

“*A New Kind of Big* is a timely, provocative, and compelling work that highlights how kingdom-minded churches are measuring their impact, not just by the number of people in the sanctuary but by the transformational effect they are having on their communities. Chip has done a wonderful job of connecting his story with God’s bigger story of transformation in Atlanta and in cities around the nation. It is a “must-read” for those who are thinking about community transformation.”

—Eric Swanson, coauthor of *The Externally Focused Quest* and *To Transform a City*

“In *A New Kind of Big*, Chip tells the story of our journey to bring the hand into Perimeter’s DNA. And it’s the hand joined with the head and heart that has introduced us to a much healthier ministry—one of increasing influence.”

—from the foreword by Randy Pope, pastor of Perimeter Church

“What a wonderful book! Most Christians would like to see their church make an impact on the community and the world but are overwhelmed with the task. This book is the remedy. It’s practical, honest, clear, and ‘doable.’ But it’s more than that. *A New Kind of Big* is exciting! It reminds us of what church is about, when sometimes we forget. Read this book! It could change the world . . . and your life!”

—Steve Brown, professor, Reformed Seminary, Orlando, FL; president and teacher on the syndicated radio program *Key Life*

“Helping churches expand their spiritual vision and discover new ways to connect with their communities is a path Chip Sweney knows well. Jesus didn’t call us to live on a church island. He called us to ‘Go.’ Thankfully, *A New Kind of Big* shows us how. I highly recommend it.”

—Robert Lewis, pastor-at-large, Fellowship Bible Church; author, *The Church of Irresistible Influence*

“A key part of our national ministry is to lift up significant practical and impactful resources that can help men and women in cities/communities across America and the world serve together for sustained evangelism and discipleship. This book by Chip is right on the mark. I recommend this book to all the tens of thousands of men and women across America who seek to be encouraged and equipped in this worthwhile ministry

of reaching our communities and cities collaboratively with the good news of Jesus Christ proclaimed in word and practiced in deeds!”

—Jarvis Ward, National Facilitator City/Community
Ministries, Mission America Coalition

“No matter how large a church is, it will never be large enough to meet the needs of our communities. We need to partner together in order to accomplish the Great Commission. Chip Sweney masterfully displays biblical principles in 3-D. After reading this book, I’m convinced we all need to become *A New Kind of Big*. This is a must-read.”

—Tito Ruiz, pastor of En Español Ministries,
The Bridge Church Atlanta

A NEW KIND OF **BIG**

HOW CHURCHES OF ANY
SIZE CAN PARTNER TO
TRANSFORM COMMUNITIES

CHIP SWENEY

WITH KITTI MURRAY



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Foreword

For nearly four decades I've watched the church search for its identity. This model versus that model, modern versus postmodern, and of course, church growth at all costs. Over the years I've become increasingly convinced that *healthy* is a word desperately needed to describe church.

For many years I've carried a reminder in my briefcase. It features requirements necessary for a church to be healthy. Chip's book, *A New Kind of Big*, expounds brilliantly on two of them:

- the church must be committed to “influence” rather than “success”
- to be a church of influence, the church must have a strong head, heart, and hand

In her early years, Perimeter Church had been deemed a successful church by most. We had a strong head (theological depth) and heart (missional zeal and passion for worship). But the hand (addressing community issues requiring mercy and justice) was conspicuously missing.

In *A New Kind of Big*, Chip tells the story of our journey to bring the hand into Perimeter's DNA. And it's the hand joined with the head and heart that has introduced us to a much healthier ministry—one of increasing influence.

Foreword

And who better to tell the story than Chip. Without question, he, more than any other, has been responsible for leading us through these uncharted waters. Chip's heart for a broken community is as big as I've ever seen. And his insights and strategic thinking have been a unique blessing to me personally, to Perimeter Church, and to our community.

So now it's your turn. He's about to be a blessing to you!

Randy Pope
pastor, Perimeter Church

1

A New Kind of Big

Are You Ready to Dream Big Again?

You didn't sign up to make a small splash in the world. If you're in ministry, chances are you've got big things on your mind. Maybe you're not a mass-market kind of guy or a girl who longs to speak to thousands. But the reason you do what you do is—by definition—large. Maybe you're content to be a smooth stone skipping across the still surface of the lake. You're a light touch, but you want that touch to have a ripple effect before it dies. Or maybe you were born with a tsunami in your chest. Either way, when you heard the call to follow Jesus, you knew you were on to something big. And when that call led you to *lead*, well, your world got even bigger.

