

The Naked Bible Podcast 2.0

Number 98

“House Churches”

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With

**Residential Layman
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House Churches

In this episode Mike and Trey talk with Tim Andrews and Rich Baker about alternative ways to think about church – specifically, if church wasn't a time or a place, what would that be like? Tim Andrews currently lives in Atlanta, GA, and has been in leadership in alternative church communities for over twenty years. Rich Baker has a long history in ministry to the homeless and other marginalized communities in the US and abroad.

Many who listen to the podcast feel displaced from church and have expressed the desire to connect with likeminded people. This episode focuses on how the traditional modern church model can either be supplemented or replaced with Christian fellowship that builds a sense of family and is serious about biblical content.

TS: Welcome to the Naked Bible Podcast, Episode 98, House Churches. I'm the layman, Trey Stricklin, and he's the scholar, Dr. Michael Heiser. Hey Mike, how are you doing this week?

MSH: Very good, I've been looking forward to this episode for a while now.

TS: Why don't you tell us what's going on?

MSH: We've invited a couple of guests, Rich Baker, who is local here where I live, Bellingham, Washington, and I'll ask Rich in a moment to sort of introduce himself. But the main focus is going to be Tim Andrews in Atlanta who was the guy who organized the Unseen Realm event back last November in Atlanta. And Tim has had a long history in what a layperson would refer to as house churches, this idea. So we want to sort of pick his brain on this interview because for those of you who've listen for any amount of time or who have paid attention on the blog to the recent beginnings of Miqlat, the nonprofit that has been started really ostensibly to promote my content but also less visibly to network people who are like-minded, who appreciate the content, who feel that they're not being taught in church and they want more content, they want to find other people like them, and they want to get active in doing ministry, doing what the church is supposed to be doing.

And oftentimes sort of traditional outlook for that is an impediment or it just isn't something that the works real well, like in the case of Fern and Audrey. So we wanted to have Tim on just to pick his brain about how he does what he does and the people he works with, how they do what they do, and start to contribute something to the listeners thinking that if you are in this situation, either in terms of lacking a church home or wanting to network with like-minded people, just to hear good ideas, to hear maybe about bad ideas that were tried, I hope this episode we'll do today will be a thing that people can return to, kind of a touch point that if you're in a situation where you're trying to figure out how do I supplement what I'm getting in church or how do I network with other believers to have fellowship, find like-minded people, that this will be an episode people can look back on and re-listened to just stimulate that thinking, get some good ideas there.

So Rich, and we're going to start with him. I'm going to briefly introduce himself because Rich and I are actually going to try some things, at least that's the goal. We have a group of college students here in town and we're going to sort of use them as guinea pigs to try to experiment with how to do church things differently that really isn't a church but that is beneficial to them and actually try to weave some of my content into this. So we're going to on what is essentially I guess a nine-month experiment starting in the Fall. But as preparation for that, I thought it would be a good idea to just to talk to Tim. Help us to think well about this. So Rich, why don't you just briefly tell who you are, why you are in Bellingham, and that sort of thing.

RB: Name is Rick Baker, married to a beautiful wife Michelle, have an awesome son 3 ½ years old named Jedediah that pretty much God gave to save my life and I love them. My interest in this is when I started walking with the Lord about when I was 23, I'm 38 now, I read in the New Testament and I appreciate what he said about New Testament Fellowship as opposed to maybe house churches. What I began to read was that really Jesus never told his disciples to do anything he didn't model and that we have the right to be able to seek God all we wanted. And so

we just started trying that so we'd have prayer groups and prayer meetings every night at our house because we could when we were young and happy with what you live with. And we experienced such rich fellowship, and we've had homeless people and went to other people's Bible studies and learned so much that eventually you want to actually see that so much more in our lives now as you get away from it.

So I'm interested in that. What I'm doing in Bellingham, as far as I can tell, is one, I'm trying to recover from about five years of being severely ill and this is a beautiful place to do it. I was living in California where it did not rain and I need some rain so I came here. I did not know that necessarily Mike Heiser lived up here or went to the church but I actually see that God brought me up here so that I could spend time with Mike as we've been hanging out for over two years now and he's one of my closest friends and really appreciate not only the work that he does, the love that he has for the Lord, and being able to bring that love for the Lord and for people in the content that he produces into these groups of people that really desire to seek God more deeply in fellowship to bring that to them and to him as well.

MSH: Well great. Tim, I think a good place to start is who are you and how did you get to this point? Tell us who you are. We'll just start real briefly. Describe what it is you do that most people would look at and say that's house church stuff. So who are you? How did you get into this? How did this all start? What's the story?

TA: My name is Tim Andrews. I live in Atlanta, Georgia. I have a beautiful wife Donna. We have a son who is at Emory Law School right now finishing up. Started out, I guess like any other church attender, sitting in a pew growing more and more uncomfortable with the process that I saw. More than sitting in a pew, I served in the church doing high school and college ministry, sat in on writing the pastor's sermon and this was an exploding mega church. It just became more and more frustrated. I felt maybe I'll go seek out seminary, see if that works. Walked in seminary twice, walked back out after about 30 minutes, sat in on a class and a half. I got through one.

Not to go after seminary, just wasn't for me. Owned a business that marketed gigantic youth events around the country, saw the inside of what you'd refer to the local church. Saw the inside of the big production end of what you might call ministry. Came out of it unsettled. Friend of mine's father pastored a church in a particular area of Atlanta called Little Five Points. It's a very alternative area. Went up and started taking my college students up on Sunday afternoon, skipping dark evening service to clean up the grounds there and to work with the people that lived on the streets. And that lead to one thing which led to another. I ended up working for a local Baptist Association here serving there. Ran into a little bit of problems about two years in with certain stances that were being taken on. We'll call it social political positions. Felt like I couldn't do it anymore, went to my direct report, and told him that I couldn't do it anymore. He asked me where my heart was.

I told him I feel like there's a model that can be done that, actually, we're already doing it. We just didn't know what you called it. And he gave his blessing to go do it. Subsequent to that, I did a big project for what's called the frontier side of the North American Mission Board and ran into a person here in Atlanta, very similar story you're going to hear. Close to someone here in Atlanta who had been doing it, who had written some material on it. He kind of took me under his wing and that has been 20 years ago. Began to think through it a little bit more

aggressively. Left that Association. Some folks who we're fellowshiping with felt like we should pursue this. Formed a not-for-profit and really haven't looked back. That is where we are or where we came from as far as the beginning of it. We were doing it and didn't know what it was. I find that most Christians have done that. You're just going to have to rethink some terms that you use like church. What is that? Most people in their way of thinking, it's it somewhere you go. You have to redefine that for them. And moving through this it's an interesting dynamic because you're going to find that you're deconstructing and reconstructing at the same time in people's lives and that can be very messy.

