

New York Times Bestselling Author

ELLEN VAUGHN

WHAT
JESUS
STARTED

The **WORLD-CHANGING POWER**
of **THE LOCAL CHURCH**

“Clear, compelling, and exciting. Ellen provides a much-needed reminder that local churches living in and by the power of God are the way He displays His glory and goodness to a broken world.”

ALISTAIR BEGG, Bible Teacher on Truth for Life;
Bestselling Author of *Pray Big* and *Truth For Life*

“Relaying the true-life accounts of simple believers who labor in small, dark corners of the earth, Ellen shows us once again how ‘weakness and humility’ open the way for God to perform His most powerful, kingdom-shaping work. The faith-forging stories you will read in this exceptional book will stir you—as they’ve stirred me—to roll up our sleeves and do the hard, modest labor that will impact our communities for Christ.”

JONI EARECKSON TADA, Joni and Friends
International Disability Center

“The apostle Paul said that God’s promises are ‘yes’ and ‘amen.’ One of His promises was to build the church, and, as Ellen Vaughn describes in these pages, He has. The stories she tells should inspire and encourage us to *be* the church where He has placed us, resting in the promise that ‘the gates of hell shall not prevail,’ but the church certainly will.”

JOHN STONESTREET, President of The Colson Center

“When Ellen Vaughn writes something, I read it—no question. What she writes is never boring. She makes history come alive—not just as facts or a compelling narrative but as a story she genuinely understands and helps you understand too, and in a way that points straight to the hand of God moving through it all. *What Jesus Started* is a rich, compelling, and beautifully written book that celebrates the local church as God’s primary instrument for changing the world. It will inform you, stir you, and challenge you to live differently for Christ.”

GREG LAURIE, Pastor at Harvest Christian Fellowship
and Evangelist for Harvest Crusades

“Jesus said, ‘I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.’ In this remarkable book, Ellen Vaughn shows how He continues to do that. The stories she shares are eye-opening and soul-stirring. I hope this book will be widely read and that the Spirit will stir us all to prayer and action.”

CAROLYN LACEY, Author of *Say the Right Thing*

“Jesus came to build His church, but we’ve often settled for building a crowd. If you’re longing for more than just ‘church as usual,’ the real-life stories in this book will stir your faith and call you back to the movement Jesus started.”

MIKE KELSEY, Lead Pastor at McLean Bible Church

“*What Jesus Started* will help rejuvenate a faith grown stale or one coddled by Western comforts. Ellen not only writes with the pen of a poet and the wisdom of a sage but with a passion for the local church. She calls us back to our thrilling roots. This is a book the church needs to read. And as we do, we’ll discover it’s the one we’ve wanted to read for a long time.”

KELLY MINTER, Bible Teacher and Author of
The Blessed Life

“Does your faith feel stagnant or small? Do you long to hear of God’s miraculous works in ordinary individuals across the world? Reading these true stories will set your heart ablaze with a fresh perspective on how very big and how very good our God is. In our broken world it brings very good news.”

SUSAN ALEXANDER YATES, Speaker and Author

“Ellen has captured stories that expand and challenge us all. I was blessed to travel with Ellen when she collected many of the stories in this book, and I can attest that there are thousands more that could be told! The Spirit of the living God is working in powerful ways to continue to build what Jesus started.”

JANICE ROSSER ALLEN, CEO and President of ICM

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The logo features a stylized, curved line above the text 'the goodbook' in a lowercase, sans-serif font. Below this, the word 'COMPANY' is written in a smaller, all-caps, sans-serif font.
the goodbook
COMPANY

What Jesus Started
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Published by:
The Good Book Company



thegoodbook.com | thegoodbook.co.uk
thegoodbook.com.au | thegoodbook.co.nz

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Published in association with the literary agency of Wolgemuth & Wilson.

Cover design by Studio Gearbox | Design and art direction by André Parker

ISBN: 9781802544442 | JOB-008598 | Printed in India

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*To Patti Bryce,
life-long best friend and fellow pilgrim on the great journey*

Soli Deo Gloria

Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. And when they saw him they worshiped him, but some doubted.

*And Jesus came and said to them,
“All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”*

MATTHEW 28:16-20

But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.

ACTS 1:8

Part 1

**WHAT JESUS
STARTED**

Chapter 1

WHISPERS FROM THE EAST

And a vision appeared to Paul in the night: a man of Macedonia was standing there, urging him and saying, "Come over to Macedonia and help us." And when Paul had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go on into Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them.

