

“Whenever the church lives into a holistic gospel, she brings life to all. But too often the church has become a religious industrial complex instead of a community of people shaped by the gospel who display a sustained faith, a stubborn hope and a sacrificial love. Scott Olson calls us to live into a rhythm of life together that seeks to resist the principalities and powers and communally embody the good news in the world for the sake of the world. This book will help you build a movement.” – **JR WOODWARD**, National Director, The V3 Church Planting Movement; Author: *Creating and Missional Culture* and *The Church as Movement*; Washington D.C.

“Scott is the real deal. His passion for the church to be a mature, sent, loving people is contagious. My friendship and comradeship with Scott has been a joy. He practices what he preaches, lives out what he writes and embodies what he desires the church to become. Scott is the kind of shepherd, leader and practitioner we need more of.” – **ALAN BRIGGS**, Founder & Director, Front Range Church Planting; Author: *Staying is the New Going: Choosing to Love Where God Places You* and *Guardrails: Six Principles for a Multiplying Church*; Colorado Springs, CO.

“Developing a healthy root system takes time, thoughtfulness, and tender loving care. No matter if you are working with plants or people in churches, the same principles apply. However, with people and churches, it is important to learn from those who have toiled long and hard as church planters and gardeners. In *Re-Imagining the Church*, seasoned missional pastor Scott Olson provides you with a ground-breaking guidebook for cultivating and nourishing your church to bear much relational fruit.” – **PAUL LOUIS METZGER**, Ph.D., Professor of Theology & Culture, Multnomah Biblical Seminary; Author: *Consuming Jesus: Beyond Race and Class Divisions in a Consumer Church*; Co-Author: *Exploring Ecclesiology: an Evangelical and Ecumenical Introduction*; Portland, OR.

“If Moses was considered the ‘most humble man on the earth,’ Scott is a close second to that. During his seminary days, he served as one of my pastoral interns. I witnessed up close his godly humility in circumstances that for many would provoke anger and defensiveness. It’s out of that teachable spirit—forged in the crucible of life together in community—that Scott shares valuable insights that enable us to re-imagine the church through developing a healthy root system.” – **DAVID STEVENS**, Pastor, International Bible Church, Jurbise, Belgium; Instructor, African Pastoral Training Ministries serving in West Africa; Author: *God’s New Humanity: A Biblical Theology of Multiethnicity for the Church*.

“I love rubbing shoulders with leaders. Some you have a connection with because of place or season in life. Others the connection is harder to describe in concrete terms. Scott is one of those guys I’ve always felt drawn to just because he is a leader with an uncommon heart. Wherever he has served and no matter the amount of time he has always brought a quality of heart and mission that was like a breath of fresh wind.” – **MILAN HOMOLA**, Co-Founder and Executive Director, Compassion Connect, Inc.; Portland, OR.

“For the past decade, I’ve come to deeply love and respect Scott Olson as I’ve observed his walk with Jesus and the impact he has on others for building Christ’s church. He models a mentor’s heart to share the gospel with unbelievers and equip believers to live the daily life of a disciple who makes disciples who make disciples. His love for Christ, the word of God and people is evident and has often been both an encouragement and challenge to my own walk with Christ. I count it a privilege to call Scott my friend, brother and co-laborer in the gospel.” – **PAUL ANDERSON**, Founder and Executive Director, Skatechurch (www.skatechurch.net); Portland, OR.

“There are all kinds of books on the market today, and sometimes it’s hard to choose because you don’t know the author or their character. This author I do know. Scott is one of the most outstanding men I know. He is upright, forthright, honest and an incredible leader. This book comes from his heart and his experience. A must read for every church!” – **CATHE WIESE**, Executive Director, My Father’s House, A Community Shelter, Inc.; Portland, OR.

“The best thing I can say about Scott is that he is ‘the same.’ He’s the same humble Christ follower whether a husband, father, neighbor, businessman, friend or pastor. I think most would describe Scott as the nicest man they’ve ever met. If I were to describe him in a word, it would be ‘Equipper.’ And that is definitely evident in this new work, *Re-Imagining the Church*. Scott’s holistic understanding of the gospel is both refreshing and encouraging. This guide will help equip communities to not only understand the gospel, but holistically respond to it together.” – **CLAY ROSS**, Founder, GRASSROOTS Church; fellow Dream Awakener; Colorado Springs, CO.

“During the two years I knew Scott, I found in him an unusual combination of musical skill, of biblical understanding, of human mercy, and of service without reward. Although he had more practical experience than I in launching and leading simple churches, he was always willing to learn and to assess fresh perspectives. Whatever Scott writes comes from that kind of character.” – **GALEN CURRAH**, DMiss, Church Planter, Trainer, Consultant, Editor (*www.PeopleOfYes.com*); Portland, OR.

