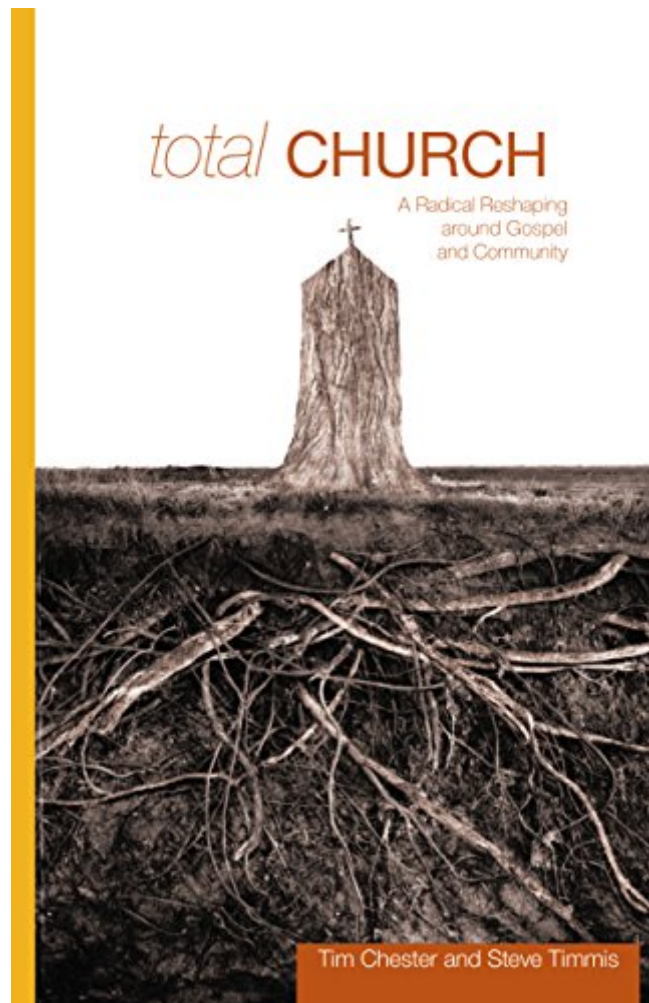




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Total Church: A Radical Reshaping Around Gospel And Community (Re: Lit Books)



Synopsis

"Church is not a meeting you attend or a place you enter," write pastors Tim Chester and Steve Timmis. "It's an identity that is ours in Christ. An identity that shapes the whole of life so that life and mission become 'total church.'" With that as their premise, they emphasize two overarching principles to govern the practice of church and mission: being gospel-centered and being community-centered. When these principles take precedence, say the authors, the truth of the Word is upheld, the mission of the gospel is carried out, and the priority of relationships is practiced in radical ways. The church becomes not just another commitment to juggle but a 24/7 lifestyle where programs, big events, and teaching from one person take a backseat to sharing lives, reaching out, and learning about God together. In *Total Church*, Chester and Timmis first outline the biblical case for making gospel and community central and then apply this dual focus to evangelism, social involvement, church planting, world missions, discipleship, pastoral care, spirituality, theology, apologetics, youth and children's work. As this insightful book calls the body of Christ to rethink its perspective and practice of church, it charts a middle path between the emerging church movement and conservative evangelicalism that all believers will find helpful.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Total Church is one of the best books I've read in a long time and may be THE best books I've read on church. As the subtitle suggests, the authors argue that church is to be radically reshaped around gospel and community. They argue for three things: "Christian practice must be (1) gospel-centered in the sense of being word-centered, (2) gospel-centered in the sense of being mission-centered, and (3) community-centered." (p. 16) The authors immediately nail their colors to the mast, distinguishing their perspective from both conservative evangelicals and the emerging church. With emerging church, they agree that conservatives are often bad at community. But with conservatives, they agree that the emerging church is sometimes soft on truth. This book proposes an alternative to both, churches that are both gospel-centered (with both a word-centered focus and a missional focus) and community-centered. "Rigorously applying these principles has the potential to lead to some fundamental and thoroughgoing changes in the way we do church," warn the authors (p. 18). This is no entrenched defense of traditional church structures or practices. I found the book stimulating, eye-opening, paradigm-shifting, and sometimes personally-threatening. Total Church is divided into two parts. I. Part one is on "Gospel and Community in Principle" and argues for each in turn. Chapter one, "Why Gospel?" discusses both word and mission. "Christianity must be word-centered," the authors argue, because "God rules through his gospel word" (p. 24) and "mission-centered because God extends his rule through his gospel word" (p. 28). These assertions are fleshed out with close, but non-technical, attention to the text of Scripture, and real-life stories that show how the principles work out in practice. In fact, two of the strengths of this book are the pervasive use of Scripture and the multiple stories and examples of application. Chapter 2, "Why Community?" argues that "The Christian community is central to Christian Identity" (p. 39) and "Christian mission" (p. 47). II. Part Two of the book focuses on "Gospel and Community in Practice," by applying the principles of part one (being word-centered, mission-centered, and community-centered) to the following areas: *Evangelism (chapter 3) *Social Involvement (4) *Church Planting (5) *World Mission (6) *Discipleship and Training (7) *Pastoral Care (8) *Spirituality (9) *Theology (10) *Apologetics (11) *Children and Young People (12) *Success (13) There are too many helpful insights from these chapters to share in a brief review. But here are some examples from the chapter on evangelism. The authors argue that there are "three strands of evangelism" (1) building relationships, (2) introducing people to community, and (3) sharing the gospel (p. 60-61). Their approach is holistic, relational, and driven by genuine concern for both the gospel and people. You won't find gimmicks or techniques here. In their words, "most gospel ministry involves ordinary people doing ordinary things with gospel intentionality" (p. 63). Evangelism is to be a community