MSH: You've been doing what we call alternative church, let's just use that. You've been doing alternative church for 20 years.

TA: Yes, we've thought through this a long time ago. We were actually working with some of the thinkers through the emergent church movement. That was a joke I told you Mike about now we wanted to be part of the submerging church. We didn't want to be seen when we were being interviewed about that. So we've been doing this a very very long time. It's one of those things where as I've gotten older and lost more hair, I've lost my patience with theorists on this. I tend to look for practitioners who are doing it. And most of us have come to the position of I can't tell you how to do this and be guaranteed what someone might call success, but, man, I can hook you up with ways to mess it up. So that's kind of where we are. **MSH:** You're very open. This impression I got when I met you in Atlanta.

And I had no idea who you were when I showed up in in Atlanta. I was there for the academic meetings and we were going to have the Unseen Realm thing, and wound up in a remodeled funeral home talking about the Divine Council. It was just so interesting because it had come on the heels of discussions I've had with Rich. Rich was the guy who first distilled this in my head, at least this is a thing to think about, with the statement, what if church wasn't a time or a place. And I heard that same sort of thing you're coming out of you and I was intrigued because of something you said, even here. We were doing this stuff but we didn't really know what to call it. And there's this inclination to call it something and the first thing you sort of gravitate to is you include the word church in there because you're doing churchy stuff. And so, boy, that becomes a comfortable label but you're right.

It is not adequate. It's not really even descriptive and I think you'd even say it's not even necessary in terms of giving it a label. For listeners and those who've read the Portent, this will be familiar and we're calling our nonprofit Miqlat for a reason. But the group in the Portent are just a group of committed believers. They're committed to just doing things that they know the Lord wants done. They're not asking permission. They're not taking it through committees. They're just doing it. If needs be done, just do it. And they're mutually committed. They're just absolutely loyal to each other in this cause. And so that has become sort of what plays in my head when I think of, this is what church ought to be. But I'm still like anybody else. I'm still stuck with this vocabulary. I'm willing to call it a disadvantage but I don't even know what to say about it anymore. I just love to meet people who whether they "go" to church or not, they're doing ministry. Some of the most dedicated people I know are not doing anything you could look at and equate it to a traditional church. That's why I found you so interesting and have been looking forward to the conversation just so that people can get to hear you. I also think you're

very realistic about it. This is not a silver bullet as you've said over and over in Atlanta. You're going to have every problem with this or any other model that you do with the traditional model.

RB: You still have to deal with people.

TA: Yeah, you still have to make a distinction. And we've learned to make a distinction early on. If someone contacts us, and I'll back up and say, I think right before that event was the first time I had some business cards printed in 20 years. I took our website down. If you find out about us, you know someone who knows us and we did that on purpose because of the people we work with and for. It is a complex set of issues, people coming out of a church. You walk in and there are rows or pews or chairs. There's a pulpit up front, a riser for the choir. If you walked into one of our houses on Sunday morning, it looks much more like Thanksgiving at grandma's house than what people are acclimated to in a 10:45 or 11 o'clock on a Sunday morning in most places across America.

So it takes some adjustment. You have to know that. If someone contacts us and they're just absolutely upset with their current sort of environment, finding things wrong with it, taking it apart, we encourage them to stay there until they get it worked out one way or the other. If someone contacts us, and after a while one can discern these things, and the Holy Spirit, if he's leading them somewhere else, we're all in. We'll jump in immediately. We'll go anywhere around the country or even locally, whatever the need might be, to help people begin at least to think through these things because it is a pretty high hill to get over sometimes.

MSH: Now that that has come up, what kind of people or party or group, is there a certain percentage that, there's 10% of the people who are here who were disgruntled with their other church. What are their reasons? How does it breakdown? Is there a profile or you can't profile this at all?

TA: Not really. If you were to walk in by the time everyone kind of shows up, you're going to be looking on a normal Sunday somewhere between, these numbers shock people sometimes this many people in a home, anywhere from 40 to maxed out would be 70 people who would show up in a home. And we've yet to find an environment that can't accommodate to some degree. We have four to five families who each take turns hosting for about a month at a time. And so the people who show up, we have three families that are three generations of that particular family that would be there. We have on folks whose parents were full-time staff at mega churches. So it's across the spectrum background wise, Baptists, completely unchurched. We have some people who have never been to an institutional type setting of a church which you would think of when you walk in to a local community or first fill in the blank church of whatever city. They've never been there. They don't even know what sometimes people are talking about. They have no point of reference because they've come to the Lord in this sort of environment. So to get a read on types and background, it's really tough.

MSH: So you couldn't say 90% of people who are here are here because they want content. They feel let down by their old church and they somehow through a set of circumstances found us. It's not that simple of an equation. They wind up as part of your network for all sorts of reasons.

TA: That's right and the bulk of them I would say, if I had the bigger category, the biggest slice of the pie, are people who, there's something within them, driving them toward ultimately a deeper fellowship primarily with our Lord, secondarily with the people they identify with. These are the people I fellowship with. We start to sort of push that the minute we make contact with them. We talk about issues like eating together, sharing together. What we do is very very meal focused. About I would guess a third of our gathered time is around a full meal and in the midst of that meal are the components of the Lord's supper. That's a central issue. So it's shocking to people who walk in and never seen this sort of thing before when they contact us and want to show up. We tell them don't worry about the first couple times. We'll cover you on food. Just come and be our guest. It takes about a month of adjustment or so for people to wrap their minds around what's going on here.

MSH: To me it sounds suspiciously biblical.

TA: Well, it comes out of probably a Greco-Roman influence of that symposia sort of meal thing where you had this cultural field already ripe and that New Testament model sweeps right in there. Sharing a meal together, it torpedoes certain cultural systems. You don't know how the food was prepared. You hope the spoon wasn't licked as the food was being prepared, stuff like that. There's a lot going on but it creates an environment for a lot of passive instruction to people.

MSH: I think the closest thing I've seen to that, and this is going to be a really simplistic illustration, but when I was in graduate school, I was attending a particular Reformed Church and one of the neatest things they did I thought, and this is still a very traditional setting. It's a very denominational sort of thing. We wound up going to this place because we wanted some sense of liturgy and what I mean by that is we wanted what happened on a Sunday morning to make some kind of sense as opposed to just being activity. And one of the things they did was, with the Lord's Supper, they had just a loaf of bread and everybody went up to it and tore a piece off. That it's a very simple act but you meet people at the table. Because you get a big congregation, you literally like meet people at the table and there is no single profile. It's rich-poor. It's professor and student. To me it had a leveling effect just this one simple act. And so when I hear you talk about the meal, that's the first thing that pops in my head, this kind of leveling effect.

TS: Tim, can you walk us through a typical worship, the structure of it?

