



Foreword  
Todd Hunter

I met Mike Bishop near the turn of this last century. You may remember the times. We had somehow made it through the gigantic scare of all our computers and related technology crashing in 2000 and 9/11 was on all our minds and hearts. In addition, for those of us who work with the church, things that no one would have ever questioned even a few years earlier were now open to discussion among reasonable and devoted Christians.

For the church, this evolution began a few years before the year 2000 when a few new words crept into our vocabulary: postmodernism and post-Christendom to mention just two. It is remarkable how much power some words have. Some give great comfort—*mom* or *grace*. Others strike so much fear they can give sensitive people

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panic attacks—*earthquake* or *test*. The *post* words of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries upset much of the church. I know; I lived through it and heard the debates from the best thinkers on all sides of the issues.

To my surprise and relief, I found in Mike Bishop and his colleagues all over America something different than mere skeptical hand wringing. They were conversant with all the debates, but they were not that interested—just marginally so. Their real focus was on these questions: What do we do about what we know? How do we faithfully follow Jesus and proclaim the good news of the Gospel of the Kingdom in a culture that is genuinely changing right under our feet?

Let's stop here for a moment—let me back up and tell you how I bumped into Mike. From 1994 to 2001, I was National Coordinator/Director of Vineyard Churches USA. Though I love and respect the Vineyard and have great relationships within it, I resigned my position to *get back into the game* of evangelistic church planting. I have always loved evangelism. Billy Graham and Greg Laurie were my earliest heroes and I even tried crusade type evangelism. I was okay at it, but over time and through frustration I learned that I was no Greg or Billy. Thus, over the years of my life, I have mostly expressed my passion for evangelism through planting churches that were designed expressly to make new followers, new disciples of Jesus.

A few weeks after I resigned, a young man named Mark Priddy asked to come to Anaheim to see me. I had spoken to him once before on the phone and something inside told me to meet with him. As he sat down in my office, he told me his story—his love for the Kingdom, his love for the Vineyard and John Wimber, the successful business he had recently sold, and his vision to help young leaders like himself figure out how to navigate the churning waters of

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our shifting culture. His idea was to start a ministry that would coach young leaders. We made a deal pretty quickly. I cannot remember if it was that day or not, but we were rapidly on the same page. Mark created an organization called Allelon and hired me to be its first church planting coach.

At the time, I lived in Yorba Linda, California—a neighboring city to Anaheim. I rented a small office from a friend who was a lawyer. When I say *small*, I really mean a closet that doubled as a storage and copier room. I literally worked in a 3 foot by 5 foot space and loved every minute of it. Those couple years were some of the most rewarding of my life. Most days I had back to back phone appointments like a doctor or a therapist, sitting with a headset on eight to ten hours a day learning from people like Mike. They thought I was teaching and mentoring them, but in hindsight I think I may have learned more from them as they opened their hearts, minds, and souls.

Mike picks up the story in the pages ahead. As you turn the page and begin to read, I want you to know that I really admire what Mike and his friends are trying to do. They do not need to get everything right for me to respect them. We need risk takers—people who get some things wrong, which allow others to build on their mistakes. There is no such thing as context-less evangelism. Contexts change, that means we must change. Change requires risk—and I admire those who take such risks.

You will surely not agree with all the conclusions to which Mike has come, but that is not important. I commend *What is Church?* to you because I know you will grow reading it in the same manner I grew through living the story with Mike and his friends.

—Todd Hunter ♦ August 2008 ♦ Eagle, ID