Re-Imagining the Church

Developing a Healthy Root System

*An Introduction to Gospel-Formed
Communities Living on Mission*

Scott K Olson

Foreword by Alan Briggs

Re-Imagining the Church: Developing a Healthy Root System

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Dedicated to my wife (Anna), my children (Jaden and Jonah), my local church family (GRASSROOTS Church), and my extended church family (the bride of Christ). May our hearts and lives continually be captured by our First Love.

With gratitude towards the many who have invested in me and helped shape and reshape my theology, praxis, and life with a view to the holistic gospel received from our Triune God.

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FOREWORD

ALAN BRIGGS

I spent a summer as a mountain guide. I mostly led exhausted flatlanders up peaks they had no business summiting. It was torturous and occasionally exhilarating. There were tedious moments, but I loved the challenge of planning for the journey, coaching people up a mountain and watching people experience the climb of their lives. Tears were commonplace on the trail and on the summit.

Of the hundreds of folks I led up mountains that summer, I did not carry one of them. I wouldn't. It wasn't my role. I couldn't. It literally wasn't in my power. The role of guide has become the defining narrative of my experience as a pastor, coach and consultant. I won't do the work for others, and I can't make others hungry. Spiritual leaders are guides, not pack mules.

Scott Olson is a fellow guide. He leads real people in a real church to share Jesus in a real world. He has produced a resource that doesn't carry leaders into mission but helps them plan and execute the ascent into mission. Too many books either give lofty, unattainable ideas or simply try to carry you up the ministry mountain. Scott casts a vision for the church as a practical missionary force, but he leaves space for the Holy Spirit to guide every group uniquely.

This resource is for practitioners who are hungry to practice and guides who are hungry to guide. This is a beautiful framework for a community to practically discover and practice their unique missional fingerprint. Scott combines enough spirit-led chaos with enough well-organized structure to produce a resource Dee Hock would call "chaordic."

If you are looking for a quick read this isn't for you. But if you're looking for a process that will lead a group from the living room to the trenches, this is it. It was birthed in real groups among real conversations by real people.

If you believe groups of Christians can exist for more than just smallness or community, give this a shot. Re-Imagining the Church can guide communities out the front door and into a world desperately needing to taste, touch, smell, hear and see the gospel.

Grab your pack, lace up your boots – Let’s get climbing!

Alan Briggs is a Pastor, Director of Frontline Church Planting and author of *Guardrails* and *Staying is the New Going*

THE RUB

The moment you listen and engage the good news about the kingdom, the scripture indicates that you will meet **resistance**. Take, for instance, the parable about the sower and the seed from Matthew 13:1-9; 18-23. Take some time to read the parable below and its interpretation on the following page. As you read, identify (circle, underline, notate) the four situations in which the Word about the kingdom is spread, the four types of soil, the four different responses, and the three realities that inhibit the growth of the seed (resistance/opposition).

THE PARABLE

THAT SAME DAY JESUS WENT OUT OF THE HOUSE AND SAT BESIDE THE SEA. AND GREAT CROWDS GATHERED ABOUT HIM, SO THAT HE GOT INTO A BOAT AND SAT DOWN. AND THE WHOLE CROWD STOOD ON THE BEACH. AND HE TOLD THEM MANY THINGS IN PARABLES, SAYING: A SOWER WENT OUT TO SOW. AND AS HE SOWED, SOME SEEDS FELL ALONG THE PATH, AND THE BIRDS CAME AND DEVoured THEM. OTHER SEEDS FELL ON ROCKY GROUND, WHERE THEY DID NOT HAVE MUCH SOIL, AND IMMEDIATELY THEY SPRANG UP, SINCE THEY HAD NO DEPTH OF SOIL, BUT WHEN THE SUN ROSE THEY WERE SCORCHED. AND SINCE THEY HAD NO ROOT, THEY WITHERED AWAY. OTHER SEEDS FELL AMONG THORNS, AND THE THORNS GREW UP AND CHOKED THEM. OTHER SEEDS FELL ON GOOD SOIL AND PRODUCED GRAIN, SOME A HUNDREDFOLD, SOME SIXTY, SOME THIRTY. HE WHO HAS EARS, LET HIM HEAR.