TA: Even that word, too, makes me chuckle. I was with a fresh product of the seminary system two weeks ago and he kept using that word. I kept having him define it for me. I 'm going to use it differently. The average person who attends a church in America, the worship is compartmentalized in some degree to either you may see a sign outside that says 10:30 worship service. But especially in the less tightly orchestrated denominational sort of systems, the worship is when the band is up there playing. Worship for us and what we try to move people toward is you don't take a vacation from that from 12 o'clock on a Sunday until the next Sunday at 11 o'clock. It's all of it.

So if someone shows up on a Sunday, some of our gatherings it can get a little bit tight parking wise. That's the only issue that we really face and it kind of depends on how rural the home is. If you were to walk in, you would see people in little groups. You'll have a couple people maybe playing the piano and guitar, a couple of people praying together, kids playing around inside and outside, the food being put to where it's pretty visible and easily accessible to the people who'll show up. We pull everyone in and we'll have about 30 maybe to 40 minutes of pretty solid teaching. I feel like it is. We just work through the particular groups that were visible during the Second Temple period so that's something you wouldn't normally I don't think get at mostly Sunday school classes, so that when they read their New Testament, they have some familiarity with these groups they've seen mentioned and sort of set the ground for what's going to happen with Jesus showing up on the scene.

Then we will pray. The food is prayed over. People will begin to eat and it's a beautiful thing. To what you just said a minute ago Mike, I watched four or five weeks ago the granddaughter of a family go up, tear off the little pieces of bread and take a cup to her grandmother and grandfather. And I just don't know what you say to that sort of thing. When you see it, there's something within you that affirms, yes, that's what you're after right there, this beautiful portrait of this little girl, and she's probably five or six, considering the weight of what she's doing when we're together. And that's one of the things I mean it creates an opportunity for teaching. After we finish up eating, one or two of the musicians will start playing and people just want to pick a song or how many, anywhere from 4-5 on average. Again, these things vary wildly, sometimes it's one, sometimes it's none. And then you'll have two to three folks teach maybe 5 to 10 minute words of encouragement and that's about it. We leave. I say we leave to say we conclude that part and people hang around for an hour or two afterward.

MSH: I would imagine there's a lot of hangers on just to talk like you would do if you went over to somebody's house.

TA: That's exactly right. It ends up looking less like a Sunday morning at a church we would drive to a building. You're driving to a house and people will become acclimated to conducting themselves as if they were in a house. It doesn't mean you're more relaxed or dismissive. It's a serious time and we let people know that this is a serious time. And the reason for that Mike, I think you had asked about some of the content you're teaching, how does that play into this? And you get over to Ephesians 3 and Paul makes this staggering statement sort of about the purpose of the church, what it's all about, and it's in our sort of modern mindset that church sort of influence's a horizontal plane. And Paul's saying no. This is a different plane that the church is demonstrating what God has done through Christ. And we take that very seriously to the unseen and heavenly places. So we take that very seriously and we push that out there, this is why we gather together. We're making a statement and it isn't necessarily in a way that you think of it, if you think church exists only for evangelism, which is traditionally the answer you get when you ask someone why the church exists.

MSH: Do think because of what you do, because it's so different, that you actually end up having to be more intentional in what you're teaching and why you're teaching it to sort of, I don't know a better way to put this, but to sort of remind people of what you're actually doing, like why we're actually here at this point. I don't know if that makes sense. I'm just wondering if

you have to be intentional so that people don't forget why we're doing this because it looks like just a normal meal, like doing something you do at any anytime during the week, that sort of thing. Do you have to be more intentional about that do you think?

TA: Well, yes. You want to remind people, and that's not an idea foreign to the New Testament. You ought to know this know but I need to remind you again. Fill in the blank whatever the issue is. You do find yourself having to do that but I think this is part of human nature. I don't know if anymore intentional. We probably approach it from a little bit different viewpoint, especially now for the last five or six years, I guess, in taking people through some of the worldview that comes out of Divine Council thinking. But it's not difficult to find areas that touch. In fact, you start to see things more clearly I think when you think about the story that way and moving people out of that hour and a half, maybe two hours, on a Sunday to this is your life so that where and when becomes a who as you move them over to seeing their relationship not to some set of ideas but to this Jesus. It would still be, the bulk of the teaching would be Christo-centric. It would just go out maybe in a different direction than you would get on a Sunday in a Baptist Church. I'll pick on the Baptist since I'm here in the south. It's a lot of stuff going on in people's lives. It's easier for someone who's never been to a church to begin to talk to them about these things and fellowship with them.

MSH: Do you think this setting, because it's a home, something as simple as that, because it is a home and if you're used to going to this home and you get to know these people over the course of time, do you think that actually encourages people to kind of be more transparent, to share things that they wouldn't normally share in "church" because one of the frustrations I think, and I'm not saying this to pick on traditional church. I just think that it's an inherent obstacle. But if church is a time and a place and it's a set time and it doesn't occur, I can't think of any other way to say it, it doesn't have a family atmosphere even though pastors try to cultivate a family atmosphere. They're just inherent obstacles to that. But because it's in a home, you see the same smaller group of people with regularity that it just encourages you to be more open to build relationships. Do you think that's true?

TA: I know it to be true. And the reason I can say that it is you're not left with a whole lot of room because if you're hosting, people are going to be in your house and they're kind of up in your business. So it's pretty obvious what's going on. Self-control is one of those manifestations of the Spirit's work in our life that we can only fake for a little while. People are going to see through that. It's going to come out and so yes, you're forced into a level of intimacy. Then the responsibility shifts over to the group never to violate that. So it's one of those dynamics where you have a lot of this stuff going on at the same time and it does take a while to work people through these sort of dynamics as they enter into it, especially an idea like intimacy where I let my Sunday morning guard down because it is such a different environment when you don't have any suits. You don't have ties. In the South here, nine months out of the year, we were shorts to church or what you would call church. Sometimes people don't know what to do with that. It's not that it's being somehow less respectful. It may in some ways be more respectful in that I am not going to put on a pretense in here when I go inside these walls and hopefully, even when I'm outside these walls, but specifically inside, you're just not going to be able to get away with it for long.

RB: Who do you work with, number one, that you yourself, how many people do you work with, like the leadership of what you're doing?

TA: There's myself and 3 to 4. We meet on Wednesday mornings and have a time of discussion. If an issue comes up, or something that we need to sort of address, and when I say that, it's very rarely some corrective behavior thing. That does come out from time to time. Most of the time, it's some sort of service, who is in need, and it's the basic I know about it. If you know about and you don't tell me, so that's lived out there. They would be viewed as this group as the Elders. That is a very passive thing. You would never know unless you were there for a while with what's going on here, but you would see these people doing real service. Outside of that, we felt like how do we impact the community outside of is?