Somewhere along the way you joined a staff or volunteered at a church or ministry. You figured if you were to go anywhere at all, you would need to catch hold of some coattails. And the church seemed like the best place to grab hold. So you stepped up. You took a small, personal leap of faith with a big dream in your heart.

The dream was big because of God. The more you got to know him, the more compelled you were to make sure no one within your reach missed him. Loving. Kind. Merciful. Forgiving. All in bigger doses than you could imagine. You're still taking him in.

And the dream was big because of the need. From the beginning you found evidence of people living smaller lives than they were created to live. And because their lives didn't fit the original plan, they were suffering. You saw it in the faces of your neighbors' children after their parents divorced. You saw it in the outstretched hand of the homeless man who waits for a handout at a downtown intersection. You saw it on the news and in the missionaries' newsletters and in the newest movie about children and sex trafficking. The need was staggering. You're still taking that in too.

God is big. The need is big. And, slowly, you began to realize just how small you are.

How can one person, one church, one organization meet the needs of the world with the dynamic message of the living God? How can we, the church, have a big influence on the world? It's a question worth asking. It's a question the church has been trying to answer for centuries.

Big or Small?

The prevailing definition of "big" is pretty obvious. Big parking lots and buildings, big activity centers and sanctuaries. Massive media coverage, marketing, music production. Systems, strategies, and social networks. Compare our subculture to the world. Big means keeping step.

Or does it? Measure the dimensions of your impact this way and this way alone, and you will most likely end up empty—full of improvements but wondering where the kingdom value leaked out of your life's work. You've probably had those existential moments when you've questioned the relevance of big. Like a landscaper who develops a plan that requires hours and hours of upkeep, you don't have time to sit back and absorb the beauty. You know why you're doing it that way, but at times you forget.

But does that make "small" the way to go? Maybe you've viewed the church as a Walden's Pond, a place to retreat from the glitz and to trim your ideology down to its simple roots, a place to stay focused. Sure, small scale has its benefits, but that doesn't make the need any smaller. Sure, the relationships formed in a smaller setting

are meaningful, but what about the masses? How many times has a small group soured because it failed to look outside its comfortable boundaries? And when a small church reaches out, how effective can it be without the resources of its mega brothers?

Or maybe you've yo-yoed between a love affair with the sheer power of the large and the sweet simplicity of the small. You aren't a consumer. You are consumed with a mission. You have a job to do, and you want to get it done. You really want to know which works best.

And maybe, just maybe, you've been addressing the wrong issue. Think about it. The problem with the church is not its size (or, rather, the size of its gatherings); the problem with the church is its reach. When you suspect that the church has minimal or even non-existent influence, *that's* what provokes your heart. Isn't it? That's what you really care about. That's why you started this journey in the first place.

Go back to how it all started. It began with something big. The God of the universe touched your life and longs to touch people—entire communities even—through you and others like you. You are down the line from those first disciples who “turned the world upside down” (Acts 17:6 ESV) in the first century. Yes, big is important but not for the reasons that can easily consume you if you are part of an institution or organization that keeps records, counts heads, or builds buildings. (No matter the size of your church, it's all too easy to trip over these things on your way to the “real” stuff.)

Big is important because God is bigger than his own creation, bigger than his church in all its expressions, bigger than his heaven. Huge.

And big is important because the need is big. The issues—like injustice and poverty and hunger—are bigger than any one person can address. Our cities and countries and continents are bigger than any one church can influence.

The Drama

This is a drama of epic proportions, and the big versus small debate hardly matters at all.

Here is the pivotal question: How in the world can churches—no one church is big enough—make a God-sized impact on a world with God-sized needs? Or preface that question with this one: If your church ceased to exist tomorrow, what impact would that have on the people living in a twelve-mile radius of your front door? What about the kindergartener at the elementary school five miles away who's in the free lunch program because Dad left and Mom can barely make ends meet even though she works fifty to sixty hours a week? What does your church have to offer *that* kindergartener? Are you making a difference? Is your church making a difference? Is making a difference possible? What if it could be done? What if someone tried and lived to tell the tale?

What if, indeed?

You are not the only one with a big dream in your heart. You know that. But did you know others are beginning to succeed in their pursuit of that dream? One church, Perimeter Church in Atlanta, united with over one hundred other churches in one city for this purpose alone. Each church laid aside its own agenda to serve a big God and meet a big need. And it worked. It's still working. Here's a wide-angle view of the combined firepower of these churches: On just one weekend in 2007, six thousand volunteers from over sixty churches gathered to work on 250 service projects inside the twelve-mile radius around Perimeter Church. Thirty welcome baskets were delivered to refugees, a dozen homes were repaired, a thousand Bibles were given away, 750 "encourage a teacher" gift bags were distributed. And that's not all. Volunteers orchestrated twenty block parties in low-income apartment communities and sixty-five neighborhood food drives that collected twenty-five-thousand pounds of food.

