

# Planting the Underground Church - Part 2

by Eric Foley

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*The underground church is built on the principles of household worship, parish mentality, and spiritual leadership, where every member is a minister and the goal is to grow each member to fullness in Christ.*

**Duration:** 1:01:31

**Scripture:** Matthew 28:19

**Topics:** "Church Growth", "Evangelism Methods"

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## Description

This sermon emphasizes the church's obligation to deliver the gospel to all, even in challenging circumstances like restrictions on public preaching or sacraments. It discusses the need for a shift from building-focused evangelism to a parish mentality, focusing on spiritual care in households. The sermon also touches on the importance of training members to be generalists, not specialists, and the significance of knowing foundational Christian beliefs like the Nicene Creed.

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## Transcript

The church has to be able to deliver the gospel to everyone. It has to be able to deliver the gospel to everyone. We can't deliver the gospel to children in China.

That's not acceptable. It is not acceptable that we can't preach the gospel in the public space, like a park. So in every situation like that, the church is obligated to go underground.

It is not acceptable for us as Christians to say, yes, we will accept the restriction of being limited to a building. Spiritually, we do not have the right to accept that limitation. And so those decisions are out of our control.

Meaning, God tells us that. Through the scriptures, that it is not simply okay to say, oh, if in a society they let you preach in a licensed building, then that is okay. The second condition that requires us to go underground, when the government or the general public restrain the free hearing of the gospel, meaning not only the government, but the general public, if they make it so that we cannot preach fully, completely what God gives us to speak, then we are obligated to unplug from the systems of the culture, not to retreat, but to fully serve the culture.

And then the third, we deliver the gospel, when the pure administration of the sacraments is impaired. Now, for most churches, that may not be a big deal, because most churches may not do a lot of baptism or

the Lord's Supper, but we are commanded by Christ to carry out the sacraments in the way that he gives them to us. And so as a result of that, any restriction on our ability to baptize as according to the Bible, to make the commitments that are required of the person who is baptized, obligates us to go underground.

I can't even imagine why there would be anything that would block those kinds of things, the baptism, the Lord's Supper. The answer is, take a really close look at what is required for baptism and for participating in baptism. Because those things are among the first things that are restricted.

Fourth point, fourth principle, instead of acquiring buildings, meet in the places people already are. This is a big challenge for us here in Korea. I am always surprised to see the number of new churches that are convinced that the very first thing that they need to do is to acquire a building.

Not only just to buy, but to rent a place. We need a place to have a worship service. It seems like the most natural thing in the world to us.

And so it shapes much of our practice of evangelism. Because in evangelism, we are often more focused on trying to lead people to the church than we are lead them to Christ. We go out to the subway, hand out hamburgers.

Say, please come to our service that we are having tonight at 7 o'clock. Hand out the flyers. Hand out the eggs.

Always the goal, get people to come to the church building. Why we print the business cards? With the worship service time. And so we see churches even with less than 10 people.

Because they are taught in many seminaries that they need to do this. Got to get a building. But that is such a strange practice among Christians in most of the world.

And certainly among Christians in countries where there are restrictions on practice. In the future, the moment that you choose a building, in some sense you are entering into a series of restrictions. So the goal in persecuted countries is try to avoid getting a building as long as you can.

So one of my favorite quotes in the book is on page 82 or 83 of the English version. The quote comes from John Wesley. He says, the world is my parish.

And this is a change in mentality. A parish mentality is a change from a building-based mentality. And a parish mentality, the goal is not to invite people into a building, not to invite people to a worship service.

It is to see all people in that designated geographical area, as people whose spiritual care we are responsible for. So this does not mean that we simply go out and say, Hey, do you need your light bulb changed? Do you want me to mow your lawn? It is not that kind of thing. It is to say that everyone in a given territory, we are responsible for their spiritual care.

Not only the presentation of the gospel, but the ongoing presence of the gospel. Through what Wesley called close conversations. And so what that means is that it changes our way of thinking about church.

So that instead of recruiting people into an organization, we are wholly focused on the spiritual condition of a given area. And so this is why we want to avoid a building as long as possible. Because where we want to be, we want to be where people already are.

And typically the fundamental structure in any given locality is what we call the household. Now household does not mean family. As we said at the very beginning, in Korea within two years, that idea of a family will not be the most common form of household.