project, which means that "our different gifts and personalities can complement one another. Some people are good at building relationships with new people. Some are socialites - the ones who will organize a trip or an activity. Some people are great at hospitality. Some are good at initiating gospel conversations. Some are good at confronting heart issues" (p. 62). A team approach combines the various gifts, which helps counter the guilt and despondency so many people feel when thinking about evangelism. "By making evangelism a community project, [we] take seriously the sovereign work of the Holy Spirit . . . Everyone has a part to play - the new Christian, the introvert, the extrovert, the eloquent, the stuttering, the intelligent, the awkward. I may be the one who has begun to build a relationship with my neighbor, but in introducing him to community, it is someone else who shares the gospel with him. That is not only legitimate - it is positively thrilling!" (p. 62). As you can see, this approach focuses on all three priorities: the word, mission, and community. This is how the authors approach each of the eleven topics listed above. I can hardly recommend this book highly enough. I will be sharing it with my staff, elders, and other church leaders (I'm a pastor). I'll also be talking about this book with friends, exploring how to apply it in our congregational life, and referencing it often. If you want a fresh approach to church and mission that doesn't lose sight of the gospel and isn't just a plug-n-play program, get this book. You'll be glad you did.

Great book.... but. It's concerning that they quote Calvin at least three times. Not that everything Calvin said was bad I just find it hard to believe anyone would quote him. overall the book was well written and scripture rich. Well written and a great read, other than the Calvin quotes that turn my stomach.

Helped redefine the concept of church. The authors bless the reader by reeling in the concept of the Body. It clearly lays out the problem of today's local gatherings as they have drifted into program and human tradition, and away from the harbor of the Gospel.

My wife and I just finished this great book. It was recommended to me by a church planter. I am so encouraged with the ideas and fresh approaches to ministry. It is a book that keeps Christ at the center of all we do. I loved this book and would recommend it to anyone that is seeking a more authentic Christianity where living life in gospel community is so attractive to the unsaved observer that they truly will long to have what we have. Behind the method is the man. Any methods we choose to follow are secondary to Christ Himself. When Christ forms all our theology and practice

the church will be triumphant in producing true disciples who will be driven by Christ as the Master of their lives. Daniel G McKenney

I enjoyed this book completely. It wasn't "earth shattering" for me, but it was a great reminder that the New Testament Church was lived out in community. The Gospel of Jesus Christ is lived out in community. We can not do it on our own. I think that the concept was summed up in the chapter on Church Planting when the authors remind us that "lone rangers" are not what church planting is all about, it's about the community of Christ working together. There are three principles that are pointed out throughout the book. They are; 1. Gospel-centered through God's word. 2. Gospel-centered through mission (action) 3. community-centered. The Gospel is who we are and is displayed in how we live. The authors state that "True theology leads to love, mission and doxology." Again this is nothing earth shattering, but I think we have a tendency to loose sight of the goal because of "programs" that we think and feel will deliver the Gospel. We have to be reminded that no one comes to Christ through a "program", they come to Christ through the Gospel message. So, how is that message delivered. Total Church delivers it's message in two sections. Part One deals with the concept of Gospel and Community. Part Two deals with the practice of Gospel and Community. Even the authors say that the message is simple, but frankly we Christians take what is simple and make it complex. For the early Jewish Community the ten commandments turned into 683 rules to live by. For us today the Gospel Message has turned into 100's of programs. Don't let programs push out living in community and living out the Gospel. In other words, don't loose sight of the forest because of all the trees. Enjoy this easy to read but profound thesis.

I have to say that hearing about such a nontraditional church was challenging and refreshing. It gave the vantage point of how a "successful" church has been constructed over in Europe, and the subtle cultural differences painted a picture of a much different style of how to construct a church. I would have to take some issue with the approach to counseling as it seemed to over step some boundaries about when a member would need to be referred to a professional counselor. I am all in favor of the community loving and supporting that person, but there is a time and place for a person struggling with major issues to get professional assistance that is not readily available within every church.

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