ACTS 16:9-10

Kazakhstan, the largest landlocked country in the world, is a mystery to many in the West. It's bordered by Russia, the Caspian Sea, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, the Kyrgyz Republic, and China. It's home to snowy mountains, crystal lakes, and endless steppes whose grasses sway in the wind.

If you look hard enough, you can see into the past, when Kazakhstan was a land of sultans and great khans. Kazakhstan saw wars, invaders, and threats, but its pastoral nomads were rich in their own fierce culture.

In the 20th century, Kazakhstan became part of the Soviet Union, ruled by Joseph Stalin. His forced collectivization of farms caused massive starvation; one-fifth of Kazakhstan's people died.

In this context, Stalin, brutal dictator, provides the backdrop for the story of one small Kazakh woman named Gulshamal. In English, her name means “suffering flower.” This gentle flower lived in a largely forgotten Kazakh area known by some as the “Land of the Outcasts.” She outlived Stalin, and God used her as the tiniest of seeds for new hope that only He could plant.

It started with God moving in one of His friends—a hearty, Jesus-loving, exuberant bear of a man named Paul Hagelgans. Paul is from Kazakhstan; he served in the Russian army as a young man. His grandfather, a pastor, was murdered by Stalin’s thugs. Paul learned of Jesus as a child and follows Him still.

I’ll tell you later how I met him.

Many years ago, Paul saw a newspaper article about people who were suffering from leprosy in the former USSR. Curious because of Jesus’ specific compassion for such sufferers, Paul researched further. He talked to a pastor who was interested in planting a church near a town now called Kyzylorda.

“Yes,” the man told Paul. “There’s a leprosy colony about 180 kilometers [112 miles] from that town. I’ve prayed for the people there, but I’ve never stopped in their village.”

Paul Hagelgans is neither shy nor hesitant. He went to Kazakhstan’s ministry of health. “I want to get a permit to visit the people in the leprosy colony,” he told the officials there. They stared at him, now understanding that he was a crazy man. But Paul being Paul, he convinced them to give him a pass to visit the leprosy colony.

In March 1995, Paul and a group of fellow Christians arrived at the colony. It was then a closed zone where the government had sequestered all those in the country who had leprosy.

Paul and his small team met first with the medical staff, led by a man they called Uncle Volodia. Volodia had originally

come from St. Petersburg as a young, gifted surgeon. His life's dream was to see the last person suffering from leprosy in Kazakhstan. When he arrived, the colony had 10,000 inhabitants; in 1995, there were only about 1,000 left.

Volodia gave permission for Paul and his colleagues to go from room to room in the area of the hospital that housed the most severe cases.

Thrilled to have visitors, the patients told Paul their life stories. He would ask if he could pray for them, and if they were open, share the unique hope found in Jesus Christ, friend of those with leprosy.

In one small room, a nurse had helped an elderly patient to sit up in her narrow hospital bed. The woman motioned with one clubbed hand for Paul to come in. She had thin, white hair trailing from a long piece of gauzy fabric wrapped around her head. She had wild gray eyebrows but only parts of her ears and remnants of her lips. She had no fingers, and shocking, empty sockets where her eyes should have been.

Her name was Gulshamal. She told Paul her story.

"When I was just a small girl in my village," she said, "men wearing uniforms brought a family to live with my family. It was during the Second World War, and the government had rounded up Germans from the western part of the Soviet Union. They sent the men to work in camps, and they sent the women to live and work in faraway places. I lived in a faraway place."

The Germans assigned to Gulshamal's house were a grandmother, a mother, and her little daughter, who was Gulshamal's age. The German girl picked up Kazakh quickly. Every night the girl's grandmother would tell her bedtime stories, and then every day, after the adults had gone to work in the fields, the German girl would tell them to Gulshamal.

Remembering those days so long ago, Gulshamal sighed. "Ah, those were beautiful stories! Every morning, I could not

wait to hear the next one. Now I don't remember them all, but they all had one hero. His name was *Īsā Masīh*."

Paul recognized the name. The Arabic title for Jesus, the Christ.

Gulshamal and her playmate spent many months together. But one day men in Soviet uniforms came and rounded up the Germans. They were to be deported further into the icy bowels of the Soviet Union, many to their deaths in Siberia. Gulshamal never saw her friend again.

Time passed.

