ORGANIC CHURCH: GROWING FAITH WHERE LIFE HAPPENS

By Neil Cole

Reviewed by Darren Cronshaw

Neil Cole is a hero of mine for his simple evangelism, disciple-making, leadership and church planting principles. He is a church starter and pastor who has started hundreds of churches through Church Multiplication Associates. If you share my excitement for the responses of delegates at the dinner, then I encourage you to get hold of his book and put it into practice.

Churches try all sorts of ways to attract people, especially with what we do on Sunday mornings. Cole tells his story and unpacks principles for taking a fresh approach – taking Jesus to people rather than relying on them coming to us. When he went to plant his first church his team wanted to start a coffee shop, but he said instead to go to existing coffee shops where lost people are already. He urges planting seeds of the Kingdom in places where life happens and where society is formed – coffee shops, neighbourhoods, restaurants, schools, campuses, homes and workplaces. Their vision is “Every Christian is a church planter, every home is a church, and every church building is a training center.”

Cole urges investing heavily in making disciples and abandoning anything that does not multiple healthy disciples, leaders, churches and movements. One of his reproducible patterns for church are Life Transformation Groups (LTGs). Two or three people meet weekly for accountability, mutual correction, reading Scripture and praying for lost friends. He wants to simplify church but promote discipleship. One of his maxims is to “lower the bar of how church is done and raise the bar of what it means to be a disciple.”

He does not criticise larger churches, but his philosophy is to grow mainly through church multiplication. It is not about building a large regional church but making Jesus available to a region. His book does not help much with vision statements and building blueprints, but reminds us of the essence of church.

Cole asks basic questions worth pondering:

- Who is Jesus to you?
- Where is Jesus at work?
- What will happen if we plant seeds of the Kingdom in places where life happens?
- What difference would it make if Jesus was in the room on our leadership team?
- What is church?

In answer to the last question, he proposes the DNA of the church is three simple things:

- Divine truth, with revelation of God seen in Jesus and Scripture
- Nurturing relationships, as we are not meant to be alone
- Apostolic mission, recognising we are on earth with a purpose – making disciples.

Churches need all three together, not one in isolation and not adding other extra “stuff” as essential. A common commitment to truth, common familial relationships and common sense of mission will hold our churches and our denominational tribes together and keep us true to our purpose.

Organic Church specially inspired in me a longing for Jesus’ presence and a love for people. My imagination was freshly captivated with the power of the gospel in changing people’s lives. The book is full of great stories of people coming to faith, being transformed and being unleashed to start new churches with their networks of friends and neighbours. Cole declares hopefully: “I believe we are leaving the day of the ordained and ushering in the day of the ordinary. It is a time when common Christians will do uncommon deeds.” (p.215)