In two years, the most common form of household in Korea will be people living alone, especially elderly people. And so to think with a parish mentality, means that instead of inviting all of the old people to our church, we are responsible for all of the households in our area in terms of the spiritual condition of those households. And so even if a church is an existing church, has its own building, it can adopt a parish mentality.

I had the pleasure of working with one of the largest churches in the United States, which is the Los Angeles Dream Center. And so the LA Dream Center, every Saturday, visits every home in the area surrounding their church. For them, that's about 80 blocks of people that they reach.

And the purpose is not to invite those people to church houses anymore. Instead, it's to bring church to every household in their parish. So building on that recommendation then, principle number five, we need to begin to think of the church as a household of households.

The way we like to express it is to say that the underground church is built from the household upward not from the pulpit down. There was a church we visited recently. They have a pastor, two chandrasanims, and less than 10 church members.

That is what we would call building a church from the pulpit down. The idea, and it's taught in many seminaries, we've got to have a lot of pastoral leadership in place so we can attract people to come into this church today. But an underground church is not built like that.

It is a household of households. And that doesn't just mean cell groups. Listen carefully.

It means that the primary spiritual leader in that household is the leader of that household. The job of the pastor and the church is to support that person in their spiritual leadership within their household. So the pastor is not providing spiritual leadership to each of the people in the church.

The primary spiritual leadership that's provided within the church always happens at the level of the household. And so what that means is that in principle six, we could talk one whole night about any one of these principles but we have to link them all together. If the household is the primary building block of the church, building of the block, it's the main thing, the church is a household of households, then the main service of the church isn't Wednesdays and Sundays.

It is every day within every household. Now, if you think that what I'm saying is heresy, then you don't know your Korean church history. And that would be bad for a Caucasian to know Korean church history better than you.

If you read the first baptismal requirements of the Korean church, you will see that one question that is in that list is are you conducting daily worship in your household? If the answer is no, then you don't get baptized. Now think about what our Korean church fathers would think about us today. We talk to Korean church pastors and ask them that question.

We say, are you having daily household worship? What do you think the answer is? Unfortunately, the answer many times is no. And according to the early Korean church, such should not even be baptized.

Not only should they not be leading a church, they shouldn't be baptized.

Why? Because what we knew in the Korean church a hundred years ago was this. A hundred years ago, this was not strange. This was church.

And it still is church in many countries today where Christians are not able to gather together on a weekly basis. But I think today, if we could ask the early Korean church fathers, if we could say to them, now that we can have church freely, do you think it's okay that we don't have household worship? I think they would grieve. And I think that grief would not just be for families that have young children.

It would be true for husbands and wives as well. Because it's part of what it means to be in a Christian marriage. So what happens on Sunday and Wednesday? We're preparing people for spiritual leadership in their homes on a daily basis.

So that if the church comes to a point where it's not able to meet, the church can continue its mission without interruption. And by the way, in the book, we provide a basic order for household worship. Because we're talking here more than praying before a meal.

So you can see that beginning on page 104. But we need to continue on to principle number seven. Principle number seven, instead of professional leaders, use amateurs.

And you can see how this is linked to the principle that we just shared right before that. One of the quotes that I really like in the book, it's on page 121. A couple of quotes there.

It says, if pastors visit, they supplement, not replace the pastoral oversight of the household leader. Do you see that it's in the end of the second paragraph? So the paragraph says, the underground church has had to learn ways of worship that do not depend on professional pastors. So it's right here in English.

Do you see where that could be in Korean? Any of the other staff? It's right here, this one. It's the paragraph that starts, the underground church has had to learn ways of worship that do not depend on professional pastors. So the last sentence in that paragraph says, if pastors visit, they supplement, not replace the pastoral oversight of the household leader.

And then a little further down, I think it's the one in bold there in Korean, and it's in italics in English. The underground church places the highest priority on each member growing to fullness in Christ in the context of their everyday ordinary life. So the goal isn't to try to get people more active in the church organization.

It's to help people grow so that they are operating as priests in their own households. Why does this become important in light of issues like the sexual revolution? Because the church's biggest problem in the sexual revolution is that more than half of Christians support gay marriage. The problem is the rate of divorce inside the church and outside of the church are coming to equalize.

They're becoming closer. In the US, they're almost the same. Third graders that are Christian have almost the same level of pornography on their phones as third graders that don't.