Gulshamal missed her friend desperately. She comforted herself over the years by rehearsing the beautiful stories she had been told. Eventually she became very ill. She developed discolored patches of skin, numbness, and muscle weakness. It was leprosy. Her toes and fingers shortened, then retracted.

Parts of her body dropped away; her eyes failed.

Now I don't
remember them
all, but they all had
one hero. His name
was *Īsā Masīh*.

She gradually became worse, and in 1965 she was dropped off at the front gate of the leprosy colony. By 1995, Gulshamal was a frail stick of a woman who, true to her name, had suffered greatly.

Her world had taken on the confines of the 8 x 10 foot room where she now lived. But still... she had held on to hope for all those decades—the hope first instilled in her by her little German friend.

"I remembered the stories!" she said to Paul. "I remembered how this *Īsā* was healing the sick people, even the ones with leprosy. I remembered that my German friend had told me that *Īsā* had come to save people from their sins. I knew I was a very big sinner. I remembered that this *Īsā* even died for the sins of the people. But then I remembered the best story of all:

how God had raised Him from the dead. How could that be?

“In the Soviet Union, it was not allowed to talk about *Īsā*. But even though I was stuck in this place, even though my eyes rotted away and I could no longer see, I was searching. Searching for God.

“And then I thought, what about all these other people around me? These poor sufferers! If what my friend told me is the truth, then what about them? So, I started praying to God that He would send someone from far away to tell all these people here the stories about *Īsā*.”

Gulshamal raised her hands in the air, though she had no fingers. Sobs shook her face, though she had no eyes. “I have always remembered the stories of this man who healed the people with leprosy, gave sight to blind people, and forgave sins! I have been praying for 30 years... praying that someone would come to this forgotten place to tell the beautiful stories of *Īsā*, the one who loved the outcasts.”

She paused, her sightless eye sockets turned toward Paul even as tears coursed down his ruddy cheeks. “And now,” she said, “my prayer has been answered. *You have come!*”

The commonality of various communist regimes is their cruelty, whether exercised by Joseph Stalin in the former Soviet Union or by the revolutionary Pol Pot in southeast Asia.

In the aftermath of America’s disastrous experience in Vietnam, communist forces took power in neighboring Cambodia. Led by the brutal revolutionary Pol Pot, the Khmer Rouge army entered the capital city of Phnom Penh. Pol Pot’s soldiers destroyed highways, buildings, medical equipment, and hospitals. They burned books and eradicated every vestige of western technology and infrastructure. Their

vision was for an agrarian state made up of workers and peasants, egalitarian to the core—except for those who held power and enjoyed privileges others did not.

Infrastructure aside, the regime's greatest destruction was reserved for its people. The Khmer Rouge marched Phnom Penh's two million citizens into the countryside. Pol Pot had long lists of "undesirables," such as doctors, monks, journalists, people who spoke French or wore eyeglasses, or those too young or too old to work for what Pol Pot called *Angka Loeu*, meaning "Organization on High."

As many as two million human beings—a quarter of the country's population—were beheaded, shot, bludgeoned, drowned, strangled, buried alive, or slowly tortured to death. Soldiers smashed babies against trees. Twenty thousand people were sent to Security Prison 21 for interrogation. Only seven survived.

The bodies rotted in mass graves, where their battered skulls endured to become the symbols of Pol Pot's "killing fields." Those who survived were sent to labor and reeducation camps, where everyone five and older was expected to work 16 hours a day. The communists killed those who could not meet production quotas. They obliterated schools and family structures. They rewarded children for allegiance to Pol Pot, or "Uncle," and educated them in the fine art of informing on their parents.

After four years of this brutal madness, Vietnamese forces invaded Cambodia. Pol Pot and his Khmer Rouge fled into the jungle. He was sentenced to death *in absentia* on genocide charges and finally died under detention by his own troops in 1998.

A year or so later, a Cambodian pastor I'll call Tuy Seng traveled to Kampong Tom province in the north of his country. As far as anyone knew, Pastor Seng was the first person to speak of Jesus in that isolated area. Most villagers

cast their lot with Buddhism or ancestral worship. Christianity was unknown.

But when Pastor Seng arrived at one small village, the people welcomed him eagerly. They couldn't hear enough about Jesus. Most wanted to change their ways and follow Him.

Smiling, Pastor Seng asked the people why it seemed as if they'd been waiting for him to come.

An old woman shuffled to the front of the group. "We *have* been waiting," she said. "We have been waiting for you for 20 years. And now you have come!"