The drama is in the impossibility of the task. This book is the tale of how the people of Perimeter Church joined people from other churches to address an "impossibly" big need. The service projects mentioned above didn't just happen. They grew out of relationships between churches and the community. And those relationships were formed in response to huge issues such as poverty, education, family, and justice. These churches refused to limit their definition of big to buildings, gatherings, or parking lots. They shared a love for God and an ache to extend his hand to the world in significant ways.

This book is not an instruction manual; it is a story. It is not written from the pedestal but from the pit of need. It does not outline the small stuff; it proposes the big. And it is an open invitation to your own bigger story.

Maybe over the years your dream has become smaller. Who can blame you really? I mean, if you dream big and it doesn't work out, you're left with a broken heart. People give up on their dreams all the time, and it's understandable. The problem is, as beings created by a big God, we were meant for big things. So you can give up on your dreams, but it won't result in a fulfilling life. Sadly, if you choose this path, you will have settled, sold out.

This book is for people who are ready to think big again, ready to grapple with the ancient, fiery questions in the crucible of this drama. Because that's what your mission is about. The Christian task encompasses "the ends of the earth." In other words, while fully aware that you are small and your church is too, God has given you an assignment with an unlimited reach. He has had big in mind all along.

Think about It

At the end of each chapter, you will be given an opportunity to pause and process what you've just read. Because I honestly don't know what big will look like in your life or in the life of your church, the work to be done in this section is all yours. I encourage you to dig deep here, to be honest about "what is" and courageous about "what could be."

I also encourage you to answer these questions, if possible, in the company of other leaders in your church or ministry. They were written for people who not only want to think big but also want to put big into practice. The questions represent a progression that goes like this:

What is . . .

Where are you and your church right now? Are you currently addressing the issues presented in the chapter?

What could be . . .

I will ask you to look ahead several years, to dream about what might happen.

What will be . . .

What steps can you take right now? In each chapter, you will set a few simple goals that will help you and your church put things in motion.

What we did . . .

How did Perimeter Church do it? You won't do it the same way, but it may be helpful to read a brief summary of Perimeter Church's action steps.

To find out more information about what Perimeter is doing, go to www.anewkindofbig.com.

Picture This

Each chapter will also end with a metaphor—a picture of something tangible, something of unparalleled function or beauty (or both) that is ineffective if it stands alone, something that derives its highest value and splendor by blending with similar elements. The strands of a rope, the threads in a tapestry, the words in a sentence, the links in a chain . . . you get it. Here the material in each chapter is presented as a visual parable. So picture this.

In 1666, Sir Isaac Newton observed that, in all of art and nature, just three colors exist: red, yellow, and blue. All other colors are derived from these three. We know them as the primary colors, the three spokes in the color wheel. Simple. But what wonders are wrought when just three basic, pure, unadulterated colors collide!

Combine two—yellow and blue—to make green. US currency. Oz. The canopy of a rain forest. A gardener's thumb.

But it's much more complicated than that. Colors have things like values and saturations. They are either warm or cool. The study of colors is a veritable science. Did you know red can seem brighter against a black background and somewhat duller against a white

background? In contrast with orange, red looks lifeless; in contrast with blue-green, it shines.¹

The best dreams are in color, aren't they? To say something is colorful is to say it is the product of expert integration, of the amalgam of more than one hue. In other words, living color is only found when various elements are joined together. Again, colors are meant to mix. As you read on, you'll find that the dream that became Unite! was and is synergistic: the product of mixing. It has been the blending together of people, gifts, ideas, visions, and churches. As in a work of art, the mixture is what has given it depth and beauty.

Why do two colors, put one next to the other, sing? Can one really explain this? No.

Pablo Picasso

Walk into the fields and look at the wildflowers. They don't fuss with their appearance—but have you ever seen color and design quite like it?

Luke 12:27 Message

2

Turning Our Hearts Inside Out

First Steps toward Becoming a Church of Influence

Looking back, it was an abrupt awakening. In reality, it was the slow unfurling of a life-changing message in my heart. The really surprising part is the messengers by which it came.

It all began during seminary. While attending school in Chicago from 1993 to 1996, I served as a part-time staff member at Winnetka Bible Church. At Winnetka, I began to discover an untapped resource for ministry—an indefatigable group of people.

This lively group exists in every city, populates every church, and can penetrate every culture. They are unencumbered by the normal stresses of life, yet they are as embattled as the rest of us, if not more so. They may be bruised, but they are not bitter. And talk about easy to motivate! Because they typically lack cynicism, it takes very little exposure to the needs of others for them to spring into action. Just give them a few well-aimed nudges.

