put it on the screen. Not to encourage any of you to get anywhere near it. Which looks very dark and foreboding and strange.

[7 : 46] Why it calls itself a church. It's because the word church is just gathering. But I want to say the church of Jesus Christ. Has got nothing to do with that. There are plenty of other versions.

Of churches out there. The only thing we're concerned about this morning. Is biblically endorsed churches. And as I indicated. When we had this message.

Four weeks ago. This isn't a hard thing. People say. Oh there's just so many versions out there. But it's not a hard thing actually. As we read the Bible. Openly with open spirits.

And with the benefit of those. Who've looked into these matters in the past. To determine what are the core ingredients. Of biblical churches. And this is part of our DNA.

We love one another. We serve humbly. We are willing in our hospitality. And we look forward. To the coming again of Jesus Christ. In order to strengthen this point.

[8 : 48] I want to just refer you to three passages in Ephesians. Three powerful truths about the church. First is Ephesians chapter 3 verse 10.

God's intent was that now. Through the church.

The manifold. That means the sort of. The varied. The many sided. Many aspects. Wisdom of God. Should be made known.

To the rulers and authorities. In the heavenly realms. That's a very rich expression. And says something very powerful. Especially to.

To small churches. Who feel they say nothing. Actually not. Actually not. Through the church of Jesus Christ. Something magnificent. Is being declared constantly.

[9 : 45] Not just to the watching world. And sometimes to the unwatching world. But to the rulers and authorities. In the heavenly realms. It's a mystery isn't it?

That somehow or other. What is happening here. Has an impact. And says something. Very positive. About. The nature.

Of the wisdom of God. It's a great thought. In Corinthians. Paul speaks about. The wisdom of God. And he says. Look how.

Massively. Amazing. It is. When. People. People. People. Who. Haven't got any other qualifications. Are brought into God's kingdom. Look around you.

Not many wise. Not many exalted. Kind of people. But God chose the foolish things. Of this world. The things that are not. In order to demonstrate his wisdom.

[10:43] He just does things. In a different way. And this is what the church. Constantly. Displays. Christ is the head of the church. Ephesians chapter 5. Verse 23. The husband is the head of the wife.

As Christ is the head of the church. His body. Of which he is the savior. He's not an onlooker. He's not an admirer.

He's not a critic. He's not just an interested third party. He's the head of the church. He's intimately related to his people. He belongs to you.

As you belong to him. And here in this church. With all its varied population. Jesus Christ. Is the loving head.

Two verses later. Ephesians 5. Husbands love your wives.

[11:49] Just as Christ loved the church. And gave himself up. For her. In that. Little phrase. We read something.

Of the heart of God. The church is God's most loved. And prized possession. Christ. Gave himself. Up. For her.

God did not spare his own son. But gave him up. For us all.

Christ died for the church. These are. Rich and powerful truths. And. Putting that together. We might feel. We might feel justified. In making a very close.

And direct connection. Between the truth. Of growing Christians. And the idea. Of growing churches. And in fact.

[12:44] It's something that I've wrestled with. Over a long period of time. This. Sort of thought that. If Christians grow. Then churches should grow. And.

This message this morning. Is about addressing. This particular point. But here's a reality check. Church in London. For sale sign outside it.

And this could be repeated. Throughout this country. And indeed. It has been repeated. Much closer to home. In walking distance. Of where we are today. You can find.

A venue. Which used to be. London Road Methodist Church. Now Emporium. On the right hand side. You can find. What used to be. Is that the Lewis Road. Congregational. Church.

Now. Now flats. That's to Monfort Road. It used to be. Pentecostal Church. On the right. Much larger place.

[13:49] Called St. Wilfred's. Up in Elm Grove. Still. Interestingly. It's got a cross. On the tower. And still got its name. But it's just flats now.

And. Queens Park. Methodist Church. Which was actually. Built. And started. By the same guy. Who. Who built. The Primitive Methodist Church. Here in Viaduct Road.