Remember that article we were talking about, about people in third grade, how they have pornography on their smartphones? Almost the same. So sadly, we've created the idea that a really good Christian is someone who's always active in church. And it leaves our families vulnerable or weak to attack from the culture.

So our strategy has to be to strengthen families, not by providing more programs for them in the church, but by adopting a parish mentality that takes us out so that we can train each household leader to be the spiritual leader of the household. So principle number eight, when we then are going out with our parish mentality, we actually don't want to try to recruit people to become Christian. We want to instead caution them.

If that sounds strange, just open to any page of the Gospels and see how Jesus does it. Jesus is always encouraging people to count the cost. Of following Christ.

And so in the book, what you'll see is a story of how I violated that rule. A guy came to our house for doing some repairs. And he found out I was a pastor.

So I started talking to him about his own life. So he said he was kind of interested in coming to church. So I immediately started to try to recruit him to come.

But Jesus' approach is always the opposite of that. Not that he discourages people from coming, but what I should have talked to the man about was I should have said, you know, look, you're already the spiritual leader in your family, whether you know it or not. Whether you're acting like it or not.

How's that going for you? In other words, always the issue is not about recruiting people into the church, it is about helping them realize the role they already have and either are or are not playing. Principle number nine. Train members to be generalists, not specialists.

A specialist is someone who does one or two functions within the church. Like they lead worship. Or they are the greeter, the usher.

Or they count the money. Often people base this model on the idea of spiritual gifts. But spiritual gifts does not mean that people should not grow to fullness in Christ in every area of their life.

So even though I may not have the spiritual gift of evangelism, which I don't, I may not have the spiritual gift of generosity, which I don't, doesn't mean that I don't have to evangelize and I don't have to give. So in a restricted or persecuted church setting, it is absolutely vital to have generalists in the church. Everyone in a household ought to be able to preach in that household.

Notice I didn't say in the Sunday morning worship service time. But when we did household worship with our kids growing up, I didn't lead every day. I led one day a week.

Dr. Foley led one day a week. And Margaret led one day a week. And Trevor led one day a week.

And when they led, they had to lead the singing. And they had to share the scripture. And they had to lead the prayer.

And they had to even be able to give a message. And so now in our family, all of our family members had better be ready to preach, pray, or die at a moment's notice. That's just what it means to be Christian.

It's not the pastor who preaches, prays, or dies at a moment's notice. It's the pastor who trains us to do those things. Actually, I should say trains the household leaders.

So the household leaders can train their family members. Principle number 10. Remember who you are.

When you read this chapter in the book, this is my second most important chapter in the book. It says that the biggest problem we have in the church today is that we try to be too creative, too original. And so we talk about in that chapter is how absolutely important, how vital it is, for every Christian to be able to know and be able to recite the Nicene Creed.

The Apostles' Creed is good too, but the Nicene Creed is more complete. Not only to be able to recite it, but to know what every line in it means, to be able to give a basic explanation of it. To be able to do the Ten Commandments.

And to give a basic account of the fundamentals of Christian salvation. A good test for an existing church pastor is to invite us to your church on Sunday morning and let us interview every church member you have for five minutes. So we can ask them, can you share the Nicene Creed? Can you share the Apostles' Creed? Do you know the Ten Commandments? Can you give us a basic explanation of what it means to be saved? Can you tell me briefly what the Trinity is? Every Christian ought to be able to do those things.

In the church originally, you couldn't get baptized unless you could do those things. And again, if you look at the original Korean church baptismal questions, it doesn't mention the Nicene Creed, but it does mention every other thing that I've talked about. We've lowered the standard.

We've weakened the church. And that will not serve us well as persecution hits. Let me just briefly touch on the last two points and then open it up for questions for you.

Point number 11 refers to giving. And I know it will be a controversial point, but hopefully not too much. Biblically, our giving is not motivated to give to the church as an institution.

But it's to give in the areas where God calls us to give, namely in service particularly to our neighbors. So the question will arise, how do I tie it then if my church doesn't have a bank account? And it turns out that's one of the areas that persecuted Christians are most creative about, which is how to tithe even if they can't give to the institutional church. For us in church, we've always said to people, give 3% to the church.

Take the other 7%. We'll pray over it together. And return it back to you for you to use in your ministry with everyone that you meet.

And then every month we'll hold you accountable for what you did with the money. So enough said about that one because you can read about that in the book. And the final point relates to missions.