I'm talking about junior high kids. No, I don't know kids from another planet. And, yes, I know what they're really like. I'm also aware of the current research that reveals that the prefrontal cortex of a teenager's brain doesn't develop until around age eighteen.¹ That explains the deficiencies in their ability to plan, remember

where their backpacks are, organize simple tasks, and control their wildly fluctuating moods. But I also know what I've observed. Young teenagers have tender hearts.

Some parents who had their children at a young age talk about “growing up with” their kids. Well, I “grew up” into missions with my junior high kids. It began at Winnetka, where the kids in my youth group and I began to live out the gospel in both word and deed. We learned firsthand about the needs of our cities together. We took action together. I'm still not sure who led the way.

At Winnetka, our eyes were opened to the complicated needs of the inner-city poor in Chicago. This wasn't an overseas mission trip experience for us; it was in our own backyard. The needs were impossible for us to ignore. Every couple of months we went as a group and spent time with children who were part of a ministry called Inner City Impact. These experiences brought the reality home that significant needs were not far from us.

After seminary I moved to Atlanta to become the junior high pastor at Perimeter Church, and the story at Winnetka repeated itself. While in this role from 1996 to 2002, I discovered similar needs in our city and a similar resource in our church: teenagers. At Perimeter, I observed kids making a difference on mission trips and realized that their talent for touching lives could become a lifestyle if they had an outlet nearby. I wanted to “get in the game” and decided to take them with me.

Once a month—instead of bowling, putt-putt, or some other form of entertainment—we did what we called Mission Mania. We went to a village for the mentally challenged to develop relationships, play games, and love them. While this was good, I was burdened to give students more opportunities to give themselves away in the community. Then I met a man named Tim Cummins, whose ministry, Whirlwind Missions, was mobilizing churches to serve in apartment complexes that were full of immigrants and refugees. We mobilized our students to do Bible clubs in these apartment complexes, where the parents often could not speak English. That grew into an after-school program. Momentum built, and members of our student ministry began serving in more complexes. Soon, adults were joining us to teach English and to tutor. A movement was beginning, but

The Power of Suggestion

Brian was a junior high student at Perimeter who helped out at a transitional village for homeless families. One summer we suggested—well, challenged, really—the students to give away something they owned to the children at the village. Brian was an avid hockey player and had a garage full of hockey sticks. It would have been easy for him to polish up an old stick and give it away. It would have been a powerful gesture—especially to the child who received it. But Brian did something more powerful: He gave away his newest, prized stick, the one he played with all the time. Little did he know he was setting an example for our entire church. Brian's gift paved the way for a culture shift among his peers. Giving became second nature to many of the kids, and their parents began to notice. Giving our prized possessions away— isn't that the truest picture to the world of the gospel in action?

most couldn't see it. Maybe that's because they didn't expect it to begin with middle school kids.

A Vision Is Born

While the junior high kids at Perimeter and I were learning all about missions together, our pastor, Randy Pope, was ignited by a similar flame. In 2001, he explained a simple paradigm of a healthy church:

head (theology) + heart (passion) + hand (external ministry)

Randy shared with the Perimeter staff that he felt the church was missing this last key ingredient, the hand. He confessed his regret that our church was not strategically caring for those with significant needs outside our own doors. As Perimeter neared the celebration of its twenty-fifth anniversary, he charged the leaders to devise a plan to engage with the community and serve its needs. Because of my experience connecting junior high kids with the community, this was a challenge I was uniquely prepared to hear. He called for the church to “become a church of influence and to turn itself inside out for the least and the lost.” Change was in the wind.

Solomon, in his wisdom, advised, “It is good that you grasp the one and do not let the other slip from your hand” (Eccles. 7:18 HCS). For twenty-five years Perimeter had built its ministry on a solid foundation—solid enough to provide a launchpad for new work, solid enough to produce the godly leadership for it, solid enough to provide biblical guidance.

One reason community outreach at Perimeter has been so successful is that the initial vision of community transformation fell on fertile soil. The reflexes of its members tended toward obedience. Their heads and their hearts were mature enough to do the next thing: to extend their hands to the least and the lost.

As a leader and staff member at Perimeter, I was required to do more than promote programs; I was to share my life in discipleship relationships. We were all accountable to operate on this basic level, including Randy. Jesus did it. His disciples did it. And they passed the pattern along to the next generation.