That's been converted. Into flats. And is also a nursery. And that's. High Street Chapel. I remember. Preaching in the. High Street Chapel. Just.

Just down the road. From. Edward Street. So six churches. I reckon. Brighton. Has probably lost. About 25% of its churches. In the last 50 years.

Many places. Have closed down. Now. You could say. Are some of those. Were some of those. Biblical churches. Or not. I. I'm. I'm not going to even. Try and comment.

[14:48] But all I would say is. That there is. There is a fact. That. Definitely. God's people. In some numbers. Were meeting. In these places.

In the past. The whole reason. Why the congregation. From. Viaduct Road. Moved into the London Road. Methodist Church. Was they were too big.

For this building. And they needed a larger space. To live in. But they dwindled. To a number. That was unsustainable. And the place closed. What is it now?

Seven or eight years ago. So. All these places. Had. Some vibrancy. About them. You go onto a website. Like. My Brighton and Hove.

And you'll find. Reams and reams. Of. Stories. From people. Who remembered. Growing up. Being part of a girls brigade. Or a boys brigade. Or some sort of. Group or other.

[15:42] Remember the kindness. Of Sunday school teachers. And so forth. A whole generation. Sort of grew up in that. But these places. Are not open. And available. For the gospel.

Anymore. They've been closed. And. We see it in Brighton. We see it. And this story. Could be repeated. Throughout. The country.

So. It was last February. That I put that slide up. On the screen. For you. And I said. Here's 1851. According to the. Census.

It was taken. Rather remarkably. It took a census. Of people who went to church. In 1851. And it looks like. With a population. Of nearly 70,000. In Brighton.

34.7% of people. Came to church. In Brighton. In 1851. But in 2014. That. The population.

[16:37] Has rocketed. The percentage. Of people. Going to church. Has declined. And. It's a pathetically. Small number. Isn't it? So.

Suggestion. Going to evangelical church. On Sunday. Here in Brighton. Possibly. 2.2%. Of the total. Population. Where's that heading?

If you were a business. And you looked at that kind of statistic. You'd say. It's non-viable. It's in terminal decline. Then. Growing churches.

Question mark. This is not an academic issue. It affects our thinking. It affects our commitment. It affects our expenditure. It affects our prayers. It affects our activities. Because. What are we to do? What are we to make of this?

[17:37] So this morning. We're going to try to see. What the Bible has to say. Now the first thing. I want to draw your attention to. Is the fact that. The Bible.

Indicates. That people. God's people. In the past. Faced with issues. Of decline. Have responded. Firstly. Emotionally. And deeply so.

I think of Nehemiah. Living in exile. Thinking of the state of. Jerusalem. And. So burdened about it. That he goes into a period. Of prayer and fasting. And. When he has his. Kind of opportunity. To tell something. To the king. His first thing.

Is that he. Cries. And the king says. Why are you looking so sad? Why are you so upset? And Nehemiah says.

[18:37] I'm so upset. Because. The city of Jerusalem. Is in ruins. Is. Is. Is. Is. Is.

The very epicenter. Of God's activity. In this world. Is in ruins. Is. And if you've grasped. Something of what. Been talking about.

In the last few minutes. About the significance. Of the church. And everything that God says about it. The significance. That God places on it. If you're a Christian person.

You can't. Fail. To be upset. At this. Picture of decline. Sincerely admire.

And then I think. Run through. Hundreds of years forward. Jesus Christ. Standing outside. Jerusalem.

[19:36] And he weeps. Over Jerusalem. How often would I have gathered you. As a hen gathers her chicks. But you would not. Jesus Christ.

The son of God. The king of kings. Exalted on high. He says. Of these people. Your hearts are hard. Decline has set in.

Rebellion is in place. How often would I have gathered you. And his reaction to that. Was. Knowing all things. And knowing the future. Reacher. Nevertheless.

His reaction is one of. Deep. Deep. Anguished sorrow. And I think we can't do better.

Than to feel like that. Ourselves. About this situation. So whatever. We're going on. To talk about.