- MATTHEW 13:1-9

THE PARABLE'S INTERPRETATION

HEAR THEN THE PARABLE OF THE SOWER: WHEN ANYONE HEARS THE WORD OF THE KINGDOM AND DOES NOT UNDERSTAND IT, THE EVIL ONE COMES AND SNATCHES AWAY WHAT HAS BEEN SOWN IN HIS HEART. THIS IS WHAT WAS SOWN ALONG THE PATH. AS FOR WHAT WAS SOWN ON ROCKY GROUND, THIS IS THE ONE WHO HEARS THE WORD AND IMMEDIATELY RECEIVES IT WITH JOY, YET HE HAS NO ROOT IN HIMSELF, BUT ENDURES FOR A WHILE, AND WHEN TRIBULATION OR PERSECUTION ARISES ON ACCOUNT OF THE WORD, IMMEDIATELY HE FALLS AWAY. AS FOR WHAT WAS SOWN AMONG THORNS, THIS IS THE ONE WHO HEARS THE WORD, BUT THE CARES OF THE WORLD AND THE DECEITFULNESS OF RICHES CHOKES THE WORD, AND IT PROVES UNFRUITFUL. AS FOR WHAT WAS SOWN ON GOOD SOIL, THIS IS THE ONE WHO HEARS THE WORD AND UNDERSTANDS IT. HE INDEED BEARS FRUIT AND YIELDS, IN ONE CASE A HUNDREDFOLD, IN ANOTHER SIXTY, AND IN ANOTHER THIRTY.

- MATTHEW 13:18-23

Take some time to compare this to **Luke 8:4-15**. What else do you learn? In each situation, the Word about the kingdom was sown in soil (heart); however, in only one situation did the recipient understand it and bear multiplying fruit. This was, at least in part, due to the three primary forms of resistance that prevent or inhibit the maturing of the Word about the kingdom in people's hearts:

1. **The evil one:** snatches away the "good news"
2. **The world:** external difficulty or persecution; time of testing
3. **The flesh:** internal desire for wealth, power, etc.

Living under the rule and reign of God is countercultural and counterintuitive, even within the church. It pulls against every reflex, rhythm, habit, and thought pattern. Therefore, new ways of life must be formed (rhythms) in us through hours, days, and years of intentional reflection and training, sowing the seed of this Word about the kingdom into our hearts with a view to hear, listen, and obey – putting it into **practice**.

We must learn to embrace the rhythms of God's unforced grace and allow them to embed deeply in the good soil of our hearts in such a manner that they bear fruit and multiply into a bountiful harvest. As we do this, we must also fight the advances of the evil one, the world, and our flesh that seek to stunt the Word's growth. The future of your communal faith and the missional, incarnational presence of your Gospel Community depend upon it.

This book was crafted as a tool for re-imagining the church as a network of Gospel Communities living into incarnational mission within your city. It's an opportunity to journey together, embrace this Word about the kingdom and see it "bear fruit" in your neighborhood, workplace, and in the world. However, be mindful that God's kingdom doesn't break into this world predictably. Rather, it's transformational presence resembles the musical progressions of jazz: learning to embrace rhythms that aren't quite natural, but are intriguing. And as you become immersed in the music, you learn to appreciate the beauty, complexity, and subtlety of the chord progressions.

My hope is that walking through this in community will enable you to participate in God's kingdom as it spreads in the world like yeast spreads through dough, transforming everything in its path. This includes cultivating a willingness, both individually and communally, to *listen*, be *transformed*, and embrace God's revealed will. At times, this will mean confronting both external and internal barriers that may be hindering you from following Jesus as He sends you into the world together.

Re-Imagining the Church has *three specific purposes*:

Purpose 1: to be a tool for spiritual transformation that prepares you to embrace missional, incarnational life and practice.

Purpose 2: to be a tool for understanding, critiquing, and engaging culture as Christ's apprentices sent into the world.

Purpose 3: to be a tool that cultivates the multiplication of Gospel Communities living on mission together in the world.

I understand that those in your Gospel Community may be vastly different in their ability to fully engage these materials. The main goal is that you begin to honestly and authentically wrestle with the materials together. As you become aware of barriers in one another's life, lovingly come alongside each other so that you can encourage one another towards love and good deeds.

Remember that your journey together should be **PACED**:

- Provide accountability for one another
- Acquaint yourselves with the concepts together
- Consider their meaning for your lives
- Engage the four gospel rhythms together
- Discuss and process your struggles together

The good news can be polarizing when it's understood properly. To some it will be a pleasing, life-giving aroma that draws them into the kingdom. However, to others, it'll reek like the stench of a rotting corpse (2 Cor. 2:14-16).

Regardless of the response, the goal is to live in the tension of the already but not yet kingdom and create pathways for others to experience it together with you. At the end of nine months together, you'll have the opportunity to discern next steps as a community towards a fuller engagement of the principles you've begun to learn and practice.

