

Is the Local Church “Really Nice but Totally Unnecessary”?

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This article starts out with a hypothetical dialogue between Pastor Joe Smith and his former congregants Sam and Samantha Brown of Corner Community Church of Somewhereville, USA. The dialogue rotates around the relevance of the local church, issues of biblical and ecclesial authority, and the nature of authentic Christian spirituality in the 21st century.

Sam and Samantha are upwardly mobile professionals. Pastor Joe has an evangelical church of about 250 attendees. If the characters seem wildly exaggerated and the dialogue sounds a bit artificial it is because I am just using their debate as a vehicle to make missiological, sociological and ecclesial arguments.

Some of the arguments against the local church may seem controversial, but as mature scholars we must yet face them. There will be a lengthy conclusion to sort it all out in the end where I will show how the Asian church can respond.

Sam and Samantha: We just don't need to go to church any more Pastor Joe! We are Digital Christians, not Church Christians! We can get saved online, find good sermons online, listen to worship music on YouTube, watch preachers on TV, have a significant relationship with our local Christian radio station and our local Christian bookstore, get a theology degree online, meet a Christian partner on Christian Mingle, get ordained for five dollars from some website, and even arrange a missions trip to Mexico. We have discovered that we can live a wonderful Christian life without the clergy, without the local church, and without belonging to some kind of religious denomination! We have total freedom!

Pastor Joe: Don't you need other people? You can't be true Christians if you don't fulfill the Great Commandment to love one another. There are 37 “one-another” commandments in the New Testament¹ such as love one another, forgive one another, be patient with one another and encourage one another and those commandments need to be fulfilled in a community such as Corner Community Church!

Sam and Samantha: We encourage Christians with our awesome Tik-Tok videos! We share bible verses on Facebook, and we pray for people who text us. We forgive those who spam us and forbear with those who post nasty comments on Reddit! When we went to CCC hardly anyone ever talked to us or prayed for us. It was Samantha's birthday last week and no one from CCC said “Happy Birthday”; but over 500 people on Instagram did! Who is our community?

1. One Another Commands in the New Testament <https://overviewbible.com/one-another-infographic/>

The people who contact us, or the people who don't contact us? For us, the Christian experience is primarily a digital experience!

Pastor Joe: Did you join any of our small groups?

Sam and Samantha: They were all in the evenings during our family time. We are busy professionals with two small children and we didn't want to leave them with a baby sitter after they had been in child-care all day! Family first! Perhaps you could have provided small groups by Zoom for people like us.

Pastor Joe: But you still need other believers!

Sam and Samantha: But it is just so socially complicated at church, our generation doesn't do large groups any more.² We just want to hang out with a few other couples who are upper-middle class professionals who are just like us. We don't want to go near the drug addicts like the one who gave her testimony at CCC a few months back!

Pastor Joe: That is not a biblical or Christian view of other people! Romans tells us that we are to associate with humble people³ and James tells us we are not to discriminate against the poor man dressed in rags!⁴ Jesus even touched lepers⁵ and we can embrace people from all generations and walks of life by going to church.

Sam and Samantha: We are still baby Christians and we are not very mature and we are not up the standards of the Sermon on the Mount which is just for socialists and Democrats!⁶ We are entrepreneurs and we only want to be around other entrepreneurs!

Pastor Joe: Do you believe in biblical authority? Do you believe that what Jesus says is mandatory for you and for your lifestyle?

Sam and Samantha: What do you mean? We are Digital Christians, not Church Christians and we extract meaning from the Scriptures as it impacts our lives in the 21st Century, we don't see the Bible as actually commanding us to do anything. It's like the Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath;⁷ so, the Scriptures were made for us and not us for the

2. Millennials Lack of Social Skills <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/millennial-media/201708/are-millennials-socially-impaired-or-just-rude>

3. Romans 12:16 Live in harmony with one another. Do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly. Never be wise in your own sight.