Then she told him this story.

After the Khmer Rouge took over Cambodia and remade its city centers in their own image, they pressed on into the countryside, destroying anything created with purpose and design—bridges, highways, hospitals, and human beings. It took time, but they pressed on into rural villages.

So it was that the soldiers had come to this hamlet 20 years earlier. Their technique was the same as it had been for countless communities, but for the people who lived there, the terror was new. The communists ravaged from hut to hut, ordering the villagers out. Those who resisted were killed at once; many died in front of their homes.

The rest were marched to a clearing behind the village. Their own farm tools were thrust into their hands.

"Now dig!" the soldiers shouted.

The villagers hacked the soil, trembling with the dark realization that they were digging their own mass grave. Some lost their nerve and tried to run. They were shot and dragged to the edge of the still shallow pit.

Hours passed. The people sweated and wept and dug, until finally the hole was deep enough. The soldiers shouted for them to turn and face the pit.

They braced themselves, waiting for the killing blows, knowing that the soldiers would bludgeon them to death

rather than shoot them—why waste precious bullets on ordinary peasants?

The heavy, humid air lay still as the villagers began to cry out in the wail before death, when the heart's longing to live becomes a desperate plea for help. Some screamed to Buddha or to ancestors or to demon spirits. A few cried for their mothers.

Then one woman began to cry, intuitively, to one of her earliest memories—the faint echo of a story told her by her mother about the God who hung on a cross. She called out for that God. Surely the One who had suffered Himself might have compassion on those about to die. She cried for Him.

And suddenly the screams around her became one great wail as the entire village called out as one, crying for their lives to the God who hung on the cross.

They sobbed into the darkness of the pit before them.

Silence. A flicker of hope.

And then the people turned around, one by one by one.

The jungle was empty. The soldiers were gone.

And ever since that astounding day so long before, the people of that village had been waiting. Waiting for someone to come and tell them more—more about the God who hung on the cross.

Chapter 2

FISHBOWLS AND FIRST-CENTURY FAITH

*Peter was filled with the Holy Spirit and told the nation's
leaders and the elders ... "Only Jesus has the power to save!
His name is the only one in all the world
that can save anyone."*

ACTS 4:8, 12, CEV

These stories that I heard in Kazakhstan and Cambodia can stir up many things.

First, they sound foreign to many North American ears because, well, they are.

Second, they can sound to Christians like a plea for evangelism, with a tinge of guilt mixed in: *this* is why we must reach the three billion people around the world who have never heard the name of Jesus. The fields are white with harvest.

True, but my focus in telling these strange stories to myself and to you is to remind us of something more elemental: the absolute mystery and power of the gospel. Many of us have forgotten the main thing. There is *power* in the name of Jesus.

His gospel is not just a compendium of information, a list of tenets we check off if we agree, or a worldview we adopt

for talking points. Christianity itself is not a political stance or a cultural nicety or an adjective for our social media profiles.

The gospel is a living story, dangerous, multidimensional, and infused by the Holy Spirit, who hovers all over this dark earth, whispering glory to God in places as hard as stone. Like remote jungles in southeast Asia or Stalin's USSR or India's Hindu strongholds or, as we'll see, in the libraries of Muslim extremists, or, dare we hope, even in the complacent comforts of 21st-century North America.

Throughout history, His name has endured. And so, against all odds, has His church.

If you reread the book of Acts with fresh eyes, the story of the church's beginnings takes your breath away. It's an account of an unlikely organic movement of diverse people—fishermen, tentmakers, small-business owners, political officials, slaves,

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His name has endured.

And so, against all
odds, has His church.

and free men and women of all backgrounds who multiplied all over the world and changed the course of history. Noticeably missing from this new community were those who considered themselves “religious”:

those who were complacent, self-satisfied, self-defined, and assured of their own goodness.

No, this unlikely community kept growing and growing, flowing with the Holy Spirit, continuing the work that Jesus had started.

In the New Testament, we see the Jesus story introduced: “all that Jesus began to do and teach.”¹ Neither the Kingdom of God nor the Messiah Himself looked like what people

1 Acts 1:1.

had expected. Jesus Christ, the Messiah, was not a political king who would rescue the Jews from their pagan Roman oppressors but a suffering servant who gave His life for all who would receive Him, that they might have the power to become the sons and daughters of God.²

And in the book of Acts, we see the continuation of the surprising story—what Jesus *continued* to do, through the power of the Holy Spirit, growing His church made up of people from every tribe and nation, sinners who were thrilled that they could be swept up in the tsunami of God's grace because of the one Gulshamal called *Īsā malik*: Jesus, the Messiah.