This morning. Surely. That is a right response. That is a first place.

[20:36] And if we've grown immune to it. And hard in our hearts. About it. Well God forgive us. Because we should be sorry. About this. We should be deeply upset. Not just for sort of.

Personal and selfish reasons. Not even because the fact that. You might be in a church. Which within a generation. Might close. So where are your children.

Going to go. But because the honor of God. Is at stake. This reflects on the honor of God. It's an enormous blessing.

For the world. To have a church. In its midst. It should. It is an enormous honor. For God. To have a biblical.

Church. Operating. This is. The whole reason. Why Jesus Christ died. That he should gather a people. Who should be for the praise of his glory.

[21:37] And grace. Who should declare a message. Who should show by changed lives. That they belong to him. The church is the most visible expression.

On earth. Of God and his ways. I just repeat that. The church is the most visible expression. On earth. Of God and his ways. You say.

What? Us? Yeah it is. It's us. It's us. It's not out there. It's here. A strong reaction.

And people who have felt deeply. And been concerned about these matters. Have responded in different ways. And I want to just suggest. Two ways. Because they're almost at two ends of a spectrum.

About how we could respond to this situation. And how people have done. And the first if you like.

Over on the left side. Is a prayer for revival. Because in church history.

[22 : 46] There is evidence. That at times of. Seemingly terminal decline. God has intervened in a most miraculous. And wonderful way. And I draw your attention to.

What is called the great awakening. In the past. Great works that God did. In the times of Whitfield and Wesley. In the 18th century. And similarly in the United States.

In New England. At that period of time. When multitudes flocked into churches. As a result. Of a sovereign work of God. God. Reviving his work.

And. Speaking to people. Deeply in their hearts. So that people. Out in the streets. Were convicted. Of their sin. And they were saying.

As they did on the day of Pentecost. What must we do. To be saved. They were asking a question. That is a million miles away. From. What people in Brighton.

[23 : 41] And Hove. Are thinking. This morning. They were asking that question. Because of a sovereign work. Of the Holy Spirit of God. In their lives. That is. The Bible's.

Understanding of. Of this idea. Of revival. To my knowledge. Brighton and Hove. Has never had. That sort of revival. Never had that. Other parts of the country.

The United Kingdom. Have had that kind of experience. Those things are happening. In this world. But it hasn't happened. In our. In our time. And in this.

Geographical area. Is it a good thing. To pray for revival. I do think it's a good thing. We should pray for that. We. We can and should. Because this is what God. Has done before.

And this is often. The pattern. That God chooses to deploy. When things are at such a low. And desperate ebb. That his people. Lift up their hearts. Cry out to him. And ask.

[24 : 36] Oh Lord. For the honor of your name. Do something. Which is what we sung. That's what we sung. Earlier. Restore oh Lord. The honor of your name.

In works of sovereign power. Come shake the earth again. That men may see. And. Come with reverent fear. To the living God. That people should know.

There's a living God. So I thoroughly encourage that. Thoroughly encourage it. At the other end.

Of the spectrum. Are those who would. Speak earnestly about. Strategies for growth. Strategies for church growth. They would say. There are many things.

That we need to consider. Again. About. The way we do church. Nothing sacrosanct. About meeting at 11 o'clock. On a Sunday. Or 6.30. In the evening.

[25 : 32] do we have to meet on the Sunday if that's not the best day of all maybe there's another one day in seven is this the best way of meeting after all here we are quite a gathered group wouldn't it be better to put on something that would just be more targeted to specific people groups we have a meeting for let's say internationals a meeting for young people we put on a certain kind of arrangement for them that suits them let's have a bit more food you know that there's lots of things that we could do isn't there and people have looked into this and of course our friends over the water are ahead of the game in this respect on this the church growth movement what is the church about well some people have changed their churches completely around and they've said the key thing is to get people to become christians we're in decline do the do the sums we're all going to die at some point if we don't get new people in if we don't have younger people in the church will die within a generation so what do we do we just swing everything around so it is seeker sensitive seeker sensitive means yeah forget some of the songs because after all a lot of those say things that people can't identify with it at all and it seems like 19th century we won't go down that route we'll cut down on some of the lengths of bible speaking because after all people's attention span is probably less than five minutes we won't have a sort of didactic approach here i am preaching to you today why don't we just gather together in small circles and just have a little conversation together now i'm i'm not i'm not saying that with with any sort of weight of criticism particularly about it i'm just saying that's what people are saying and what people have done and there are mega churches in the states in particular where that that sort of style and and approach