4. James 2:1-13

5. Mark 1:40-42 And a leper came to him, imploring him, and kneeling said to him, “If you will, you can make me clean.” (41) Moved with pity, he stretched out his hand and touched him and said to him, “I will; be clean.” (42) And immediately the leprosy left him, and he was made clean.

6. Jesus Was A Socialist <https://andrewspringer.medium.com/jesus-was-a-socialist-d76a8b1fbb7f>

7. Mark 2:27-28 And he said to them, “The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. (28) So the Son of Man is lord even of the Sabbath.”

Scriptures. The Scriptures are there for us to confess to be blessed.⁸ Why should we listen to you? You drive an old Toyota Camry!! God is not blessing you! We are smarter than you, we are richer than you, we are better looking than you. God is blessing us, the Digital Christians and God is not blessing the dowdy, boring Church Christians!

Pastor Joe: The apostles made significant sacrifices for the gospel⁹ and great was their reward in Heaven!

Sam and Samantha: Our apostle on TV has a private jet! Winner are grinners, we don't have a submissive poverty mentality. We are victors not victims.

Pastor Joe: Well, what is actually wrong with Corner Community Church?

Sam and Samantha: It is the institutional church. It was founded by the Emperor Constantine in A.D. 313¹⁰ and Christmas and Easter are pagan festivals and the clergy are just pagan priests with Bibles! Except for you, Pastor Joe.

Pastor Joe: Well I am glad about that! So, you think that all local churches are evil? Do you think that CCC is evil?

Sam and Samantha: The clergy is the patriarchy!¹¹ We don't submit to man we only submit to God!

Pastor Joe: But isn't authority just a normal part of life?

Sam and Samantha: Yes, but we are professionals and we are not going to submit to pastors, deacons and elders who are barely successful in life. They have nothing to say to us. We will only listen to successful people and to strong people!

Pastor Joe: But can't you at least attend a Sunday morning service?

Sam and Samantha: Why bother? It is our day off. We have to get up early, get the kids ready and sacrifice our time to hear a sermon that we can hear better on YouTube once the kids are in bed!

Pastor Joe: Your commitment to Christ is measured by your commitment to other people!

Sam and Samantha: Good Christians change churches all the time. You can't tell us that they aren't committed to Christ! We can only be committed to people who talk to us regularly, and the people who talk to us regularly are online, in coffee shops and at the seminars we attend, not at CCC where it is always just "Hi and bye".

Pastor Joe: But local churches have theologically qualified pastors who know Greek, Hebrew and Theology!

Sam and Samantha: It is just a circular argument. It is just the system validating the system. We don't need Greek, Hebrew or Theology, we have the Holy Spirit

and we are not taught by man, rather we are taught by God! Jesus and the apostles were not validated by the theological system of their day, they were not members of the Sanhedrin!

Pastor Joe: What about the traditions of the Church, the creeds, the deep thinking of many people over many centuries about the Trinity and the Incarnation?

Sam and Samantha: We only need the truth that we can apply. If we cannot live it, why believe it? What are the real-world consequences of Monophysitism?¹² We are too busy for theology. We know God through experience.

Pastor Joe: So where do you encounter God?

Sam and Samantha: We encounter God online, mainly through YouTube worship. We also encounter God with our friends, in nature and in the things that God does to help our multi-level marketing business.

Pastor Joe: That's ridiculous! God would never help a multi-level marketing business! God only helps pastors and missionaries! The love of money is the root of all kinds of evil!¹³

Sam and Samantha: Our generation is going to create an interplanetary, transhumanist future¹⁴ where we have our brains integrated with computers, where God is the Universal Spirit, and truth is "what works".¹⁵ Our Messiah will be the artificially-intelligent Leader who gives us eternal life here on earth through the New Genetics.¹⁶ We want to be like Elon Musk, not like the Apostle Paul!

Pastor Joe: That is called the spirit of antichrist¹⁷ and the spirit of lawlessness!¹⁸ It is unbiblical, and it is not Christian.