GOSPEL RHYTHMS

RHYTHM 1: SCRIPTURAL ENGAGEMENT

During Rhythm 1, we engage a particular concept within scripture, prayerfully meditate upon that concept, memorize a key verse related to that concept, and reflect on the concept as a community. The goal is not merely understanding or comprehension, but to allow the scripture to seep into your soul and transform your heart and life individually and communally.

RHYTHM 2: CULTURAL ENGAGEMENT

During Rhythm 2, we engage a cultural ideology, learn how the scriptural concept from rhythm 1 is countercultural, share what we learned by observing culture (Part 1), and dialogue together about how to put the scriptural concept into practice within culture. Participation in a *Fight Club* (Chapter 3) will be crucial to our ongoing cultural engagement. *Fight Club* brochures and laminated summary cards can be purchased at www.reimaginingthechurch.com.

RHYTHM 3: COMMUNAL ENGAGEMENT

During Rhythm 3, we share a common meal together, partake in the body and blood of Christ as a community, discuss how we put the scriptural concept from rhythm 1 into practice counter-culturally (Cultural Engagement Part 2), discern needs within our community and city, and pray for one another as we seek to live into these gospel rhythms.

RHYTHM 4: REDEMPTIVE REST

According to Jesus, the Sabbath (day of rest) “was made *for* people, not people for the Sabbath. For this reason the Son of Man is lord even of the Sabbath.” (Mark 2:27-28). We are not to enslave ourselves to a rigid view of Sabbath rest, but should engage redemptively in how we rest as servants of Jesus. Jesus modeled redemptive rest through engaging in communal worship, teaching about the kingdom, eating food with others, doing good to others, healing the sick, setting people free from sin, delivering people from evil spirits, etc.

It was on the Jewish Sabbath that Jesus taught: “Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and **I will give you rest**. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls...” (Matthew 11:28-29). Jesus is the culmination of Sabbath rest (Heb. 4:9-11). And we should *make every effort* to enter that rest – see the paradox there? This means being intentional about reorienting our lives around the person of Jesus, the giver of *shalom* (wholeness, health, peace, rest) in how we relationally engage God, people, and creation. This rhythm is vital to the health of any redemptive community.

GOSPEL COMMUNITY FORMATION

It's helpful to give people time and space to prayerfully wrestle through concepts that challenge their way of thinking/life individually (**scattered**) before coming together (**gathered**) to mutually share and experience a transformational reality. So, before you begin this process, set aside time (early in the week) to prayerfully work through one rhythm in each chapter. Afterwards, pick a day, time, and place your community will initially begin gathering. The end goal is to increasingly live life as a family that participates with God on His mission together, developing a lifestyle of **gospel rhythms** that reshape your community. While the ideal community size is 6-12 people, it certainly isn't limited to this. However, most groups this size can easily meet in a home, allow for varying schedules, and facilitate monthly meals together. Gospel Communities can include both Christ followers and spiritually interested people who desire to increasingly walk in Jesus' ways as His apprentices, applying the gospel holistically.

1. Write the names of 6-12 people that you want to invite and plan a time to get them together to start the journey.
2. What day/time will your community initially meet each week?
3. Where will you initially gather? (i.e. home, café, park, pub, community center, etc.)

THE INITIAL GATHERING

- ❑ Your pace should be roughly **one rhythm** per week. You'll take every 4th week to rest and connect relationally.
- ❑ Each gathering should last approximately 1 hour and 30 minutes. Consider designating someone who would be responsible for keeping time (x minutes per question) so that the community is accountable to keep within this timeframe.
- ❑ You may designate a person to walk the Gospel Community through the “Community Dialogue” section weekly OR you may rotate who facilitates discussion weekly (the questions are provided so this should be fairly simple).
- ❑ Identify a host or location for your weekly gathering.
- ❑ Clarify what the host is to provide for the gathering: seating, plates, bowls, cups, cutlery, napkins, drinks.
- ❑ Utilize a tool to organize your monthly meals together (paper, website, text messaging, email, etc.)
- ❑ Walk through the Overview and Chapter 1 together:
 - The three forms of resistance on **pages 4**.
 - The three purposes and **PACED** on **page 6**.
 - The four gospel rhythms on **page 7**.
 - Each rhythm should be completed early in the week. The Communal Dialogue section is for when you gather; however, think through these questions **before you gather**.
 - Each person will be writing their own stories (**pages 19-22**) and will have **15-30 minutes** to share their story with the Gospel Community over the course of your nine months together.
 - There's a key scripture to memorize monthly.
 - There are concepts to meditate upon monthly.
 - You will become a student of culture.
 - You will put every principle/concept into practice.