How do we fund missions in this context? And the answer is the same way they were funded in the early Korean church. The same way they're funded in most churches that are not wealthy. Which is that they're funded by the people to whom we go in mission.

They're funded not by the church but they're funded by the people that we do mission to. So think of those two last chapters as they're typically the questions that come up not the first time we cover this material but as people start to take these things seriously and say, well, how do we tithe in our church? How do we do missions in our church? So those chapters you can read later. But you've been magnificent to allow me to go through so much material so quickly but I want to take just a few minutes to at least answer any questions that you may have before we close the group.

And I may answer your question by referring you to a specific chapter in the book. So a question just to repeat it in English so everybody can hear it too. If an existing church were to transition to this kind of a

model of church what is the role of the pastor? And the answer is that the pastor's primary job is the spiritual equipping of each household leader for the sake of equipping that household.

And it's actually a fairly common model around the world. Anywhere where Christians are small in number and a pastor has to kind of travel a circuit that's exactly what happens. We see this in churches whether it's Laos or in Eritrea.

And certainly it was true in the U.S. for early U.S. history. And in Korea in early Korea. That the pastor's job is to be able to equip the household leaders because the household leaders are the ones who are responsible for the spiritual day-to-day care.

Now that relates to the sexual revolution in two ways. We have to set ourselves up so that when pastors are detained or imprisoned or in our case deported that the church can continue. So interestingly half of Korea already has that model.

North Korea has to operate that way but the job of people who lead discipleship bases or pastors is not to be able to gather the congregation together weekly. Church may never be able to do that but instead to equip each spiritual household each household spiritually. But the second reason why it's really important in terms of sexual revolution is because our families are really vulnerable.

We need to change the way that our church is focused so that our primary goal is not to strengthen the church but to strengthen each individual family. Our children are in real danger. Our marriages are in real danger.

So the church strategy has to focus on the strengthening of the soul. Other questions? Could you tell us about the result whether you prepare about it or not? I think historically there are good examples that we can see about where the church has prepared to face restrictions and where it has not. One of the most interesting cases I think relates to Germany prior to the rise of Hitler.

Before Hitler. In that period of time prior to the rise of Hitler there were some church leaders who began to be aware that the country was heading in the direction that was going to restrict Christianity. But of course Hitler was providing all kinds of assurances to say I'm Christian.

Christians will be honored in this country. And so of course then what arose in Germany was what was called the confessing church. While the rest of the church, most German Christians began to accommodate Hitler.

So it's the same thing that in the first book that we wrote about Pastor Wurmbrand's essay in here he talks about the same thing happening in Romania at the coming of the Communists. So I think historically we have many good examples that we can study. But I think that the one that's happening right in front of our eyes that's maybe most interesting to study is the churches in the northern part of Europe.

The Scandinavian churches. And the reason why is because their countries became liberal much earlier than the rest of Europe, much earlier than the US, much earlier than Korea. And so we can get kind of a glimpse of a possible future if we look at the churches in those countries.

And the sad thing is that it appears that the way they respond to pressure from the government is to change their theology and their practice and to accept restrictions on their role in society. So there's a whole section in that in the first book, Preparing for the Underground Church, a study of the Scandinavian

churches. And so I think that's the most contemporary example that we can look at.

And of course in our country, there's a strong interest in Korea. There's a group politically that wants to see us become like the countries in Europe. Good question.

Other questions? I think very much, instead of being a leading people to the church, it really is a leading people to Christ through having these kind of close spiritual conversations. So I think in a parish mentality, the idea is that instead of saying, well, I wonder if I should have a conversation with this person spiritually, the idea is, yes, I am spiritually accountable for all of the people in this area. So in the movie that Dr. Foley and I watched last night, the Polycarp movie, it's a great movie.

In it, Polycarp is always having conversations with people. The governor, he talks with the governor. He's talking in the marketplace.

But always he's having spiritual conversations with people. So definitely not a relational kind of evangelism. It's not relational, it's not confrontational.

It is really dealing with people about their spiritual condition. In this book, in chapter 12, the last book on missions, there's some material that I think can be helpful in that regard. Let's have one final question.

I think it's interesting, Tim Keller from Redeemer Presbyterian Church in New York. He's a famous American pastor who has really suffered a lot lately in his reputation. Simply because he believes in traditional marriage.