Sam and Samantha: You have a culture of obedience to righteousness and holiness, but that is just for losers. Winners don't obey anyone. Winners believe and achieve self-transcendence! We can take drugs, have open marriages, multiple partners and conceive multiple children through IVF like Elon has.

Pastor Joe: Are you actually doing any of that?

Sam and Samantha: No, not yet, but we might, and we don't want you holding us back.

Pastor Joe: Do you believe in the existence of an immortal soul that survives death?

Sam and Samantha: No, not any more.

Pastor Joe: Do you believe that there is quality of being as well as quantity of being? Do you believe it is better to be a loving person than a selfish person?

12. Monophysitism <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Monophysitism>

13. 1 Timothy 6:6-10

14. Interplanetary Transhumanism <https://medium.com/@timventura/natasha-vita-more-on-transhumanism-space-colonization-e68c6ffb1777>

15. Truth Is What Works <https://www.amazon.com/Truth-What-Works-William-Pragmatism/dp/0847692736>

16. Eternal Life Through Genetics <https://medium.com/@cybertec/the-technology-that-could-make-us-immortal-2b85c71a5329>

17. 1 John 4:3 and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you heard was coming and now is in the world already.

18. 2 Thessalonians 2:3 Let no one deceive you in any way. For that day will not come, unless the rebellion comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction,

8. Confess to be Blessed <https://www.hopefaithprayer.com/scriptures/confession-prosperity/>

9. Matthew 19:27-30

10. Religious Policies of Constantine the Great https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Religious_policies_of_Constantine_the_Great

11. Criticisms of Clergy and Patriarchy : <https://relevantmagazine.com/faith/church/3-ways-womens-equality-can-counteract-abuse/>

Sam and Samantha: Loving people are weak, selfish people are strong; and we need to be selfish and strong if we are to be winners in this world!¹⁹ Why should we help anyone other than ourselves?

Pastor Joe (quoting Scripture): 1 John 2:15-17 *Do not love the world nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. (16) Because everything that is in the world--the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life--is not from the Father but is from the world. (17) And the world is passing away, and its lust; but he who does the will of God abides forever.*

Sam and Samantha: It is not passing away, religion is passing away! The real world is the real world, and we will have eternal life, here and now, in this world, through the New Genetics!

Pastor Joe: Isn't that a religious belief that you have created? After all there is no sign of anyone having eternal life through new genetics at the moment! Lifespans are actually going down here in the USA!²⁰

Sam and Samantha: It will be only for the rich people, and we have to be millionaires to afford eternal life, and to become millionaires we must be selfish!

Pastor Joe: Christianity has provided a very stable and successful basis for life and culture for thousands of years, whenever it has been taken seriously. Nearly all the top twenty countries on the Human Development Index²¹ were once strongly influenced by Protestant Christian values at some point in their history.

Sam and Samantha: We are in a new spiritual age, the age of Aquarius,²² and we need a new spirituality, for the age of Spiritual Consciousness. Christianity is passé! It is old hat!

Pastor Joe: What has the New Age movement actually done to benefit society? Where are the New Age schools, New Age hospitals, New Age nursing homes, New Age development organizations? Look at all the Christian schools, Christian hospitals, Christian nursing homes and Christian aid organizations like Samaritan's Purse!

Sam and Samantha: We are just getting started!

Pastor Joe: It has been around since the 1960's and accomplished, zip, nothing and nada. The New Age movement is just futile self-absorption!

Sam and Samantha: There is nothing wrong with being self-absorbed!

Pastor Joe: Every verse in the Bible speaks against being self-absorbed. The whole idea of loving your neighbor as yourself speaks against being self-absorbed. In the parable of the Good Samaritan the priest and the Levite were self-absorbed but the

Good Samaritan saw the injured man and was other-centered and helpful! If Jesus was self-absorbed He would never have left the glory of heaven to come to earth and save us!

