**Healthy Church Life**

Many of us will have been part of churches for years, but could we identify the markers of what makes a healthy church...healthy? Mike will be taking us on a journey through the book of Acts, taking snapshots to see what God’s church looks like and covering six key areas he believes are vital to seeing churches thrive today.

**Mike Betts** leads Relational Mission, a network of churches which is part of the global Newfrontiers family. He is the author of *From the Inside Out*, *Relational Mission: A Way of Life,* and *The Prayers of Many*. Mike is passionate about the church enjoying her inheritance in Christ, involving church planting, gospel expansion, corporate prayer, and seeing the next generation grow into all that God has for them. Mike is married to Sue, and they live in Lowestoft, Suffolk, UK. He is part of the eldership team at Lowestoft Community Church, which he, Sue, and a number of others planted over 30 years ago. At that time Mike and Sue sought help and advice from Terry Virgo, who had begun to serve emerging churches. Terry’s work and relationships with churches became the start of Newfrontiers. In 2011, Terry handed over responsibility for Newfrontiers to a number of his spiritual sons, and Mike began to lead the network that is now Relational Mission. Relational Mission works predominantly in the UK and mainland Europe but with growing connections across the world. Its network includes some 70 churches of which 30 are church plant and pioneering situations.

1. **Word and Spirit**
	1. Acts 19:9-12 – Tyrannus

**‘**And he entered the synagogue and for three months spoke boldly, reasoning and persuading them about the kingdom of God. But when some became stubborn and continued in unbelief, speaking evil of the Way before the congregation, he withdrew from them and took the disciples with him, reasoning daily in the hall of Tyrannus. This continued for two years, so that all the residents of Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks.

And God was doing extraordinary miracles by the hands of Paul, so that even handkerchiefs or aprons that had touched his skin were carried away to the sick, and their diseases left them and the evil spirits came out of them.’

1. **Grace and Worship**
	1. Grace

The foundation of our faith is the remarkable grace of God to us. This is not just a belief, but something that affects the whole atmosphere and activity of church life with each other, thus liberating law and crushing legalism.

* 1. Worship
		1. Worship is about encounter! Grace brings us near and we realise that we are not just forgiven but adopted.
		2. The reason for justification
		3. Family language and experience

*‘What matter supremely, therefore, is not, in the last analysis, the fact that I know God, but the larger fact which underlies it – the fact that He knows me. I am graven on the palms of His hands. I am never out of His mind. All my knowledge of Him depends on His sustained initiative in knowing me. I know Him, because He first knew me, and continues to know me. He knows me as a friend, one who loves me; and there is no moment when His eye is off me, or His attention distracted from me, and no moment, therefore, when His care falters.*

*This is momentous knowledge. There is unspeakable comfort – the sort of comfort that energises, be it said, not enervates – in knowing that God is constantly taking knowledge of me in love, and watching over me for my good. There is tremendous relief in knowing that His love to me is utterly realistic, based at every point on prior knowledge of the worst about me, so that no discovery now can disillusion Him about me, in the way I am so often disillusioned about myself, and quench His determination to bless me. There is, certainly, great cause for humility in the thought that He sees all the twisted things about me that my fellow-men do not se (and I am glad!), and that He sees more corruption in me than that which I see in myself, (which, in all conscience, is enough). There is, however, equally great incentive to worship and love God in the thought that, for some unfathomable reason, He wants me as His friend and desires to be my friend and has given His son to die for me in order to realise this purpose. We cannot work these thoughts out here, but merely to mention them is enough to show how much it means to know, not merely that we know God, but that He knows us.’* Knowing God J. I. Packer

*‘Ecstasy and delight are essential to the believer’s soul and they promote sanctification We were not meant to live without spiritual exhilaration and the Christian who goes for a long time without the experience of heart-warming will soon find himself tempted to have his emotions satisfied from earthly things and not, as he ought, from the Spirit of God. The soul is so constituted that it craves fulfilment from things outside itself and will embrace earthly joys for satisfaction when it cannot reach spiritual ones. The believer is in spiritual danger if he allows himself to go for any length of time without tasting the love of Christ and savouring the felt comforts of a Saviour’s presence. When Christ ceases to fill the heart with satisfaction, our souls will go in silent search of other lovers. By the enjoyment of the love of Christ in the heart of a believer, we mean an experience of the ‘love of God shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given to us’ (Romans 5:5). Because the Lord has made himself accessible to us in the means of grace, it is our duty and privilege to seek this experience from Him in these means till we are made the joyful partakers of it.’* John Flavel

*‘It often happens that I lose myself…in one of the petitions of the Lord’s prayer, and then I let all the other six petitions go. When such good resounding thoughts come, one should listen to them. For here the Holy Spirit himself is preaching and one word of His sermon is better than a thousand of our own prayers. So if the Holy Spirit should come and begin to preach to your heart, giving you rich and enlightened thoughts…be quiet and listen to him.* Luther

1. **Prayer and Mission**
	1. Prayer and mission should be engine rooms of church life, with everything else flowing in the wake of these. Yet, they are often the two weakest areas in Western church life.
2. **Truth and Calling – Good Foundations**
	1. There is a unique fingerprint of calling on each local church
	2. Letters to the churches in Revelation
	3. Epistles unique context
3. **One New Humanity in Christ**
	1. Great attentiveness given to both inclusivity and diversity
4. **Thriving in Adversity**
	1. Not always in trial – they ‘enjoyed the favour of all the people.’ Acts 2:47
		1. 1 Peter 4:12 ‘Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you.’
		2. Acts 8:1 ‘And there arose on that day a great persecution against the church in Jerusalem, and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles.’
		3. Acts 11:19 ‘Now those who were scattered because of the persecution that arose over Stephen traveled as far as Phoenicia and Cyprus and Antioch, speaking the word to no one except Jews. But there were some of them, men of Cyprus and Cyrene, who on coming to Antioch spoke to the Hellenists[[c](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Acts+11&version=ESV#fen-ESV-27315c)] also, preaching the Lord Jesus. **21**And the hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number who believed turned to the Lord. **22**The report of this came to the ears of the church in Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas to Antioch. **23**When he came and saw the grace of God, he was glad, and he exhorted them all to remain faithful to the Lord with steadfast purpose.’
		4. 3 chapters – 10 years. God’s church will always thrive in and through adversity.