So here in Georgia, family and children services are called DFC, Department of Family and Children services. We went to them and said look, we have the resources to provide medical care, transportation, housing, all sorts of stuff and it took me about two months to convince them that we weren't crazy people because we want to do this and there's no strings attached. I've lost count of the young girls whose parents brought them here to Atlanta to have an abortion and the girl backed out. The parents abandoned her at a gas station that we were able to get her placed out of that environment. Surgeries we've paid for. You lose track of it after a while. I don't even try to remember them. So we're not just inwardly focused when it comes that. We are outwardly focused in an aggressive posture.

MSH: That really appeals to me. My metaphor for this is Miqlat in the novel because when I hear that, I think that's exactly what that group would do. I didn't have any real life analogy for it. But when I met you in Atlanta, and hearing different things that you've shared, that's what continually pops into my head. This is exactly what that group would do which is why there's a strong appeal to me that why don't churches do this?

TA: It's not churches, its people that don't do it.

MSH: That's true but if you think about the traditional church model, where does the money go?

TA: Infrastructure

MSH: Its infrastructure and we're not saying that the New Testament pastor shouldn't get paid anything. They should be poverty-stricken. That isn't the point. There's so much expense, people give a lot of money to have a fairly large church operate. It's a significant amount of money but it goes to overhead, to buildings, to electricity, to toiletry, or we had to hire a plumber, all this kind of stuff. If you were just basically just saving that stuff, you would have resources to do this kind of thing. To me, it just sort of rings true. I don't have a fancy academic label. It just sounds right.

TA: I think it's called the church. It's people who are being called out in order to do something. We're not called out to sit around. We're called out to be active, to be salt and light and you just

can't do that inwardly. That's going to die. So you push going outward. The kingdom's arrow going somewhere. That's not necessarily I don't think inwardly.

RB: When you're talking to people about the institution itself, the congregations, how hard are those conversations for you to have with those people to get them to, who are only understanding that that is what church is? How hard is it?

TA: It's brutal but you can get them to a place where I'll generally asked them, what's your favorite memory of your Christian experience as far as fellowship? And it's been one or two times this hasn't been the case, where that person will say to me well, one time during the summer I had his Bible study group, or one time during college I had this experience. Now take that one step further in going forward with thinking about that. If that was that appealing to you and that comforting then why don't you do that and don't worry about what someone might call it? We have to be willing to sort of take those sort of punches from at least what's the visible church to the culture that we live in. And I guess I've gotten to the point I'm willing to take that. That's fine but it is a difficult thing.

The more trained they are, the more difficult. I try to have lunch with pastors of traditional church models once or twice a week and talk to them. I don't try to convince them that they're wrong or anything like that. I just want to talk to them about where they see their particular fellowship going, the problems they face. Generally, they're the same. If it's someone who is only been an attender of church and gone there for however many years sometimes that can be easier. If they've never been, it is really easy. Why don't you come over and have dinner? I need to say this, too. That's the entry point. That's the methodology I use. If you contact me, we're going to go to dinner first and I'm going to kind of paint as bad a picture as I can of what it looks like because I don't want some unrealistic expectations because people think it's some sort of utopia. It's not. You get the, I call them the ecclesiastical preppers, the ones who feel they need to prepare for the end times, stock up food, and eat in our house. We're not that, either, trust me. I know those folks. God bless them. Again, this is a lot of stuff. You have to go slow. This is a marathon. This is not a sprint.

RB: the people's experiences, when you ask them, what one time do you remember? How much of that has to do with the presence of the Lord, like the Lord being a part of that? It's sometimes really missing from our Sunday congregations. I mean the presence of God that he promises us.

TA: I don't know that I would say he's missing. I believe that our brothers and sisters mind go to traditional church. I think that God works through that. I don't think that it's different in a house. I don't think that it's this particular model is somehow sanctioned or approved. I think it is a matter of that interdependence that's kind of woven once that guard comes down, that social guard. That's when I see him really go to work in people's lives in opening their eyes to things. I have one individual that fellowships with us. This gentleman's in his 60s. He's been in and out of church for 40 or 50 years and he is going through this illumination right now where he staggered at the view of the Bible that he was given and his experience up against what his experience has been over the last seven or eight years now.

So I think that God is present wherever. We're told that. I think it is a matter of cultivating that level of intimacy that sort of traditional structure blocks in a real way. I don't

know that it's possible. And that's why people like their Sunday school classes. That's why they like their small groups. What we're doing is taking that another three or four steps further and saying no. Why don't you view this as your church family? I'll be asked by academics sometimes, how long have people been doing house church? I just chuckle. They've been doing it for a couple thousand years now. It's nothing new or are that radical. It's just a matter of looking back at something. And we have tons of witnesses internally and externally to it.

MSH: I think maybe people can understand this. There's often a concern in a traditional church setting of we're getting too big. And people are bothered by that because when you hear that, what they're really saying is I liked it when we were smaller because we felt more like a family because you knew everybody, just something like that. To me, that's what's really going on here. It's not the fact that I do think there is something to be said for the fact that what you do occurs in a house and that just creates sort of a different setting that can lend itself to certain barriers being dispensed with or maybe dropped more readily or more quickly. But there is also this thing about the size. If you do go to a place where you do know everybody, it does feel more like a family. And if you do things deliberately to cultivate a sense of family, to treat people as though they are blood, as though they are family, and it's this smaller group, I don't see how that can be disadvantageous to the traditional church model because it's just so hard to replicate beyond a certain number.

TA: It is but it is threatening to the model. I want to backup and make this point. We have done this in homes, in offices. We had a coffee shop in that area of Atlanta. It would be very similar but on a smaller scale, funeral parlors, college dorms. We were contacted by some students at University over in Alabama. We go over twice a month and meet them in the cafeteria. And here you have 6 to 10 students in their cafeteria at lunchtime who would pray, sing. We have Bible study and time of encouragement fellowship. We've done it in multiple settings. I'm very hesitant to tell someone this has to be in a house. The coffee shop we had, on Sunday mornings, people would come from all over the city of Atlanta and we would bring food and had brunch together. And the beautiful part of it, even beyond what you might notice, is we had a really in-depth ministry to the people who lived on the street in that area.

And these folks would get out of the bushes and go down to the little corner market and come in with those little aluminum trays of those iced over cinnamon buns. They would go buy them and bring them in and put them on the table to share with the people who did not just get up out of the bushes on Sunday morning. I just don't know what you say to that stuff other than touché. That's probably what looks like right there, cutting social economic divisions off, cutting cultural division off, cutting racial off, cutting economic off. It is the great equalizer, that table is. There's a scholar at Notre Dame and he makes this comment, what the cross is to Jesus, the meal is to the early church. It became its primary symbol and I think there's something to think about within that statement. We don't think about that in that way but I think there's some truth there.

MSH: It's a familiar thing that people can contribute to and, by definition, they become a part of as opposed to just walking in a new building and taking a seat.