And he's not even out there as an activist. And that's why, as I say, I think these are the things that megachurch pastors are going to face. Even if they're not activists, they're going to be asked these questions.

They're going to be challenged. They're going to be the first targets to both change their theology or to be challenged publicly and ridiculed and humiliated. So I think Tim Keller, though, he provides an interesting model.

Interesting model. They're dividing up Redeemer and Presbyterian into four separate congregations. Not like regional campuses, just like that.

But they're recognizing the value in reducing their size. Now, they're doing it for very different reasons than we're talking about. But many of the principles are the same.

The changing role of the pastor. The purpose of the church. The megachurch model works really well for the generation that is just now completing the megachurch model.

But it has some real challenges ahead of it. Especially in churches with declining numbers of young people. But to have that level of expenses is very hard.

They have to spend a lot of money on their buildings and the pastors. So I think that Redeemer model is a good example. That's a megachurch that's dealing with not exactly the same issues but related issues, and this is how they are solving that.

So I think that can be a good model for a Korean megachurch. I'm going to take just one more question because you both raised your hands at the same time. I think that's true.

People always ask the question, is this about a house church model? And the short answer is no. It's really designed to be... We think that these issues are going to affect all kinds of Korean churches, megachurches, traditional churches, house churches. And each of those kinds is going to face the challenges a little bit differently.

So we at Voice of the Martyrs, our goal is to be supportive of all the different models. So as you noted, a house church is different than a church that is focused on the household as the basic unit. Those are not the same things.

Because some house churches still have a very traditional pastoral model, some don't. But thank you for that point. It's a good way for us to be able to draw things to a conclusion to say that really, first of all, we're thankful for you all coming tonight.

Hopefully you found some things tonight that you agreed with and some things that you disagreed with. It wouldn't be a very interesting conversation if you just agreed with everything. It would not be an interesting conversation if you agreed with everything.

But our goal is to have the conversation. It's to promote it. It's to get all Korean Christians and churches to take these issues seriously.

And if there's one overarching theme in everything that we say, it's just that encouragement to say, don't get caught up into that business of being an activist or opposing the sexual revolution or homosexual marriages, the focus of your Christian faith. Our focus really always needs to be how can we be fully Christian in every circumstance, even the most difficult ones. A few things in terms of resources available to you for the future.

Several people here tonight, we've already visited their churches to share this message. Either in a revival format or a preaching format. So we're happy to come and speak.

Second of all, the first book in this series, Preparing for the Underground Church, this is the one to read if we're trying to understand the historical theological reasons about why the sexual revolution is such a challenge to the church in Korea. So each of these, what's the price on these? 5,000 won? Is that what it is? We try to price them as cheaply as possible. If you can't afford one, let me know.

I'll buy you a copy. We want everyone to read these. Some of our other traditional Voice of the Martyrs books are in the back.

Our books on North Korea, our books on Chester Wombrin, our devotionals, daily devotionals. But the main thing, I really want to make sure before you leave, if you want to stay in touch with us, please complete, go ahead and hold that up, Ms. Kim, the brochure. We do now a prayer partner update in English and one in Korean.

And that has always the most updated information on events, articles that we think you should read. And so we'll be doing events like this in the future. So again, thank you for coming.

If you want to make a donation to the ministry, there's a box in the back. We use it to do stuff like this. We use the donations to do events like this.

And books like this. As well as our North Korea work that you may know about. Our work with persecuted Christians around the world.

So we don't take an offering, but if you want to give as you go, we'll always take an offering. So I'm going to ask our board member, Pastor Kim, who's here tonight, if he would come and close us in. He's got to find a way out there.

He's got to go underground. As the people of God and as the disciples of Jesus Christ, how should we live? In the midst of this changing situation, what kind of attitude should we have? Should we believe in God and follow Jesus Christ? Let us think about that again. And through that message, give us a chance to look back at our position and direction.

Thank you for giving us a chance to look back at our position and direction. We will pray according to the message you gave us. And we will follow the message, and follow the truth of Jesus Christ, so that we can live fully as true Christians.

Thank you, Father, for giving us this precious time. And bless the voice of the Korean missionaries, Pastor Paul and President Paul, and all the staff. Amen.

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Video: [https://sermonindex2.b-cdn.net/\\_NlkSZzxQr8.mp4](https://sermonindex2.b-cdn.net/_NlkSZzxQr8.mp4)

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