

The Church of 2020
By Mal Fletcher

Excerpt from Chapter 1
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Contemporary Is Not Enough!

We talk a lot these days about the importance of 'contemporary church' – and so we should. Too often in the past churches have tried to speak to their Babylon without ever learning the Babylonian tongue. The prophet Daniel heard from heaven, but he spoke Babylonian.

Contemporary church should not be seen as an end in itself, though. It is a means to an end. The goal is not being contemporary, but becoming prophetic.

We should work to be in touch with the times so that we can be prophetic, ahead of the times. As Christians, we are not all called or gifted to be prophets. But collectively, we can speak with a prophetic voice and model prophetic truth to our communities.

To be prophetic is to challenge contemporary values, culture, thinking and behaviour and point the way to something better – the kingdom of God.

God's prophetic people share the present experience of their generation so that they can shape the future destiny of their generation. God reveals his prophetic plans to his people so that they can call their generation into alignment with those plans.

The prophet Daniel was heard because of the unique revelation he brought. His wisdom reached into a part of the universe Babylonian technology and philosophy could not reach. He brought to men a 'big picture' view of where they were headed – and why.

This was a key to Daniel's lasting influence. But Daniel recognised something more.

Influence Is Not What We Think

Daniel also knew that true influence is not measured by the number of people who agree with our point of view. Applying this to our time, we can't measure influence by the size of our churches alone. Some quite large churches have very little influence in their cities, simply because they gauge their impact by size alone. Size is usually a *product* of influence, but it is not the ultimate measure of it.

Influence means the ability to produce change. How can we change people who are already living in line with our teaching? Where there is no change, there is no influence.

Real influence is measured by how much people *outside* our churches defer to our teaching when *they* have a decision to make.

When a pagan king asks Daniel, the man of God, to unravel the graffiti on a palace wall, that is influence. When Pharaoh asks for Joseph's advice on an emerging national crisis, that's influence.

It's All About The Future

Of all the lessons Daniel had learned during his season of obscurity, this is perhaps the most significant. True influence is not a product of how well we celebrate the past, or enjoy present. True influence is a result of how well we engage with the future.

Influence is born when we use an informed understanding of the past and the present to help us shape the future. If we don't invent the future, someone else's vision of the future will reinvent us.

In our time, God is once again positioning members of his church in places of great potential influence. Many of them are God's 'sleeper agents'; they're not all that visible yet but, like Daniel, they're ready to shine God's light when the darkness grows deepest.

I have a friend, a well respected pastor, who is running for the presidency of his South American nation. He has often been asked

by leading politicians to stand for government, because of the corruption that is rife in the land. After much prayer and consultation, he is now standing for the top job.

Another friend is helping to bring the gospel to sections of the extended European royal family. Behind the scenes, his testimony and his integrity have had a powerful impact on the noble classes. Yet another pastor friend has the ear of the British Prime Minister and is helping to shape various social policies.

A friend in the U.S. was responsible for praying the sinner's prayer with one George W. Bush, back in the days when he was a Texas oilman. And another in South Africa helped to bring racial healing to that nation by working to bring Nelson Mandela, recently released from prison, into face-to-face dialogue with his political opponents.

Of course, God has called each of us to influence -- whether or not we mix with 'the great and the good'. In fact, Zambia's former president Kenneth Kaunda once said: 'What a nation needs more than anything else is not a Christian ruler in the palace but a Christian prophet with earshot!'

I believe that the most urgent question for *every* Christian alive today is this: what kind of city and nation do you want to be living in ten years from now?

More importantly, what kind of future does God have in mind for your city? There's a second part to the question, too. What will you do *now* to set that in motion?

Jesus said that his followers were a 'city set on a hill which cannot be hidden'. We're not meant to be ignored. It's interesting that he said a 'city' and not a club or an organisation. Why did Jesus use that word? I believe it might be because a church can represent, in microcosm, what its city could look like under God; if it were to return to him and live by Kingdom values.

In most cases, one church on its own doesn't have the numbers or the resources to achieve that, but many churches working together across a city can. Together they can say to the city: 'If you want to see what family life can be like, look at us. If you want an example of how business can be conducted with ethics and justice, look at

us. If you want to see good leadership and government, where people willingly work together for common goals, look at us.'

Faced with the question above, some people, including leaders, will respond: 'What if Jesus returns within the next ten years? Wouldn't that make our planning futile?' If that's true, why does the Bible put so much emphasis on the importance of careful planning? Every Christian should plan as if Jesus won't return for one hundred years, while living as if he might return today!

I like what my friend, futurist Dr. Tom Sine says: 'Only the Lord Almighty knows fully what the future holds. [Yet] we can use the intelligence the good Lord gave us and a little discernment to ... anticipate some of the change coming at us and find ways to creatively respond before the waves reach us.'

The message of this book is based on 'doing a Daniel'. We need to draw a line from the past, through the present and into the future. We need to ask for God's help to recognize the signs of the times and to identify what kind of churches we will need to build if we're to truly shape our cities more than they shape us.

What will the truly influential church of 2020 look like? If present trends continue, what kind of church will truly meet the needs of human beings more than a decade from now? If we know the answer to that – even tentatively – we can begin to build those churches today. We can prepare in advance, engaging the future and achieving lasting influence.

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