



Jan/Feb 2013

ASKing Point is a bi-monthly communication on behalf of ASK Network International. It is an invitation to join the network of prayer throughout the nations, ASKing and agreeing regarding key issues on God's heart. It is a tool for prayer, a place for testimony to God's faithfulness in answering, and a gift of worship to the Living God.

ASKING FOR THE CHURCH

What are we meant to ask of God for the church? Behind that question are other possible questions. What is the church? What is the church meant to be? What is the church meant to do? Clearly, we must rightly discern the nature of the church, if we are going to know what nurtures its life, and therefore know what to ask for. The New Testament abounds with passages that give us a sure scriptural basis for asking God for what he desires for the church. What you often find in these passages are metaphors, images that are used to help us understand what the church is like. One very good way to develop an ask-list for the church is to construct a list of all the images for the church that you can find in scripture and begin your asking by **asking yourself** what the image is teaching in the context in which it is used. Study its use and then meditate on it, and write down all the things that this encourages you to ask the Lord for, so that the church can be "like that." Like what? Like that bride, like that flock, like that vine and on and on. Let's take 1 Corinthians 3 as an example. Paul uses three distinct images here, that describe the nature of the church, and stimulate our asking for her.

1. **A family:** The chapter opens with the image of Paul as a parent, feeding a child. The imagery of the family is essential to Paul's ecclesiology and is both more dominant and more influential than the image of "the body." Even the word "ecclesia" that is used to refer to a gathering of Christians who have been called out from where they were and called in to Christian community life, is less theologically significant than the family images that Paul employs. He has already told the Ephesians that they are "members of God's household" (2:19). "Ecclesia" is like the front door but the family image tells you what goes on inside. This immediately focuses our asking, less on the action of gathering, than on the attitudes and affections and aspirations of those who gather. The focus is also on asking for those things that truly reflect the realities of God's life as Father of the family. Asking for a revelation and an experience of the fathering of God is crucial to a healthy church family. Our capacities to be brothers and sisters to one another in the unity of familial life are totally conditioned by our assurances as sons and daughters of Abba. Sonship is primary. So let's ask for an experience of the spirit of adoption that delivers people from living in the church as slaves and orphans, and frees them to live as sons and daughters, and therefore as loving brothers and sisters. It is only in this kind of family context that we can grow to maturity. Members of a family need to be fed, as Paul suggests here, so we must ask for the spiritual nutrition of the family, that those who lead will be empowered to feed. Paul's longing is that the family "become mature" and that they "will no

longer be infants.” We need to ask that the family will spend more time at the kitchen table feeding on the meat of the Word. Sadly, more church time is spent on the equivalent of a family room in which the media of programmatic entertainment predominate.

2. **A field:** This image is not original to Paul as it was used by Jeremiah and Ezekiel when they described Israel being planted and ploughed, weeded and watered. The emphasis is on the owner of the field, God himself! “So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow.” This gives us great expectation to ask unashamedly and boldly for incredible increase and growth. If “food” was the key asking point for the family image, then “fruit” is the key asking point for the field image. And in this field, the passage tells us some of the things we need: a diversity of giftings (sowers, planters, waterers, reapers) and a unity of conviction and co-operation, purpose and practice (he that plants and waters are one). We are asking for nothing less than what Jesus himself spoke about in John 15:2 — “fruit...more fruitful...much fruit...”

3. **A facility:** This is described as a building, as a house, as a temple. From a family of brothers Paul moves to a facility of bricks (Peter’s “living stones”). He combines the agricultural and architectural images and now talks of a building that grows. He is not talking about what we call “plant” when we describe our physical buildings, or what has been described as the church’s “edifice complex”. What defines this sense of place is two things: the presence of the living God and the presence of his people in that presence. So our asking focuses on those things that attract his presence, those things that make for a holy habitation, those things that are consistent with the dwelling place of the Lord Most High who does not live in houses made by men (Acts 7:48) but in the hearts of those who have consecrated themselves to Him, who are fitly framed in the building, related to the cornerstone that is Jesus and the foundation of the teachings of the apostles and prophets. (Ephesians 2:19-22) So if the family is about food, and the field is about fruit, then the facility image is all about the foundation, about what makes for a holy structure.

Let’s begin our asking for the church with these three images: family, field and facility. We will be asking for specifics that sustain and maintain the spiritual food supply, that produce a harvest of fruit, and that lay a good foundation that cannot be moved. Under each of these headings, begin to write out the specific things you are asking for in each of these areas for your local and national church and her leadership. *Lord, we ask together for the family to know your fathering and your feeding; for the field to be fertile and fruitful; for the foundation to be firm so that the building may grow and be a place of your presence, so that it will be a place where people love to be present. Amen.*

— *Stuart McAlpine*

P.S. Don’t forget to start that ask-journal with all the images that are used for the church, with all your study and meditation notes that you then summarize in your personal ask-list for your church, and the church nationally and globally.

TRUTH IN ACTION!

Your prayers at work.

After you have read this article prayerfully, following the instructions given in the last paragraph, then turn the truth of the scriptures listed into prayer. ASKING for the Church is the most important thing you can do:

- Preparing the Bride for the Bridegroom
- Praying for the mature disciples
- Providing a safe haven for the lost

Meditate in 1 Corinthians 3

What are the needs of the Church?

ASK for the family

Meditate in **Ephesians 2:19-22**

How will the family grow strong? What will be the result of the family being built up?

ASK for the field

Meditate in **John 15: 1-5**

What will make the Church fruitful? List the specific things that must be asked for.

ASK for the facility

Meditate in **Acts 7: 48-50**

What is the ultimate purpose of the Church?

An Overview of ASK Network International in 2013

Vision:

Gathering all generations to pray for all nations,
Asking God to do what only He can do and
Doing whatever He asks of us

Mission:

To do the will of the Father

Meditate on these scriptures. Take some time out to pray with fasting if possible. **ASK the Father to show what is His will for you** within the calling of ASK Network this year.

John 4:34-35 *"My food," said Jesus, "is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work... open your eyes and look at the fields! They are ripe for harvest."*

Matthew 12:50 *For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother.*

Matthew 7:20-21 *Thus, by their fruit you will recognize them. "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven."*

Structure:

Structure is needed to accomplish Vision and implement Mission.

The structure of any house relies on good foundations and good framework. Of course unless the Lord builds the house we build in vain. We trust our foundation is always Jesus, the Logos, and that our framework is the outworking of doing His will. How we accomplish this is through worship, biblical meditation and prayer with fasting.

In the first four years of ASK Network's establishment, 2008-2012, we have been grateful how the Lord has led us and blessed us. We need to steward all God has done but also press forward into all God has for us, into the will of God. One of the chief tasks is to steward the human resources God has graced us with. We want to reintroduce the International Leadership again so you are aware of those who pray for you and seek to serve you. The Continental Directors are all part of the International Team, but they will be communicating with you directly if your nation is part of their continent.

International Directors: Stuart & Celia McAlpine

International Outreach: Martie Hunter

International Administration and Web Management: Ellen Smith

International Generational Link: Margie Drye

African Continental Directors: Charles & Miriam Kaloki

European Continental Directors: Charlie & Anita Cleverly

North American Continental Directors: Graeme & Beverley Coad

Ambassadors-at-Large: Reona Joly, George Otis

Web Teaching Resources: Tryna Bahl