has been adopted strategies for growth it's like saying this is the one big thing we've got to address whatever our past has been look it squarely in the face and we say we've got to address this strategies for growth so you see these are two ends of a spectrum the first prayer for revival says god must work and the second strategies for growth says we must work and i think there's truth in both there is validity in both and we're probably all of us somewhere on a spectrum but rather than just sort of lazily dropping to either of those categories again we need to be saying well what does the bible have to say about this does it have any commentary to make about growing churches we've talked about how wonderful the church is we've talked about um how pressures in god's sight the church is we've talked about the reality of decline we've talked about our reaction to it but what that what does the bible have to say is it is there anything that we can glean from that or are we just left to our own devices as we think about this we are a slowly growing church here but it is slowly growing and you know we need to consider the these issues um ourselves i want to go through some uh just 10 biblical principles quite quickly and i'm conscious that there's quite a lot of material here so i'm just going to really sort of skim through that because i think we need to come back to it later on let me say first of all what the bible tells us is that worldwide church growth is triumphantly certain worldwide church growth is triumphantly certain i want to read

to you from this uh unfailingly encouraging and interesting book called operation world and uh if you've never come across this this is a extraordinary um uh sort of mine of information about the situation of christianity in the world today and uh this is the latest edition it came out about two or three years ago let me just read you this god remains sovereign in our world today now as ever yet attacks on the faith of believers are widespread today's media zoom their cameras in on and dedicate endless column inches to wars disasters famines scandals tragedies and every form of evil things beautiful wholesome and good however are less photogenic so the works of god and his servants are rarely noticed like the disciples on the road to emmaus we need our eyes open to see reality god among us here on earth we see through a glass dimly much better that we dwell on this picture a countless multitude from every people standing before the throne and the lamb celebrating and praising god today this picture is more reality than ever before it has been a most remarkable generation in church history patrick johnson when queried in 1979 about the most difficult places for gospel breakthrough named mongolia and albania today there are at least 40 000 mongolian believers albania is open and churches are growing who among us 30 years ago could have envisaged over 100 million chinese christians massive people movements in iran algeria and sudan breakthroughs in mozambique cambodia and nepal i was only hearing about that last week that there are that there are there are valleys in nepal which are christian valleys and amazing these are all places of threat to god's people but growth and the beginnings of freedom for hundreds of millions of oppressed in india plenty of those things to follow through jesus said some days before he was going to face his own crucifixion to a small group of disciples this gospel must be preached in all the world and then the end will come isn't that extraordinary thought he's he's there in the city of jerusalem the sort of parochialism of it all they've never been outside their country they hardly know what the world is and jesus says to them this gospel is going to be preached in all the world and then the end will come and that's two verse 41 luke just says three thousand were added to their number on that day three thousand there'd never been that many disciples following jesus christ it is lifetime in that wholehearted sense they were baptized three thousand of them and we read in the thessalonians how the message rang out so that all were were plain and clear not just amongst the jewish people but gentiles as well worldwide church growth is triumphantly certain we live in a bubble which is completely contrary to so much which is going on in the world it is our problem it is our sadness it hasn't always been that way there were times in the past when it was the west which was the furnace of gospel growth it was the west that was sending out missionaries into the far corners of the world no longer the world has changed on its axis as a complete reversal of this process but in so many other places in the world the church is enormously expanding the new testament perspective on numbers let me suggest to you that new testament is the bible is not indifferent to local geographical growth but equally is not obsessed by this again Luke the historian is happy to give the names and to give the numbers but it's really interesting when you read the the letters individual letters that Paul wrote to to christian people and in the in the book of Revelation as well they're not addressed in a way that says you're a big church you're a mega church you're a tiny church there's a slight exception to that i think in the case of Sardis where he talks about they're few in numbers but that isn't what defines the church