TA: That's that idea of common salicy in its ecological use. It's an organism that lives on, with, or in another without doing harm. We take that one step further and say not only are you not doing harm, you're contributing to the other's benefit.

TS: And I think there's a whole other angle here for other countries like China, these home churches and secret churches that are oppressed. It set's this whole other side of the purpose of a home church or house church. Can you speak to that Tim?

TA: We have a friend in China and that is what he does. I'm not going to say his name or what his fake job is over there but he does it. It is so interesting to me when he writes back e-mails how it's in such coded language that you really have to learn to read what he's saying, that Jesus is referred to as the boss, not Bruce Springsteen boss but boss as in he is. You have to use words like that. He's been escorted out a couple of times. It is obviously the fastest growing just the sheer numbers form of church worldwide, pretty obvious. It would have to be because of the pressure that certain countries governments are applying to the visible church that may or may not be coming here. I suspect it probably is to some degree, at least in the way you think of it. The Christian community will come under more persecution. I think that's sort of the guarantee, isn't it?

MSH: We're at least going to be monitored. That's one of the reasons why I want at least my audience to start thinking about this. Is there a replicatable model for doing what we need to be doing in terms of community? And this collection of resources, whether it be skills or time or money, to be doing ministry that doesn't involve a time or a place or a building or any of these trappings we take for granted. You can say more about your friend in China but that's just a good example that this is replicatable. This isn't something you guys invented. This is the way it's been done for millennia.

TA: Two of you already said it but you just didn't know what it was or what you would call it. It's easily, I don't really like the word reproducibile but I'll use it. It's easily modeled, let's put it that way. You can do it anywhere. It takes a fairly high level of commitment. It may take a little bit of back-loading, in that deconstructing is the most difficult part. That's why the guys that tear a hole in the roof, we call them the unnamed deconstructionist because there was no hope in Mark for them to get any glory for putting their friend down in front of Jesus. So they're our heroes in the Bible. They're deconstructing this guy's roof to get their friend in front of Jesus and that is what we set out to do, to help people get some of this stuff out of the way in order to build back up, too. This just isn't that difficult. It only takes a little bit of courage to step out here. If you just take a few minutes, I encourage people, I pushed him over to Lightfoot's translation of the dedicate. Go read it. There's a great glimpse into what's going on here. There are tons of resources out there. We don't need someone to necessarily write another book about it. I have plenty of friends who do and have.

RB: Getting the people to participate in these rights and helping them understand that's who they are as a people with God, getting them to pray, getting them to be familiar with those things when they hang out with their friends rather than what we do and call it fellowship, like when we go golfing. I like golfing but I know that's not true New Testament fellowship. When we

gather together as a people we actually pray and are actually comfortable doing those things that we ought to be doing anyway.

TA: It is and I think that's one of those things where we're really big on the Ascension and the reason is this, that I don't think that's an occasion within church history that's not marketable. You're not going to sell T-shirts at Wal-Mart about the fact that you have a king. And so you're not going to do candy. You're not going to do any of those things, especially in America. A couple of European countries still close on Ascension Day but we push that, that we have a king who is seated in the heavens. Our identity is there with him. His identity here, you're looking at it. It's us, we are the mobile temples. So we even present the story in the Bible sometimes as this progressive story of temples. Genesis and Revelation are these bookends where you have these temples. And you have these two mobile ones right next them with a tabernacle in Genesis and us preceding the one we see in Revelation. There's a lot of ability to teach, a lot of opportunity to get people thinking along these lines rather than the temple being over there somewhere in the sense that people think about it.

MSH: I imagine you've talked about making the of the Lord's Supper part of the meal which obviously is fairly evident in Corinthians. What about things like baptism? What about church discipline? What about conflict resolution? Is that you and you had three or four people you meet with on the Wednesday morning, is that the time when you decide when you discuss either baptizing somebody or how you go about doing it? Is that how you more or less move those things along?

TA: It sort of depends on the situation. We've baptized in bathtubs, hot tubs, swimming pools, you name it. We've done it. I actually broke into a church, that sounds bad, but a guy was going to go to prison and he wanted to get baptized before he went in. I had keys. I worked there so we weren't supposed to be in there. Went in and borrowed the pastor's waders and baptized the guy behind the big singing Christmas tree thing they have at Christmas. We do it upon request of the believer. We'll talk to them, see where they are, what they are saying, make it clear to them that this is not, here in the South, baptism gets you on a church role, local affiliation, we explain to them that's not what's going on here. This is cosmic in nature so we baptize in that way. Generally, you not going to get away from this.

This is another dynamic. A lot of people that are involved in this, at least visible people that are involved in this are very anti-sort of pastor authority and hierarchy. I warn people right away listen, those words are in your New Testaments and they're in there for a reason. I have watched fellowships try to do it without that structure and I can tell you what's going to happen. So the visible leaders rarely do the baptizing. It's a brother or whoever that this person approached about it. We will push them that way that you should have the privilege of doing this. You certainly have the right to do it. Church discipline, we follow the New Testament model for it. It's sort of how those things work out. We have had some people who choose an alternative lifestyle that were in fellowship with us and it got to the point where we cannot say okay to this lifestyle. You're making a decision to do something that we cannot say okay to.

Those things come up given the numbers of people we have dealt with. So those things are handled. Sometimes you'll have confession of sin and it makes people very uncomfortable because you are sitting around a den or a living room and most people aren't acclimated to that.

And the body's able to restore that person. The point that is restoration. It isn't punishment, which I think sometimes the church get caught up in. You exercise the body in that way and after a while, it just becomes second nature. Quite honestly, I don't even think about it anymore hardly. It just happens because we are acclimated to that and understand others coming along are not going to be yet so you want to hold their hand through it, which we do a good bit of that as well.

MSH: What does your group, or individuals within your group is probably better way to frame this, what are some of the things that they are engaged in in terms of ministry? You mentioned working with the homeless. Rich has a lot of experience doing that. I know when I talked to you before the actual meeting, there were two guys who had gotten involved with what happens with refugees. Is there a process there in Atlanta? Give the listener some ideas of how your people, you and your people who are with you in this, how you approach "ministry".

TA: Internally, we have, I'm not going to say their names here. I'm not going to violate their privacy here. We have a couple of guys that are hyper computer literate software engineers, that sort of thing. They make it very to folks that if you have computer issues, bring them to me. I'll fix them. We have a guy who is really really good at financial planning. He helps people with their budgets, teaching them basically how to run their household because I think that people think this is a skill they're born with. It's a method you need to learn. There's no shame in that. We have people that are in the construction business to help people with their homes, that sort of thing. Externally, the people that we fellowship with will bring to the attention of the group this family over here or over there is suffering. They're facing surgeries or they need dental care. They need a car, whatever the case may be. We pray about it and then the most famous story of the entire experience is we had a friend who was a missionary to a really rough area of Phoenix and they needed a car. And so we prayed over it.