Many of us in the West today are hungry for an organic movement of the power of the name of Jesus, like what happened in the days of the early church.

Many of us are weary, overwhelmed, and longing for supernatural transformation. We long for an authentic, exciting, and radically loving reality of church and Christian community in this angry world.

As I write, political polarization and demonization of the opposition have been the cacophonous norm for the past few years. Common courtesy took a sabbatical and never came back. Identity politics and culture wars fill every virtual space, as well as adolescent social media spats between people who are supposed to be grown-ups. Families are split as never before by differing political views, and it's the same in many churches. Protests, riots, mass shootings, crime, suffering at home and abroad. Wars, earthquakes, floods, and human injustice. Children bloodied and trafficked in the rubble of the Middle East, the former Soviet Union, and across Africa, Asia, Europe, North and South America, and every other place where human beings live.

2 John 1:12, RSV.

The news cycle overwhelms us with horror, then moves briskly on to the next headline, which may well involve a celebrity we just don't want to hear any more about.

Much has been written about the feelings of confusion, helplessness, and fatigue that such an environment can create. For many, the emotional exhaustion makes them more susceptible to numbing and isolating themselves in a privately curated cocoon of nice idols: comfort, convenience, and control.

Stay comfy and keep scrolling. *What do I want?* Maybe another golden retriever video will ease my boredom and anxiety, or if I learn how to make my own corn tortillas from scratch or how to build a tiny house in the backyard. Or what about another Amazon delivery? Or what about that lurking host of darker comfort substitutes?

But there's an opportunity here. The barrage of innocuous distractions and the bad, the ugly, and the lies can compel us to stop.

Stop. This status quo, both within me and around me, is shriveling my soul. God, show me the true, the good, and the beautiful.

I have seen that best in the midst of the ugly. Like Jesus' whisper of love to a leprosy sufferer in Kazakhstan. Or, as I'll relate later, the loveliness of churches opening their doors to those left homeless by the cruel war in Ukraine. The goodness of a hot bowl of borscht for a hungry and frightened child. The beauty of a shared meal and a vigorous hymn-sing on the floor of a dark, cramped apartment in Tajikistan, or of a sun-warmed bag of peanuts shared with former child soldiers outside a mud hut in northern Uganda. Those young believers had told me the story of their lives, and the fun beauty of our shared peanut fellowship came from the truth of the gospel: the liberating reality of God's blood-spattered forgiveness for us, all because of Jesus' sacrifice on the cross,

and His explosive, ebullient resurrection from the gray ranks of the silent dead, so we can live too.

I've gotten to see such things because of an unusual opportunity.

Not too long after my husband Lee's death, I embarked on a series of journeys. I had just finished writing the second volume of my authorized biography of Elisabeth Elliot and was ready for something different. I'd also somehow remodeled parts of our home in that season, and I was anxious to remodel me. So "The Widow Vaughn," as Lee had insisted on calling me before he went off to Heaven, got on some airplanes and went forth to a variety of unlikely destinations.

In this cultural moment of great weariness, dullness, and complacency among many in the church in the West, we can be refreshed and reminded of what is true and good by our brothers and sisters in the East and Global South.

I flew away in order to interview dozens of indigenous Christian leaders and laypeople. These were not just individuals; they were all part of local churches that were transforming their communities. I found myself in Ukraine, Moldova, India, Nepal, Rwanda, Brazil, Nepal, South Africa, Turkey, Zambia, Tajikistan, and Uganda. These pilgrimages enhanced what I had seen on prior similar journeys to Iraq, Egypt, Cuba, Cambodia, Romania, Peru, Vietnam, Colombia, China, Guatemala, El Salvador, Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic, and deep in the Amazon jungles of Ecuador.

There is nothing like getting out of one's own cultural fishbowl to break out of parochial paradigms. Also, swimming with my fellow fish abroad refreshed my love for and purpose in my own fishbowl, where God has placed me.

This is why I'm writing this book, including just a few of the many invigorating stories I heard abroad. I believe—in this cultural moment of great weariness, dullness, and complacency among many in the church in the West—we can be refreshed and reminded of what is true and good by our brothers and sisters in the East and Global South.