1 John 3:16-18 *By this we have come to know love, because He laid down His life for us. And we also ought to lay down our lives in behalf of our brothers. (17) But whoever has this world's goods, and sees his brother having need, and shuts off his compassion towards him, how does the love of God abide in him? (18) My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth.*

Sam and Samantha: I don't see any good reason why we should give to the poor, give to a church or give to anyone at all. The poor are just lazy parasites according to Ayn Rand.²³

Pastor Joe: What if there is an eternal judgment that depends on how you treat the poor and needy?

Sam and Samantha: We believe in "once saved, always saved", we have our ticket to Heaven and its all by grace not works, and we don't have to give to the poor!

Pastor Joe: Have you read Luke 16? The parable of the rich man and Lazarus?

Sam and Samantha: No, what is that?

Pastor Joe: Here, I will read it to you!

Luke 16:19-31 *"Now there was a certain rich man who was clothed in purple and fine linen, enjoying himself splendidly every day. (20) But there was a certain beggar named Lazarus, covered with sores, who had been placed at his gate, (21) and longing to be fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man's table. And even the dogs came and would lick his sores. (22) And it came to pass that the beggar died, and he was carried away by the angels to Abraham's bosom. The rich man also died and was buried. (23) And being in torments in Hades, he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham from afar, and Lazarus in his bosom. (24) Then he cried and said, 'Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus so that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue; for I am suffering in this flame.' (25) But Abraham said, 'Child, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, and likewise Lazarus bad things, but now here he is comforted and you are suffering. (26) And besides all this, between us and you a great gulf has been fixed, so that those who desire to cross over from here to you are not able, nor may those from there cross over to us.' (27) Then he said, 'Therefore I beseech you, father, that you would send him to my father's house, (28) for I have five brothers, so that he may testify to them, lest they also come to this place of torment.' (29) Abraham said to him, 'They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them.' (30) And he said, 'No, father Abraham; but if someone from the dead should go to them, they will repent.' (31) But he said to him, 'If they do not hear Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded should one rise from the dead.' "*

Now tell me, the rich man was living his best life now, so why did the rich man end up in the fires of Hell?

19. Discussion of Ayn Rand's "The Virtue of Selfishness" https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Virtue_of_Selfishness

20. Falling USA Life Expectancy <https://www.health.harvard.edu/blog/why-life-expectancy-in-the-us-is-falling-202210202835>

21. Human Development Index https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_countries_by_Human_Development_Index

22. Age of Aquarius https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Age_of_Aquarius

23. Producers and Parasites <https://reason.com/1975/09/01/the-two-classes/>

Sam and Samantha: We don't believe in Hell!

Pastor Joe: Please answer my question!

Sam and Samantha: Well, according to Jesus, the rich man ended up in Hell because he was selfish, self-absorbed, stingy and very disobedient to Moses and the prophets! Anyway, we believe in grace not works!

Pastor Joe: Grace is for those who repent, the rich man did not repent, he was still selfish in the fires of Hell and wanted Lazarus to provide water for him!

Sam and Samantha: Jesus would never send anyone into Hell!

Pastor Joe: Well actually Jesus will judge all the nations on the last day and all the selfish nasty people will be assigned to everlasting torment!

Sam and Samantha: Where on earth is that in the Bible?

Pastor Joe: It is in Matthew 25, would you like me to read it to you?

Sam and Samantha: Probably not, but go ahead anyway!