We wrote a check and sent the check to him and the car that he had picked out that he was going to get, that check was within something like 20 something cents I think, if I remember correctly, of the value of the price of the car that he needed to buy. So you see things like that happen. It's easy to dismiss them. I don't dismiss them anymore. This is the superintending work of the Holy Spirit over this body and he's teaching them through this action within the body and then outwardly. We still do a lot of work with people that are sexual deviants with you name it. Sometimes it's not very pretty. That's one of the reasons I shy away from very much publicity. I think the first 5 or 6 times I emailed you Mike, because I didn't know what your deal was either, I used fake e-mail addresses and all kinds of stuff. And I think the first couple of times, it was a little more public. I asked you not to publish it because I just didn't want to get into ecclesiastical arguments with people about how the church should be. I got other things I need to worry about. We try to remain in a forward leaning posture toward culture and not pull back from it. We'll engage in it at every turn.

MSH: Some of this, just to go back to the analogy, the construction people, the computer people, do you need a car, do you need this, do you need that, that's exactly what you would do if it was your brother or sister.

TA: That's right. That's absolutely right.

MSH: You're just extending this family thinking to people who aren't blood but when you do that thing with enough frequency, it creates the, I don't want to use the word impression because it's not a false thing, but it creates the atmosphere, the trappings of family. It becomes this thing you want it to be that is modeled after this blood relationship kind of thing. To me I think that has great consequence in the way people think about the people in their group.

TA: I think it does. It's walking people through kinship. What can these things mean? How do we relate to one another? So we spend time on that as well. How does this work out? And the word I would use for what it creates is just normalcy. This is how you live. This is how these things work out. So it doesn't become some special event that you make sure everybody knows this is wonderful thing you did. We don't tell anybody what we did. We report back to a couple people within sort of within the leadership of this expenditure happened over here. This is what went down. It's shocking. You walk into, I think I told you when you were here Mike, I walked into a surgeon's office to pay for a procedure someone had to do and because of HIPPA regulations and all these things going on, it was unbelievable. They don't even know what you're talking about when you say I want to write a check for this person. They just look at you like you're an alien or something. That's cool. No problem. It just creates normalcy for the people that you fellowship with. And then for families that may come from a less, we'll call it a functional setting, it creates an environment for them as well. I see. This is how these people live. They live like this.

RB: A lot of people don't know how normal it is to be a part of a family or what's that like to have a father or anything like that and it's important to have those environments for people to be able to learn in.

TS: Mike, can you and Tim talk about your experiments that you're going to be doing for college students specifically?

MSH: Rich, why don't you.

RB: We have an opportunity to possibly on a Wednesday night to have it in a coffee shop in downtown Bellingham. We'll get together about 8 O'clock at night. And it seems that anywhere between 20 and 40 college-age youth will be there. Usually at that age, I remember when I was at that age how hungry and desiring I was to know the Lord and seek the Lord and to need content and to meet people and have conversations so I thought it would be interesting to be able to put Mike in that setting for these youth to be able to not only ask questions but to get to know him a little bit and to be able to fellowship and learn, because I think they're going to respond really well to Mike. I don't know that for sure but that's what I believe in my heart that these youth will want to fellowship and attract. And the other part we're going to do is just have Mike, at my house I have a very nice setting outside where I can have a bonfire and have people over for prayer, because for me, I want people to be with God and in the presence of God through prayer and fasting and things like that if people are willing.

But inviting them from that kind of evening into fellowshiping with us outside of that. So they can come on Wednesday night, hear Mike have Q&A, and then be able to join us on a

Tuesday night at a Bible study that we have or a Friday night or a Sunday to be able to come over to a house and do that. Give them an opportunity to spend more time with people who have understanding, who sought the Lord like Mike who's a scholar himself, be able to spend time with him, not just listening to a podcast or reading a book but actually be able to spend a couple of hours hearing Mike talk, which I believe will really impact a lot of people in the things that we do. I think it will have a huge effect on the people that are going to attend these. So we'll do things like that. We'll do different kind of like where we'll have people on a Sunday at Mike's house.

We'll rent dome tables and invite 60 people over and we'll have that kind of fellowship like you were talking, and help people come to an understanding of what we do. Explain it to them, but really have a number of people that you work with to have enough mature believers there for when other people were coming in at that point, like why would I come here on a Sunday and not there, to be able to lead them and explain that to them but as well be mature in their own right, to do it on their own and not me necessarily or anyone having to push them towards that end. Really, it's just to worship the Lord personally, and I mean worship. Go and hang out and do the things we do to honor Jesus Christ because he is our king. Like Mike said, they may not be our blood but they certainly are covered with the blood. For that, we should fellowship with them and love them. We want to get people out and hear Mike and also have the opportunity to be with other believers who do things that are just natural.

Like for me, it's just natural to want to pray with people and spend time in the Lord and discuss these beautiful ideas and discuss different and difficult ideas, like technology or things like that that they don't have the opportunity on a Sunday. And I think one of the things we'd also like to do is not necessarily do a dictatorial where someone just speaks for 40 minutes and no one can ask a question but do a lot of Q&A Mike because he's a big boy and can handle questions, unlike a lot of times on a Sunday where you never get the opportunity to be able to get to ask the pastor you might disagree or have a question about what he said. Most people won't actually walk up to ask the person that question because they'd be very intimidated. So if I can just get for a few months people used to Mike then maybe they'll ask them more things that they want to ask that they've never been able to ask about the Bible or God.

TA: Don't rent tables. Use what you have. You're going to send a message. I'm piling on Mike and his dear wife here but use what you have. You're sending a message that way. If there is a problem with this model, it is the lack of teachers. There's no question about it. We get contacts constantly from fellowships that are just dying because they don't have a teacher at all, much less two or three. That is the rarefied position unfortunately. So it may take some time.

MSH: In your group, do you have three or four people you feel comfortable with teaching and do they ever travel to some of these other groups to kind of help them out, this kind of itinerant feel you get from the New Testament. Do you ever do any of that?

TA: I have done that. I'm trying to think. I have other people we work with. The gentleman that hosted your event does it all time around the world. I've just never felt the Lord tell me to go do that for whatever reason. But we have capable teachers. I don't think twice about not being there for a meeting or two or three. That group is any really capable hands and I'll say it. It takes a while to build that because you're building the confidence in that individual and you're building

the trust of that group into those individuals. And that takes a while. That's one of those transitional things.

MSH: Going back to what Rich was saying about some of the things we want to experiment with here. I go to church. I'm an elder at the church in town and I view this kind of in the same way you do. If people are happy and feel they're being fed in whatever church context they're in, assuming it's a church not teaching nonsense or some sort of anti-gospel kind of message, messing that up. If they're comfortable with that then I think it became clear to me what Rich was saying, some of this other stuff can be a supplement. You get to ask questions. You get to spend time. I'll use your term. You get to do normal things with Christians and you start to develop closer relationships because the group is smaller and that sort of thing. In our context, Rich and I are viewing this as something we want to experiment with because we know down the road there may be some situation arise. We have one person in our midst that really has a desire to plant a church.