Western Christians habitually think in terms of Big Things, especially new and improved Big Things. Our itching ears are addicted to novelty. There can be a great energy in that tendency, but I just don't think now is the time to yearn for a new movement, for a new spiritual formula from some powerful social influencer, for a fresh, strategic start-up, or for some new, culture-changing realization that we just didn't think of until now.

It's time to remember what Jesus started 2,000 years ago: the new-covenant community of faith rooted in God's Old Testament revelation, His church.

It's time to reconnect to the old.

It's also time to think small. Not "How can we change the church in America?" But rather "Lord, what would you have me be and do in my particular church community, where I live?"

The phrasing of that question is important. Again, our gung-ho Western activism is tempted to start with "What would You have us *do*?" We are very good at programs and movements and action plans. But let's pull up the horses before we gallop off in all directions at once. The first question is "Who would You have us *be*?" or, more to the point, "Who are we, in You?" Our actions will always flow out of our identity. Being precedes doing.

So, who are we?

We live in a time when defining our own identity according to our own preference is a hallmark of our autonomous Western culture. This self-identification is much bigger than questions of sexuality and gender. It's the core of how we perceive everything.

Bluntly put, every follower of Jesus Christ has a unique identity that flows from God. That's because He made each one of us, knew us before we were formed *in utero*, and loves us with a love that will never let us go.

Over a cup of tea with a former Muslim sister in southwestern Turkey, she spontaneously spoke of this reality. As a Muslim, she said, "I saw Allah as a god of men, so why would a woman praise him? Then God showed me Himself. I understood that Jesus Christ is God, and my heart changed... like Isaiah, I said 'Here I am; whatever You want, use me.' Jesus changed my *identity*."

Being a Christian involves this crazy voluntary exchange: my will for His. My truth for His. My comfort for His cross. My preference for His power. I yield to Another because I believe He is actually God and that before I was even aware of Him, He knew me, saw me, loved me, and gave Himself for me. Because He first loved us, if we decide to follow Jesus, we love Him and sacrificially find our true selves in Him alone.

A thousand difficult but liberating ramifications, both individual and collective, flow from this exchange.

First, I follow Jesus as an individual, uniquely and specifically loved and saved to one day somehow stand on my own two celestial feet before Him.

But, in being grafted to Jesus, I am inextricably connected to His family. His church. I am not on my own. I am part of something much bigger than myself.

I am not the autonomous ruler of my own self-shaped kingdom but an intrinsic, irreplaceable part of a whole that

is both cosmic and located right in my neighborhood: the church.

If we are Christians, as those who follow Jesus have been called since the first century, our identity is in Christ. And He says to us corporately, as He has since the first century: *Be my church.*

In my travels over the past few years, I've seen what I've known theologically for decades, but the reality is urgent and tangible, and provokes tears in me now. *The local church is God's designed, ordained, and blood-bought instrument of transformation in this dark world.* It is the visible local church in a community—yes, even though it is populated by flawed people like you and me—that shows the world what the invisible Kingdom of God looks like.

Now, just as in His first-century Jesus revolution, God's design is to transform the world through this humble vehicle. In our wonderful Western focus on systems, methods, metrics, and movements, we can sometimes lose sight of God's unlikely plan, which has not changed over the millennia. The local church—peculiar, unglamorous, and imperfect—is God's Plan A for the ages. And, as many Christian leaders have noted, there is no Plan B.

The key to durable hope, refreshment, and joy in these weary times comes not in Big, Fast, New Things but in a what is usually a slow, small thing—the often-unlovely, always-imperfect local church.

And in this, God meets us with a wonderful paradox, for these millions of flawed, small churches are part now of what will one day be fully revealed as the whole enchilada: the magnificent, glorious, cosmic, and enormous whole, the

splendor that Jesus Himself started; the capital-C Church. Multicultural, multilingual, multi-abled, multigenerational; hilarious with diversity and yet gloriously solemn in its unity, “spread through all time and space and rooted in eternity, terrible as an army with banners”:^a the mysterious bride of Christ, the glorious community of the beloved.

But not yet.

As we wait for that great day of consummation, God has given us everything we need, wherever we live, to be His people in this ordinary day. We don’t need something new and improved. We need to be reminded of what we know to be true and have perhaps cast aside as too tedious or inconvenient.

In this, as always, God is gracious. He loves us. He sees us where we are. And if we have the humility to see as well, the family of God in developing nations around the world can encourage those of us in the weary, wealthier places.