Pastor Joe: (reading Scripture): Matthew 25:31-46
"And when the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then will He sit upon His glorious throne. (32) All the nations will be gathered before Him, and He will separate them one from another, as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. (33) And He will set the sheep on His right hand, but the goats on His left. (34) Then the King will say to those on His right hand, 'Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: (35) for I was hungry and you gave Me food; I was thirsty and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger and you took Me in; (36) I was naked and you clothed Me; I was sick and you visited Me; I was in prison and you came to Me.' (37) 'Then the righteous will answer Him, saying, 'Lord, when did we see You hungry and feed You, or thirsty and give You drink? (38) When did we see You a stranger and take You in, or naked and clothe You? (39) Or when did we see You sick, or in prison, and come to You?' (40) 'And the King will answer and say to them, 'Assuredly I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brothers, you did it to Me.' (41) 'Then He will also say to those on the left, 'Depart from Me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels: (42) for I was hungry and you gave Me no food; I was thirsty and you gave Me no drink; (43) I was a stranger and you did not take Me in, naked and you did not clothe Me, sick and in prison and you did not visit Me.' (44) 'Then they also will answer, saying, 'Lord, when did we see You hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and we did not minister to You?' (45) 'Then He will answer them, saying, 'Assuredly I say to you, inasmuch as you did not do it to one of the least of these, neither did you do it to Me.' (46) 'And these shall go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.'"

Sam and Samantha: So, it seems like the Bible is extremely serious about being kind and loving instead of selfish and mean?

Pastor Joe: Yes, it is and that is why Christianity is the basis of successful civilizations where

people genuinely look after each other. Most social movements such as trade unions, nursing and community colleges were started by Christians.²⁴ It was a group of evangelical Christians in England, called the Clapham Sect, and led by John Wilberforce that got slavery banned throughout the British Empire!

Sam and Samantha: We did not know that!

Pastor Joe: The media will never tell you anything positive about Christianity.

Sam and Samantha: That is for sure, we feel as if we are always being lied to!

Pastor Joe: The Bible is also very serious about Christians being in Spirit-filled community and not just being isolated individuals.

Sam and Samantha: That is not even subtle! It sounds like you are trying to get us to go back to Corner Community Church!

Pastor Joe: Church is not just about education. It is also about participation and impartation!

Sam and Samantha: Impartation! What is spiritual impartation?

Pastor Joe: The early church laid hands on people for healing, for the baptism in the Holy Spirit, for imparting spiritual gifts, and when they ordained elders, deacons and Christian workers.²⁵ This spiritual impartation happens in community. You cannot lay hands on yourself for healing.

Sam and Samantha: I suppose not. However, we have never seen a healing miracle.

Pastor Joe: Well then, why don't you come to our Wednesday night healing service next week when Paul Rapley²⁶ will be ministering, he sees a lot of healings all around the world!

Next Wednesday

Sam and Samantha: That was incredible! And we know the lady who had the metal plate disappear and the boy whose broken leg was healed. I had no idea that miracles still happen today. Spiritual power is real and the name of Jesus is real! This changes everything we once knew about God!

Pastor Joe: Yes, it does, God is alive and well today!

Sam and Samantha: But can't this happen in house churches like it did in the Book of Acts?

Pastor Joe: Some of those houses in Acts were even larger than CCC! The house of Mary, the mother of John-Mark and sister of Barnabas, could accommodate 120 people just in an upper room.²⁷ It was probably a Roman villa with courtyards, atriums, stables, great rooms and so on. Roman villas were typically from 900 square meters to 5400 square meters (9,000 – 54,000 square feet).²⁸ The house of the Roman centurion

24. <https://jasonpierce.org/15-ways-christianity-changed-history-and-society/> (Christian Social Movements)

25. The Laying On of Hands in the Bible https://www.openbible.info/topics/laying_on_of_hands

26. About Paul Rapley <https://www.paulrapley.com/about> click on the Testimonies link for interesting testimonies.

27. Acts 1:12-15,12:12

28. Roman Villas https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Roman_villa & <https://earlychurchhistory.org/daily-life/ancient-roman-villas/>

Cornelius could accommodate a large crowd to listen to the Apostle Peter and the house of Philemon had so many rooms that Paul could instruct him to set aside a room for him without appearing the least bit rude.

Sam and Samantha: What about the house churches in China?

Pastor Joe: Sure, when the church is persecuted, then house churches are a great idea! The church can take many different physical forms.