When members of a church are engaged in life-on-life missional discipleship, the church is the healthiest it can be, the most holistic. It is a church where heads, hearts, and hands join together. For example, before Randy’s vision eventually grew to become a fully staffed Community Outreach department, I was meeting regularly

Write It Down

Daniel Boorstin, author of *The Creators* (Vintage, 1993) and *The Discoverers* (Vintage, 1985), once said that the written word was the greatest technology man ever invented.²

Documentation is the difference between getting everything you need for the dinner party at the grocery store or making a second trip; putting the mower back together safely or almost losing a toe when you discover you forgot an essential step in the process; filling the prescription (if you are a pharmacist), bypassing the artery (if you are a cardiothoracic surgeon), navigating the landing (if you are a pilot) correctly and saving lives or doing it incorrectly and endangering them.

So much hinges on the written word. Visions don’t become plans unless things are written down.

Randy’s initial vision to extend Perimeter’s hands to the world, to become a church of influence, and to turn our hearts inside out for the least and the lost became a short manuscript. And that’s where we started. One simple reason we moved was because the vision was documented.

for discipleship with a group of junior high boys. At the same time, I was prompted by the Spirit to lead in the area of ministry to the community. It just made sense—at this basic, cellular level—to involve my teenage guys in mission. We studied the Word together, we shared our lives, and we began meeting once a month to tutor children in need. All three elements in concert made the picture complete.

When discipleship is going on in a church, it's hard to compartmentalize its ministries. Missions becomes a function of relationships in response to God's call. Giving becomes a communal act born out of more than a sermon on tithing. Worship is a dance of interwoven lives in motion. Holiness is organic and real, something each person hammers out in the context of discussion and debate and the support of friends. And a movement—like the gathering firestorm of Unite!—can be as deep as it is wide.

To learn more about Perimeter's vision and life-on-life missional discipleship, read Randy's book *The Intentional Church*.³

Community Outreach

Randy's vision became an electric force throughout the church, but that's all it was at first. It was a force to be reckoned with but not yet a plan. In the chapters that follow, you will read more about the process we went through. In the beginning, Randy, the elders, and some key staff members began the process of thinking and praying together. Then they assigned a Mercy Ministry Task Force to gather information and make recommendations about the next decisions. These leaders also read Robert Lewis's book *The Church of Irresistible Influence* as they continued to pray and dream about the future.

The next step was to create an in-house entity—a Community Outreach department—to send our people out into the community. We wanted not only to bring healing to those who had been treated unjustly but also to end the practice of injustice. This meant working not only with individuals but also with organizations such as schools and government agencies. It proved to be a pivotal move.

By devoting staff and other resources to our city, we were following a powerful kingdom premise. In other words, the kingdom has

priority over the local church. To advance the kingdom message into the world would cost us something not just individually but as a church. The decision to establish the Community Outreach department translated that cost into a very real budget and a very real staff.

This kingdom premise isn't limited to churches with large budgets. For smaller churches it may mean a key layperson who can chair a lay leadership team to implement a local mercy and justice ministry through the church. The key here is priority. Will the church give priority to the needs outside its doors? Will the church free up resources—people, money, programs—to focus on local ministry instead of devoting all of its capital to its own needs?

In 2002, I left my role as junior high pastor to become the director of this department. The Community Outreach department, which still exists today, is the primary means by which Perimeter sends its own people out into the community. Just as I had worked to engage our junior high kids in hands-on ministry to the least and the lost of our city, I was now faced with the task of engaging the rest of the church in the same kind of ministry.

The first thing we did in the summer of 2002 was to research the twelve-mile radius around our church to discover the needs and to find the groups already meeting those needs. We did more thorough research later, but for now it might help to know a little about what we did as a first step.⁴ We hired two seminary students who performed the research on a very basic level. There were two stages in the process:

- First, the students compiled data from county websites to provide the demographics of the twelve-mile radius around our church. This wasn't very precise because the area includes portions of several counties.
- Second, they conducted interviews with select leaders, ministries, and organizations in the community. While even less scientific, this gave us a more human connection with the needs in the surrounding areas.

One major benefit of our initial research was that it helped us to find partners in the community. From the beginning we wanted to

partner with those who were already engaged in ministry. We then began to deploy our people to get involved with those partners. It was gratifying work. It still is. But in the process, we discovered that the needs were bigger than our church could handle. Even with our big group of willing, mature volunteers, we couldn't tackle them alone.

In the beginning, the Community Outreach staff members were viewed as the “doers” of the ministry. The department's mandate, however, was to build strategic bridges with partners in the community and to provide opportunities for our people to serve. As vision casters and equippers, we had to learn how to work together with other departments in our church in order to get our people involved. As the director of Community Outreach, I had to lead the way. It wasn't easy at first, but I learned from others, like Rick Rusaw at Lifebridge Church in Longmont, Colorado. Each department at Lifebridge is required to build into its annual goals a plan to get people serving in the community. Such efforts help transfer the DNA of *doing* from the visionaries through the staff to the congregation.