Jesus Christ looks at his people with an equal volume of love and devotion whether they be few or many and it never seems to be an issue in the bible in the new testament times especially whether churches are large or small they are the church wherever they are they are the church that principle in itself should just warn us a little bit about the danger of getting obsessed by numbers the new testament record is time limited the bible record is insufficient to give a full picture of the life cycle of any one church or a group of churches the new testament record covers less than a couple of generations say 40 years you think about it Jesus dies AD 30 33 maybe Paul dies maybe AD 67 most of what we have in the bible relates to that period of time 40 years it's a very short space of time

Ray you've been here longer than 40 years a church can hardly be measured its life cycle can hardly be measured in 40 years we have to look outside of the bible to get a glimpse of what happened afterwards we have the inklings of it in the letter to the seven churches but what we know is a fact is there is not a church in Ephesus and Ross you were saying Philippi's in ruins the church in Turkey went through a massive decline didn't it and all the the churches that are spoken about so frequently in the new testament where's the evidence for them now well it's an interesting point isn't it where is God in all that we don't know quite what has happened so I'm just saying that the bible record is insufficient to give us a sort of full orb picture and understanding of what God's purposes might be towards any individual geographical church

[37 : 06] God's pleasure in his children's obedience God is pleased with the loving obedient service of his children and he is likely to entrust the gospel to the churches of such people and I'm thinking of the parable of the talents that's what that reference is there in Matthew 25-23 where everybody is granted a talent in some fashion or other at the end the master comes and he says what have you done what have you done with the talent or five talents or ten talents what have you done with it and he says to the one who's used it well be faithful in small things I'll make you ruler over many things I think there's a principle that applies there throughout life not just at the end of life that faithfulness in this life fits us to be able to be workers that God trusts God can entrust things to if we're unfaithful why would the master let precious things be carried by us

God actively intervenes intervenes against sinfulness God is displeased with the willful and persistent sin of people in churches and may even bring judgment on some within the churches even to the entire removal of a church so please look at Revelation chapter 2 verses 4 and 5 Revelation 2 4 and 5 written to the church of Ephesus Ephesus which had received those glowing testimonials of God's favour and kindness and the height of his admiration for the church yet I hold this against you says the Lord Jesus Christ you have forsaken your first love remember the height from which you have fallen repent and do the things you did at first if you do not repent I will come to you and remove your lamp stand from its place it's interesting isn't it he doesn't say I'll come to you and revive you I'll come to you and give you a soft heart I'll come and make you obedient Christians he says if you don't repent I'll get to remove your church your church will close it will be no more it will finish and this is a way of God this is what Jesus Christ will decide to do with a church wouldn't that be a dreadful thing for us to be hearing that from Jesus Christ today in a way we always have the warning of it because it's in the Bible but wouldn't it be terrible if he were to be here today saying I just want to put you on notice if you don't repent if you don't return to your first love if you don't put me first

I'm going to come and just close you down we might say as people might say on the last day but Lord Lord haven't we done all these things in your name but here's that very serious warning and I'm sure the people of Ephesus would have looked back on their rich history and said but Paul was amongst us for three years we were so well taught we've got such a fantastic opportunity in Ephesus it's on a trade route it's a big city surely Lord no no he says I'll close you down if I'm not pleased with you I can close you down how great is our God God's purpose is a bigger broader and more mysterious than the single issue of whether a church grows stays still or even declines tests trials the