Sam and Samantha: We watched a video about house churches as part of DMMS (Discipleship-Making Movements) and they seem part of the key to rapid church multiplication in creative access nations.

Pastor Joe: They certainly are! However, it's not either/or but both/and! Christians can meet in basilicas, cathedrals, mega-churches, storefront churches, parish churches, homes, villas and even in a local business! It's not the container that matters! It is the gathering of holy saints to learn true doctrine, take the sacraments, to participate in spiritual life with one another and to impart Christ to one another. We are God's temples, not any human building:

Acts 17:24-25 The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in temples made by man, (25) nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything.

Sam and Samantha: If God does not dwell in buildings made by human hands, then why do we need to go to Corner Community Church?

Pastor Joe: You tell me!

Sam and Samantha: So we can have fellowship with one another, see miracles and experience God, be taught the word of God and participate with one another in the life of Christ. But can't we do all of that, or at least most of it, online? Going to church is just so inconvenient.

Pastor Joe: Would it help you if we livestreamed our services and gave you some digital means of involvement in the life of our church such as having small groups that meet by Zoom so you don't have to hire a baby-sitter?

Sam and Samantha: Yes, that would be very helpful and we want to give online so we don't have to carry cash or write checks, and we want email notices not snail mail. We would also like to be part of a text prayer chain for our own age group and not just Boomers with arthritis!

Pastor Joe: I am sure that we can do all those things, and even come up with a Young Professionals Prayer Group. Perhaps CCC has been way behind with the digital revolution!

Sam and Samantha: And perhaps we did not understand the need to be part of the Church Gathered. It was only when we saw miracles that we changed our mind. For us, the local church seemed like a very nice place that was totally unnecessary. We felt that we could be just fine without ever going to church ever again.

Pastor Joe: It is a very confusing and busy world

out there, and we pastors have to do a much better job of helping people to be part of a church experience that works for them. We need to do a much better job of reaching the Digital Christians and of explaining why the local church still has an important place in the life of believers!

CONCLUSION

I apologize if I have offended anyone by making you stare into the abyss that is the self-centered, materialistic and almost apostate American Church.²⁹ However, some of these issues might soon infect the church in Asia.

I have attempted to tackle 20 hot topics during this hypothetical debate, and they are:

1. Digital disintermediation of essential church functions
2. The need for a digital ecclesiology
3. Impersonal churches versus digital attention and connection
4. Generational conflict
5. Class conflict
6. Individualism and the inability of some people to socialize in large groups
7. Antinomianism and the consequent rejection of all ecclesiastical authority
8. Poor and ill-informed Church History
9. The "house church only" debate
10. The Prosperity Gospel
11. Ayn Rand, Objectivism, and the exaltation of selfishness
12. Transhumanism
13. Secular religion
14. The New Age Movement
15. Hypergrace
16. Self-absorption and the lack of godly compassion
17. The hurried lifestyle that sees personal convenience as an absolute
18. Church as participation and impartation
19. The need for signs and wonders for a new generation of pagans
20. How to negotiate church structures and services in a changing cultural milieu

These complex issues simply did not exist as issues for local church pastors or missionaries when I went off to seminary in 1980. Now, they have combined into a perfect storm! There are constant daily attacks on such basic ideas as the need to love our neighbor. Some Republican Christians have become so extreme as to reject the Sermon on The Mount! Listen to the following quote from prominent Southern Baptist Russell Moore:

"Multiple pastors tell me, essentially, the same story about quoting the Sermon on the Mount, parenthetically, in their preaching – 'turn the other cheek' – [and] to have someone come up after to say,

²⁹ Only 4% of Americans hold a Biblical worldview: <https://www.arizonachristian.edu/2023/02/28/biblical-worldview-among-u-s-adults-drops-33-since-start-of-covid-19-pandemic/>

‘Where did you get those liberal talking points?’ Moore said.³⁰

The congregants questioning their pastors who quote Jesus, are as awash in false philosophy as Sam and Samantha Brown were. And these demonic false philosophies always revolt against the idea of church attendance, often twisting church history to make their point. Ignoring these uncomfortable issues will not make them go away. We have to be prepared to give an answer to the question of “Is the local church very nice, but totally unnecessary?”