These initial steps may seem like a painfully slow beginning. But this kind of thorough, thoughtful approach to ministry preparation provides a powerful start to a movement. Like the rich fuel gathering beneath a space shuttle on the launchpad at Cape Canaveral, the work of the task force readied us to move with lightning speed when the time came. The fueling process is forgotten in the drama of liftoff. When we finally began, we were a long way along the trajectory of our flight plan because of the decisions previously made by the task force.

Unite!

In 2003, Perimeter Church joined together with a network of other churches to create Unite!, a group of about 150 churches who do— together—what we set out to do in our twenty-fifth year: to transform our community by reaching the least and the lost. When Unite! launched and I was asked by the churches to be the director, I was still the Community Outreach director at Perimeter. I did this for several

years and then transitioned leadership of Community Outreach to other Perimeter staff members. Although these two groups have a similar vision, they are not interchangeable. Community Outreach is an entity of the church, fully staffed and funded by Perimeter. Unite! is staffed and funded by local churches who “give away” staff time for the movement. As you read on, the details will become clearer, just as they did for us over time. To find out more information about Community Outreach at Perimeter as well as Unite!, go to www.anewkindofbig.com.

Within a few short years of the initial vision, the Community Outreach department at Perimeter and a movement of churches called Unite! had been birthed. Both were devoted to helping the church meet the needs of the community. Both were committed to the overall goal of community transformation. Both were focused not on the agenda of one local church but on the work of the kingdom in the city. But these things take time. It didn’t happen overnight. In fact, before either Community Outreach or Unite! existed, the Mercy Ministry Task Force met for nine months to set the stage. In the beginning, the structure of the leadership wasn’t clear. It wasn’t a neat, perfectly linear, predictable process. There were lots of blanks to fill in before we were up and running. One of those blanks—one that would have stopped us in our tracks if we hadn’t filled it—was money.

Because the challenge to turn our hearts inside out for the least and the lost was a pervasive part of our vision as a church, Perimeter made the commitment to fund the first steps. When we formed the Community Outreach department in 2002, we were given initial financial support via a ministry and campus development campaign. Over a three-year period, the staffing and program costs for Community Outreach were absorbed into the general budget, thanks to continued, strong church growth. Note that our church grew while we focused not on our church but on the community around us.

The capital campaign to support Perimeter’s Community Outreach department generated a lot of excitement in the church. We were not just raising money for new facilities; we were raising money to give ourselves away to the community and to the world. It was as if the desire to burst through the four walls of our church was primed and just about ready to explode. People just needed a vision and a way to give themselves to it.

Five years later, in 2007, as Perimeter continued to invest in the kingdom both locally and globally, we initiated a second capital campaign to raise funds above and beyond our general budget, this time exclusively for external ministry. The capital campaign allocated a large sum of money over a five-year time frame for “kingdom investments.” Today, local or global partners can submit grant requests to Kingdom Investments for funding. The Kingdom Investments fund helped us take the next step toward partnering with other churches and ministries. Unlike the funds available in 2002, which were used primarily to build the internal infrastructure and staffing of outreach ministries, these funds are used solely for external initiatives.

The Community Outreach department is a part of Perimeter’s staff and programming and is funded by our general budget. That means, like Brian’s hockey sticks, these resources are ours to give away. We pour ourselves, our money, our time, and our planning into this department, only to pour them back into the community. In 2002, before we launched Community Outreach, about 11 percent of our overall general budget was allocated for missions, and almost all of this was global. Now, almost 23 percent of our general budget is for our ministries that reach beyond our four walls both locally and globally.

Randy had challenged us to turn our hearts inside out, to give ourselves, our possessions, and our church itself away. Clearly our people bought into the vision. They still do. They have turned not only their hearts inside out but also their pockets. Their regular support of Perimeter Church and Community Outreach provided the encouragement we needed to get things started and the resources to keep them going.

It’s All in the DNA

We’re only in chapter 2, and already we’re talking about capital campaigns, full-time staff, and full-fledged departments. Your church may not have even considered these possibilities. You’re thinking, *If that’s what it takes to move people into the community with God’s mercy and love, I’m sunk.*

Relax. It's not about staff and money. It's about people and resources. Think loaves and fishes. Think twelve dedicated, determined men (and not a single seminary education in the mix). Think small gatherings in catacombs and prison lunch-and-learn meetings.