That really isn't either of us and that person has a strong house church background as well. We want to bring him into the equation and kind of collectively see how this would work, what works, what doesn't, what's a good idea, what's a bad idea. And in my situation, I can be living somewhere else a year or two or five years from now, and my situation might be completely different where this is something that from the get-go we want to try to create. If that ever happens, we're bringing you in. Rich and I've talked about that. What if we moved to a different state and we sort of get to start over and we can create something now that is filling these gaps, is doing what the New Testament wants us to do, but now we have a chance where we don't have any of these trappings? Do we really want to plunge into this? So we're looking at this experimental thing as something that can help us think about that question, the bigger question. Is this something we would really see workable in some different context at some other place, some other time. So we're hoping to learn a lot in it. I view my role in it as basically you tell me where to show up and what I'm supposed to do and I'll be there and do it. I view myself as a resource, not as a planner or a planter.

I've always enjoyed being a good Indian rather than a chief. Even though you get thrust into one of those chief roles, and that's okay, but I've never been one that constantly or consciously seeks those things. I don't think it's going to shock people to hear that. I'm just not interested in kingdom building. It just bores me. I don't know any other way to put it. I'd rather be a useful person in doing this thing I think is worthwhile. To me that just feels a lot more significant than having to be a kingdom builder. I guess it's why I just have such a visceral dislike for like celebrity Christianity. I tend to behave badly in those situations. It's just very contrary to my personality. I'm not saying that's a point of sanctification. It probably isn't but I just don't think about things that way. I want to be a resource. And in this area, I meet people all the time who just feel stuck, either I don't have a church or my current church setting. I don't have these things that you guys have been talking about, either in terms of content or relationships.

They just feel stuck. So I'm hoping that one of the things the nonprofit can do is free not only me but free other people who could become participants with me in doing this kind of thing, just doing something to be a resource point, even if it's as simple as I know this guy in Atlanta. You should talk to him. Well, I'd like to have 50 Tims scattered all over the United States. I know, we know, Miqlat knows where these people are and that they can be trusted and

I'm getting this e-mail now from this person. Oh I wish I could connect with believers who were serious about ministry or I have this need and there's his void or this physical need or whatever it is. Look, we've got a list of 50 people around the country. We know who they are. We know they can be trusted, and we will put you in touch with them. That's what I think about when I talk about Miqlat being a resource for networking. It's not like an official become part of this organization kind of thing. It's an awareness thing. We know who these people are. We can connect you with someone who can give you direction or give you some specific help. I'd like to have 50 or 100 Tims.

I know they're there so that when I get the e-mails, or when somebody who's been a part of our little organization, when they run into this online or in Facebook or whatever, it's like okay, we know who to direct you to and you need to have a conversation with this person. And they will be able to get you some help. They will do what they can to fill this void. So that's what I'm really looking to gain long-term out of what we're creating. On the surface, it's Mike and his content, but I just don't think of it in those terms. That's visibly why people might get interested but as those people surface who really want something genuine, either in terms of content or how do I live out, how do I experience my Christianity and sort of get away from this what they perceived to be right or wrong in authentic context. How do I graduate to something better and more meaningful? We can actually help. So that's what we're shooting for. That's probably still kind of a nebulous thing. I'm struggling to try to even articulate it. That's what goes through my head when I think about what you do. You're resource person and how do we take your model and help people discover it so they can do it? And if they have trouble, they can talk to you or talk to somebody else and just help them to work the model, to do this, because would certainly find it rewarding correct? You wouldn't have it any other way so why should we not want other Christians to not feel the same way about what they're doing on a given Sunday, or you're not just Sunday but in their Christian experience? I would want every Christian to feel that way.

TA: You would hope so. I would encourage if you're going to do this with college students, it seems to be the richest soil to do this with. When we had our coffee shop, we had the visible Christian celebrities come and essentially assign their college-age students to us to try walk them through late adolescence and early adulthood. That's a tough world, too, and that's one of the reasons I kind of try to stay as invisible as possible. And as far as multiple people out doing, I enjoy a wonderful life and I've had just privilege where I spent two years every morning going to four different McDonald's for breakfast time and building conversations with people, relationships with people. And one of the great things, it shocked me with the number of people that show up in McDonald's reading a Bible. Then I would spend the lunchtime at a mall very close to where I live. I did that to observe how people eat together and the dynamics of seating because meals tell us a lot about the people that are enjoying them or maybe not enjoying them, to have people in places like that, to strike up conversations, to do real ministry that can only be done once you've established a relationship and get out of this sort of glancing blow sort of come to the rescue kind of thing. It is a wonderful approach to serving this world in the name of the kingdom.

TS: Tim, do you have a handful of tips of someone out there maybe listening that might be interested in starting something like this? Can you just give them some advice on what to do next?

TA: Pray for like-minded people. They are there. They're around. It's just a matter of, I'm reading Pete Ends book right now about the sin of certainty. He's talking about how he got to this point where he realized he had to be brave enough to say there things. And I think what you're saying Mike about the people you interact with who are in church feel this, I don't know if frustration is the right word. I hope it's not. I hope it's the Holy Spirit working in their lives through sanctification, moving them away from one environment to another. So I would encourage people to pray through this. Go back and historically look at the materials that we have. I push people to the dedicae. What's the University of Nottingham over in Great Britain has a Wyse study series. I think the videos are 10 minutes and one of their Old Testament scholars, a man named Tom Lockwood wrote a book on the dedicate and about a 10 minute video. And he gives incredible insight into the early church and how meal-centric this thing was. So most of the people that produce material that's available out are people I know.

So I'm very careful to speak either way to them. There is a resource online, a friend of mine. The organization is NTRF, the New Testament Reformation Foundation, and there's a book there that you can get that I think's valuable in thinking through these things, some of the problems you will probably face, some of the solutions to the problems. I would also say Mike, in the content of your teaching, that's another thing that's going to get folded into this with some of the objections to how church should function, what we should do, and I'm kind of settled now on we're very careful to do these things primarily because of the angels, which may sound odd to people but that's why you do it. That's why we act like this. That's why we conduct ourselves like this. So it's not just the model or the form or the template. It's going to be the content that's going to be a different thing, too.

RB: Can you discuss that just a little bit because when we're reading through your e-mail, it seemed like the content with a big part of it. I guess you did mention you don't have a lot of necessarily teachers that can go around. Can you just discuss a little bit about the content?