Ecclesiology is now at the forefront of missiology. COVID shifted the balance toward digital Christianity and now, just as firms are trying to enforce return-to-office, churches are similarly asking: “Will you return to church, or will you stay in the digital wasteland that you are now comfortable with?”

The USA, Australia, New Zealand and Europe are largely post-Christian societies with large numbers of “new pagans”³¹ who have relativized and pluralist values inimical to most standard theological formulations but which are very open to spiritual experiences such as signs and wonders.

The Kingdom of God is an everlasting Kingdom³² which takes many forms. This Kingdom is now a primarily digital space for hundreds of millions of Christians whose apostles, prophets, evangelists, teachers and pastors are on YouTube, Facebook and Tik-Tok. Some spend many hours each week watching Christian videos, and hardly any time in a local church.

Church (for them) is nice but unnecessary. An historical tradition. A connection with the ancient world of Boomers and Old-Timers who were lifelong members of their churches. For the newer generations, church is just too complicated, and relating to strangers is hard. The local church feels good but it’s kind of “in the way” of the rest of life.

Everyone needs a call to community and for them community is on social media, in coffee shops and in small group Bible studies that are far less socially challenging than dealing with church committees and business meetings. So, the local church just fades away, once a week becomes once a month, becomes twice a year.³³

Churches will need to adopt digitally-informed small groups that practice the gifts of the Spirit and study the Word of God in-depth. They will need to have horizontal servant-leadership rather than vertical leadership. They will have to vastly simplify the social stress of being a church member. Churches need to understand the rush and stress of 21st century life and

30. Russell Moore quote <https://www.newsweek.com/evangelicals-rejecting-jesus-teachings-liberal-talking-points-pastor-1818706>

31. New Pagans in Australia <https://au.thegospelcoalition.org/article/now-post-post-christian-pagan-australia/>

32. Daniel 7:14

33. Church Attendance Statistics (USA) <https://www.churchtrac.com/articles/the-state-of-church-attendance-trends-and-statistics-2023> (note Millennials are actually increasing in church attendance due to Millennial migrant churches.)

have some programs that can meet spiritual needs “on the go” and which do not compel Christians to visit a bricks-and-mortar building.

The knee-jerk reaction is to denigrate Digital Christians as “obviously immature” and digital Christianity as “seriously deficient”. It is easy to ignore the digital challenge. About eight years ago I met with a Filipino pastor of a church of some 600 people. I asked Pastor Ken “How many people asked you a serious theological question last year?” His reply was “Two, no, it was one”. I followed up my question with “Do you know where the rest asked their questions?” Ken said “No”. I replied, “Google”.

The Church is now experienced by Asian Christians as both global and digital. They will listen to a Singaporean bible teacher, an American bible prophecy expert, a Nigerian apostle and a Filipino Christian gospel artist, all on the same day! The sheep now have many shepherds!

The local church is no longer the authoritative source of spiritual information. They have lost that role to the Internet. We need to provide something else. We need to provide whatever is missing in the busy lives of 21st century Asian Christians. Some of these things might include:

- A clear Gospel that refutes Western apostasy
- An Asian apologetic for biblical Christian values in the face of materialism
- Incredibly supportive small groups that pray for one another
- Business mentoring
- Personal discipleship and spiritual formation
- Opportunities for business-as-mission
- Spiritual support for aspirational Asian professionals
- Prayer for the sick
- Signs and wonders
- Deliverance from curses, hexes and spells
- Family counselling that includes extended family issues
- Digital short-courses on issues of gospel and culture in Asia
- Ministry to and through the mobile phone such as daily devotionals
- Church websites that support digital interaction among members of the congregation and enhance the experience of fellowship



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