The churches that joined with us and became Unite! are all different sizes. Some are wealthy; many are not. Some are mega; lots of them are mini. And remember, the beginning wave of community outreach hit our shore in the form of a small army of junior high kids. Believe me, it wasn't very sophisticated.

A spreading virus is never any different in its essence than each individual cell. The cell holds the precious DNA, the tiny map of its meaning, the recipe for its nature. It's an unfortunate metaphor, but it works. The needs of the world are big. The grace and mercy of God are bigger. All we're called to do is introduce the former to the latter. That's our DNA. And it doesn't matter how big *we* are to get the job done.

Think about It

What is . . .

What is your church doing currently to provide opportunities for the development of the head? The heart? The hand?

What ministries does your church provide for the spiritual formation of your people? Is what you are currently doing producing mature, equipped, and missional followers of Christ? If not, why not?

What could be . . .

It is five years down the road and your church is clearly successful in life-on-life discipleship. Mature, equipped, missional disciples are everywhere!

- What were the critical factors that led to success?
- What were the greatest obstacles to overcome?
- What were the early indicators that your efforts were heading in the right direction?

What will be . . .

What are several strategic steps you need to take to enhance or change your church's current spiritual formation process to one that can better develop mature, equipped, and missional followers of Christ? What are several action steps to take in the next six months?

What we did . . .

Perimeter is a big church with a big staff. But in one area, we have persistently kept things small. From the top down, we are committed to life-on-life discipleship. Our pastor does it, our staff members do it, our members do it. We don't just talk about it; we get in small groups and do it. And it is just as no-frills as it sounds. Here is a working definition from Randy Pope, our pastor:

One way to define life-on-life missional discipleship is laboring in the lives of a few with the intention of imparting one's life, the gospel, and God's Word in such a way as to see them become mature and equipped followers of Christ, committed to doing the same in the lives of others.

Picture This

If you are going to grow living cells in a laboratory, you might want a PhD around to guide you. That's because it's delicate business. Complicated. After all, you're intruding on a natural process in an unnatural way.

First, no two cells are exactly the same, so expect some surprises. Second, for cells to multiply in a dish, they must be dislodged periodically from a dense culture and put into a more sparse culture. Then they grow in density and have to be dislodged and moved to a sparse environment again, and so on. This is called seeding. The student or professor who seeds cells in order to research them knows the cells must be watched vigilantly. Laziness or neglect may ruin the cells and sabotage the entire procedure. Some cells are adherent, meaning they are more difficult to dislodge. In that case, a process called trypsinization is required. Scientists have to baby the cells,

visiting the lab in early mornings and on weekends to keep the cycle moving along. It is a complex kind of hand-holding.⁵

Yet the cells themselves do the real work. And the DNA inside each cell determines the intricate pattern of life that unfolds.

In some ways, this is what those of us who lead in the body of Christ are here to do. We dislodge people from the dense population of church and move them to the sparsely populated (by Christians) culture of the world. We coach, offer encouragement, and sit back to let the DNA work. A farmer doesn't yell "Apple!" at his trees, does he? He just plants the seed, helps along the environment as much as he is able, and waits for the tiny pattern that shouts "apple" inside each seed to emerge on its own.

DNA. The imprint of reproducible life resides inside each of the redeemed. That's why it doesn't matter what size your church happens to be. Size is all about the God who planted himself inside you.

Physiologically, every cell in the human body is designed for every other cell. The whole purpose of each cell is to enable all the other cells to perform. The only cell that exists for itself is a cancer cell.

Tim Hansel, founder of Summit Expedition
and author of *Choosing Joy*

"All we have are five loaves of bread and two fish," they said. Jesus said, "Bring them here." Then he had the people sit on the grass. He took the five loaves and two fish, lifted his face to heaven in prayer, blessed, broke, and gave the bread to the disciples. The disciples then gave the food to the congregation. They all ate their fill. They gathered twelve baskets of leftovers.

Matthew 14:17–20 Message

The mystery in a nutshell is just this: Christ is in you.

Colossians 1:27 Message



C I T Y S C A P E

Community Transformation on the Horizon

As you continue to read, you'll find the story interrupted here and there with short Cityscapes. I want you to see places other than Atlanta where the local church has had a notable influence on the city. I hope you enjoy the view.

Life between Two Worlds

The drama of Scripture begins in a garden and ends in a city. It begins in a sylvan sanctuary where God himself walks in the cool of the day with his created image bearers. And it ends when the planet is remade and restored and includes within that world a “holy city” of unparalleled beauty.