TA: As far as Mike's influence, I was challenged by, the gentleman who's my mentor, why does the church exist? I told Mike this story. I get up at four clock on Saturdays in the morning, not in the afternoon, and I only remember what I typed into my trusty old Dell Inspiron. And that passage out of Ephesians, up popped a resource to some guy named Mike Heiser. And I think I told Mike an Old Testament scholar Margaret Barker, and I began to read what Mike had published at that time. It was one of the super early manuscripts of the Myth that is True back then. You took it down just a week or two later once I started telling people you need to read this stuff. I'll never forget this. We did a gigantic midweek Bible study at that time and I went in and I started to present it and I was terrified.

My first question was how many gods do you have? And from that point on, our fellowship took a dramatically different sort of trajectory in viewing Scripture, viewing your relation to Scripture. And maybe in a real way de-idolizing, I use that word carefully, the Bible in looking at we've been told these things that may or may not be, I'm not going to say not true, but they may not be accurate might be a better word to use. And in thinking through that, that content is now impacted and affected every part of everything that we do where if somebody in our fellowship starts talking about wisdom, they're going to stress that this is a W wisdom, or someone's talking about the word. This is a W. Don't think for a second that your Bible showed

up and took Abram outside. That is a dramatic shift for people. It's more than you think it is. And Mike and I were staring at some gigantic whale or something at the Georgia aquarium and I told Mike I ask every pastor and every Bible teacher I meet if they recognize Jesus as the Old Testament figure of Yahweh, if they put those two together. And every trained person tells me everyone knows that.

Then I ask to have access to either their class or their Bible study or whatever. I've only ever had one person raise their hand and say I think that way. I think that's a problem. I think that's a foundational problem. If we don't recognize who he is, he doesn't say what do you say that I am. He says who do you say that I am. If indeed every knee is going to bow and every tongue is going to confess that. what is the content, I'll use that word, their confession? Is it Jesus is boss or master, or is he Yahweh? And if you said that to a first century Jew or any century Jew, you'd have a problem on your hands. It's an explosive statement that somehow there's this assumption that all Christians think that way. Then I asked them do you associate Jesus with Genesis 1:1. I've had two people say yes to that. That's scary and I'm talking about across the spectrum of Christendom, charismatic background, Methodist, Greek Orthodox, Baptist, you name it. It is shocking. Then you try to introduce them to this thinking, and I was borrowing Mike's thoughts from the old Myth book and working people through this and I will say this. This had such a profound effect on my life of moving away from seeing my relationship to a thing or a set of ideas to a person. It has been revolutionary.

RB: That work has that effect.

TA: It is that particular content and that way of thinking that I have watched it have a profound effect on the people that love and care about. I don't know what other higher compliment you can pay to something other than this has moved people. It has freed them from a real bondage. It's absolutely shocking that something that we assume, or take for granted might be the better way to look at it.

RB: I was telling Mike that I just went to California to visit my mom and my brother. And on the way back, on the plane I sat next to a gentleman and we began discussing, I have the name Jesus tattooed on my wrists so I get a lot of people asking questions about it. Are you a follower? I said yeah so I began to dialogue with him for a little bit. He said you know what, I've been really thinking about the past year, and especially about the Council of God. What is the Council of God? I've been studying the Bible for 37 years like four hours a day. I'm really into this. And I just laughed and handed him the book. Call me when you're done.

TA: Beyond that, I think his approach to Romans 5 that has been the thing that has been the most, I don't even have an adjective to describe it, what it has done to people to begin to see this death sin thing. Where I think in traditional Christendom, we in some way value this sin first mentality where the New Testament declares the death first reality. That is such a different approach to life. That dominates most conversations I have with the people I fellowship with, that idea. I don't even have words to describe it. We are infected with death and that is what he frees us from.

MSH: For my part, as I've said many times, I just had this sense that it just didn't feel right that the way, I use the term academic since that was my context. I was not a pastor and never have been. But why should believing academics, not just critics, why should the scholars within our believing ranks why should they be talking about Scripture in such a different way than the average person in church? And why is this disconnect tolerated? So that became kind of the driving ambition to take all this stuff in the academic world that had real payoff for understanding Scripture and just thinking more like the writer, and being able to translate that for the average person because I think that they are quite capable of digesting the material. I think most people are and that they're probably going to enjoy that.

It's probably going to reignite a sense of discovery because we all know what sort of happens in the average church. It is just a real dearth of content so not only do you have the disconnect to begin with but there's seems to be just very little attempt to sort of cross the divide or fill the void or whatever metaphor you want to use there for it. It just bothered me. It really bothered me that people should be missing out on content and not being able to think what I think are kind of exciting thoughts about Scripture, about a given passage and just sort of seeing it for what it is and how it fits into the bigger picture. I love that stuff so it just didn't feel right that it was restricted to this little ivory tower community and not filtering down to church.

TA: Doesn't that sound like the atmosphere and the environment that you had at the Reformation? And if you argue that press or technology is what accelerated that work, we're in a very similar dynamic today where technology can move ideas forward now at a much higher, more rapid rate than was possible in those days. I really do believe that's sort of the dynamic we're finding ourselves in. We're not just one monolithic voice any more, at least not in the Protestant world.

RB: I would say this, too, Mike that one of the guys at our fellowship, he put it this way. He said what I've experienced my entire life was teachings on stuff about the Bible and what Mike is doing is he's talking about what the Bible's about. And that's a different thing.

MSH: That's actually pretty profound. It's a pithy but very pointed way of putting it. Well Tim, many thanks for spending this time with us. I think the goal here has been to stimulate thinking among the listeners about if you're in the situation, you feel stuck in your church context. And even if you enjoy your church context, to be able to think more widely than that and get some insight on building a family atmosphere, even if you like your church, you're going to have a small group. You're going to have other smaller units of contact that can play a role in your life that maybe the bigger Church can't. But if you're really, right or wrong, whether you're processing your situation correctly or not, you feel you're stuck, we're going to try to do something intentionally here and hopefully Tim won't be our only touch point even though he's a good touchpoint. We don't want to wear him out. We don't want to pepper you with anyone else.

TA: Send them all, that's fine.

MSH: Just to start people thinking about how to do these things and how to live out what the church is supposed to be doing, between ourselves, we have this little thing like we're not going

to start a church because you are the church. We don't even want to talk about starting churches because that's supposed to be us. Because when you use that language, you're using time and place kind of thinking. But you just have to be mentally retrained to start thinking of yourself and your fellow believers in your church family circle, your fellowship family circle in a different way. So hopefully this will be part of that for other people.

TS: Rich, any parting words from you? 1:24:05

RB: Nope. I would just like to hear Tim's actual traditional testimony but we don't get time for that

TA: God called me and I sat up and laughed in the bad like Sarah did. And I promptly ran for 18 years.

MSH: Well Tim and Rich, thanks for being part of this episode. I think it'll be something that when people listen to it, they'll get a lot out of it and use it as a continuing ongoing resource. You're going to be stimulated to think about these things are important so just thanks for your time.