

God is speaking, prophetically...

Steve started by discussing the importance of weighing and responding in faith to prophetic words that God brings to us, in the overall mix of finding God's direction for a church or initiative.

He then brought our attention to three prophetic words that had been given over a number of months to the European Apostolic Team, each with the same thrust. He set these in the context they were given, particularly the final word from Ally Kay (for the full story, please read Steve's August 2007 letter at www.saltlight.org/banner):

- Tony Gray (Teesside):

"Gather the battalions. We have marauding bands here and there. But God said gather them; gather the battalions, with a trumpet call, for strength.

"The generals (by this he meant EAT) are the needle and thread, bringing a sense of cohesion to the troops, not just sitting at the planning table, but addressing the troops in the different parts of the army. Is this gathering perhaps behind a new banner?"

- Dave Oliver (Basingstoke):

"We need to move from being 'static Salt & Light' to respond to the missional challenge. Although we have been trying to change over the last 5 years, we still need to 'rebrand'."

- Ally Kay (Kent/Calais):

"On Saturday night when the flute was played it was as if there was a calling of the troops to battle. An ordering and an organising; a putting into ranks, into lines and the forming of the men into regiments and battalions.

"And so the call goes out to line up alongside, to come under authority – a call to the banner.

"A call to structure, a call out of independence and a call into unity under the banner. The family becomes a movement; the movement becomes a regiment."

The European Apostolic Team is of one heart and mind that God is speaking through these prophetic words.

Our DNA of diversity...

A key aspect of our foundation and DNA has been diversity! This has been our ethos over the years: "We need to trust God to speak to each leadership and church as he leads, rather than lead through any centralised authority." It's our default mode, as a team and as a family of churches. It has been our great strength, but can tend at the same time to be our great weakness!

Yet, it seems that this weakness is the very thing that God is after as he speaks to us! He doesn't want to change the strength of our diversity, but he is challenging the accompanying weakness of practical independence.

Some steps we have agreed

As we (EAT) talked we felt an urgency from the Lord to agree some specific steps, rather than just say 'yes' in principle, and then let it drift.

1. A 2-year window for change

Our culture will take time to change. This is what God is after more than anything else. We're aiming for some clear change by our next 28:18 in 2009.

2. Working on both culture and structures – at the same time

Culture is hard to change. Structures are easier to change, but may help us change our culture. We're committed to work on both!

3. Recasting vision

God is not after changing our vision, but it maybe has a fresh clarity that we might express like this:

*“We are hearing a fresh call from Christ
to plant and strengthen churches
that preach and demonstrate the gospel,
and impact local communities with the power of God’s kingdom.”*

4. A new culture of cohesion

We want to work on our cohesion through the following areas:

- Prioritising time together (e.g. Prayer and Fasting times are the building blocks of what we want to do – a fresh call to prioritise these days);
- Strengthening intergenerational connections and leadership;
- Seeking *unity* of purpose, not *uniformity* of practice;
- Work towards *cohesion*, not *control*.

5. Increasing connection

‘Battalions’ not ‘Bands’: Tony Gray’s word spoke of marauding bands becoming battalions in an army; the battalions each have their own distinctives and unique part to play – but they are part of a bigger army, with a unity of purpose.

Training regularly together, e.g. by gathering our year-team programmes

6. Develop new UK and European teams

We have been talking for some time about developing a new European team involving mainland European leaders and those in the UK with a particular focus into the mainland; and developing a new UK team, with a clear focus on planting and supporting UK churches. We feel this should be one of our 2 year goals.

7. External help

At key points of transition, a local church will often ask for apostolic input from others. At this time of change, we are asking for some external input from some apostolic ministries that we trust, and have confidence in coming with no particular agenda, other than to help us find the mind of God.

8. Administration suitable for the times!

We are clear that we need an administration suitable for the times, and with both capacity and the right skills to facilitate our development over the coming 2 years. We will be adding to our team ‘in faith’, and asking God to release the finances over the coming months.

In conclusion: 3 principles of change

- “If we don’t go forwards, we’ll end up going backwards!”

In Mark 2:18 “John’s disciples and the Pharisees were fasting...” See how they’ve been lumped together, which is quite bizarre, considering how anti-Pharisee John was. They’ve ended up going backwards into an alliance with the Pharisees. *We must respond to what God is saying to us!*

- “Culture is one of the hardest things to change!”

Fasting was in their genes. They found it hard to let go, even though Jesus came saying “It’s a party!” (Mark 2:19). *There is a new culture God wants for us, letting go of our independence.*

- “If we don’t change everything we’ll lose everything!”

Mark 2:21 speaks of the need for new wineskins for new wine, a picture we understand to speak of the need for new ways of thinking and structuring when God is doing something new!

We *must* respond to what God is saying to us, if we agree that he’s speaking!

As the prophetic word came earlier (during our Prayer Day): As at Jericho, it’s our shout *in response* to the trumpet that causes the walls to fall. Will we shout ‘yes’ in response to God’s fresh word to our family of churches?