Job syndrome battle to be fought disappointments to be faced defeats to be endured lessons to be learnt sin to be seen and dealt with we live in the not yet don't we this is the world in which we live it's the not yet things are not perfect we are sinful we do sinful things the world is a messy place and bad things can happen things can blow up suddenly which are very distressing and difficult and in all this God wants his people to trust him to keep on trusting him keep on looking to him whether the sky is dark or full of sunshine whether things seem to be falling apart or whether it all seems to be

going in a great direction the big call for us is to be trusting him maybe you could almost think of the Christian life in that terminology and say this is what it's about we are being weaned off our confidence in ourselves so that we keep on having to trust him times when we don't understand what's going on we have to trust him times when our best friends are disappointing when people are disloyal when error comes in we have to trust him we have to keep on doing the right thing keep on being faithful because God's purposes are bigger than just giving us brightness and encouragement and success sowing the wind and reaping the whirlwind any techniques and methodologies of church growth that bypass or abuse biblical norms and principles are likely to result in wood hay and stubble do you know the reference the wood hay and stubble that's what [43 : 30] Paul speaks about in 1 Corinthians 3 verse 12 he just links it all in to the task of ministry he says in 1 Corinthians 3 verse 12 if any man builds on this foundation using gold silver costly stones good wood hay and stubble bad his work will be shown for what it is the day will bring it to light it will be revealed with fire and the fire will test the quality of each man's work if what he has built survives he receives a reward if it's burned up he'll suffer loss so there's plenty of building with wood hay and stubble in this world plenty of building like that in churches you may get a result but is it a truly spiritual result it's probably man centered and guided by psychology or social engineering so I would comment that the danger of youthism of concentrating so much because we're so concerned about youth is that that can abuse the principle of the church as a family of brothers and sisters and the family meets together there's a real importance of the balance of scriptural principles undue emphasis on one thing at the expense of another so music and song at the expense of the word exalting the spectacular over the seemingly ordinary obsessed with doctrinal accuracy at the expense of truthing in love and you could go on and we need to very carefully discern and be careful that we don't just blindly follow the sort of principles that seem to work in sort of secular businesses or secular organizations and groups but that we are governed by the principles that govern in the word of God the places of plans plans have a place the example of the early church gives us plenty of encouragement to adopt wise strategies to win people for

Christ Paul went to Philippi he probably wanted to go somewhere else the Holy Spirit said to him go over he had a vision didn't he man of Macedonia but but the next morning he discussed that through with his fellows and then they went over think of Paul in Athens preaching his message on the Areopagus it's an amazing thought when you read that message I don't think there ever been a message like that ever preached before he's constantly bumping into Jews he gives a message in the synagogue it's pretty straightforward in a way all your Old Testament scriptures they all point to Jesus Christ up on the Areopagus he's not speaking to Jewish people he completely changes his language he goes a completely different route he says something which as I say I don't think has ever been said before in that way and he just adapts his strategy to the listeners that he's meeting as we have to meeting people in

Brighton and Hove because we don't meet that many Jews we don't go into synagogues too much but we are out in the London road and we are in this community and we have to find ways of bringing the gospel of Jesus Christ strategically to people in a way which is understandable and starts from where they're at he reached centres of population some places missed out but the gospel spread out from the cities the trade routes the seaports the centres of influence and he didn't have qualms about leaving some place out or not because he knew that in order to get the maximum input of gospel ingredient and multiplication he needed to be in the places where people are equally there's no need and call for us to be perverse and unthinking so I remember the film I think it's called The Field Kevin Costner in it about a guy who has a dream to build a baseball field in the middle of nowhere and he's told in the dream build this and the people will come and of course in the film it does it's wonderful it's whimsical it's brilliant but you need to think very carefully if you're saying

I think we ought to really build a new church on the top of the South Downs there aren't any people there why would you do it would you build a church at Ditchley Beacon well it'd be great you know symbolic and all the rest of it why would you do it as a church I used to preach at which has a massive building but it's in the heart of the country people don't live there praise God we're in a place where people live we can't move for people around here can we we're just in a place where people are so no need to be called to be perverse in our thinking we don't church plant in a field I'm just saying plans have a real place so important that we remember that we're nearly there assessment it's right to test what we're doing ask the questions pray the prayer for instance thinking