What does that mean for us, for God's people who live between those two perfect worlds—the one created and the other re-created? As the future inhabitants of *that* city, how do we live in *this* city as it is today? And—dream with me for a moment—could it be *that* city is a reminder to us of God's plan for the daring acts of restoration and rescue he longs for his people to do in today's cities?

Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, to all the exiles whom I have sent into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon: Build houses and live in them; plant gardens and eat their produce. Take wives and have sons and daughters; take wives for your sons, and give your daughters in marriage, that they may bear sons and daughters; multiply there,

and do not decrease. But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the LORD on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare.

Jeremiah 29:4–7 ESV

Even though we live in it, we don't know how to define "the city," do we? Maybe that's because we are indeed exiles. We don't fit in. Christians in the suburbs often think of city ministry in distinctly old-school terms. We can't think "city" without attaching the prefix "inner" to it. We classify the faraway-and-separate downtown as a mission field, as exotic and unreachable as Khartoum or Nepal. *The Cross and the Switchblade*, dilapidated flop houses, bearded street preachers, and the LA soup kitchens of the movies are the gritty images that come to mind. The relationship between the church and Atlanta has been no different.

But times have changed, and we can't help but notice. Because of the gentrification of our poor out of the inner city and into the suburbs, and because of the immigration explosion in our suburbs, the challenges that were once confined to urban areas are now spreading all over the metro area. Urban sprawl is just that: a wide dispersal of "downtown" issues. Homelessness, crime, poverty, gangs, and other societal ills are now at the back door of the swim/tennis neighborhoods. Atlanta isn't unique in this way. Metropolitan areas across the country are now, in every sense except the architecture, cities.

This new, bigger city has long been overlooked as a potential repository for the grace and peace and mercy the church has to offer. It's just where we live. It is too close to our own back doors to be considered a viable mission field and too far away in its values and culture to be a "safe" investment. It is like the distant cousin who shows up at Thanksgiving and no one in the family knows what to do with him. We've not been sure how to act toward the city, what to do with it or for it. But we do know our well-being is inextricably linked with the city's.

Seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the LORD on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare.

Jeremiah 29:7 ESV

A Tale of Three Cities

In 2004, I visited four cities: Dallas, Houston, Fresno, and Boulder. I wanted to see what community transformation looked like in other locations. I conducted phone interviews with leaders in ten other cities: San Francisco, Minneapolis/St. Paul, Cincinnati, Milwaukee, Portland, Oregon, Little Rock, St. Louis, New York, Memphis, and Corvallis, Oregon. At Perimeter Church, we were already committed to contributing to the welfare of our twelve-mile radius in the city of Atlanta. The groundwork had already been laid for Unite!, but I wanted to be better informed and more deeply inspired. I wanted a firsthand look at community transformation in other cities. I took a two-month sabbatical to do my research. It was well worth the halt in my own life and in our community transformation efforts.

I found a community within these communities. I found kindred spirits all going the same direction we were going. This view through a wider lens not only captivated me but has guided me ever since. And it has given me ongoing relationships with like-minded leaders. As I talked with these innovators, these godly lovers of their own cities, little did I know I was about to share in their adventures right here in Atlanta. The welfare of our city was going to change. And with it, inevitably, ours would too.

I'd like to draw attention to three cities in particular—Knoxville, Long Beach, and Little Rock. Like a searchlight sweeping its bright beam across the late-night sky, their skylines broadcast a message the church needs to see: *You can do this*. These cities are unique among the 150 or so cities with city-reaching ministries by evangelical groups because they boast a city-reaching movement led by *local churches*. The staffs of these churches in Knoxville, Long Beach, and Little Rock are providing leadership. They are the catalysts for community transformation. Perhaps the local church—not just its sophisticated parachurch counterpart—needs the reminder that the welfare of the city is our responsibility, our privilege. And it is our *possibility*. I've seen it in Knoxville, in Long Beach, in Little Rock. And I'm seeing it in Atlanta. The church can do this. The local church can send echoes of the future city of the King into the city of today.

Seek the welfare of the city.

Jeremiah 29:7 ESV

The axis of the earth sticks out visibly through the centre of each and every town or city.

Oliver Wendell Holmes Sr.

The Man came alive—a living soul! Then GOD planted a garden in Eden, in the east. He put the Man he had just made in it. GOD made all kinds of trees grow from the ground, trees beautiful to look at and good to eat. The Tree-of-Life was in the middle of the garden, also the Tree-of-Knowledge-of-Good-and-Evil.

Genesis 2:7–9 Message

The one who conquers, I will make him a pillar in the temple of my God. Never shall he go out of it, and I will write on him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem, which comes down from my God out of heaven, and my own new name.

Revelation 3:12 ESV