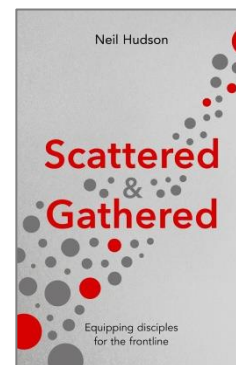


Neil Hudson  
**Scattered & Gathered**  
Equipping Disciples for the Front Line

IVP 2019

Summary by [Alison Morgan](#)



Rev Dr Neil Hudson is the Director of Church Relationships for the London Institute for Contemporary Christianity. He leads a team of consultants who inspire church leaders who want to grow whole-life disciple making communities. Their website is <https://www.licc.org.uk>.

This book is the latest in a helpful series from the LICC, following on from Neil Hudson's [Imagine Church](#) (IVP 2012) and Mark Greene's [Fruitfulness on the Frontline](#) (IVP 2014). Click on the titles for summaries.

*Scattered & Gathered* offers a simple challenge: we should see church not as a pastorally-focussed unit of people who meet together for worship and support, but as a missionally-focussed gathering of people who follow and serve Jesus in their daily lives – or, as Neil puts it, on their frontlines. The gathering is not an end in itself, but a way of resourcing the effective and fruitful scattering of individual Christians within the community.

The implications of this way of thinking about church are profound. The conventional view of the local church is that is there to serve and support its members, who in turn will be invited to assume various responsibilities within it in order to assure its smooth running. This means in practice that mission is really about recruitment (or even financial sustainability), and that the key task for the church leader is to persuade people to join the church and volunteer for roles within it – Christianity by rota. The LICC view is that this is an unhealthy and inverted way of thinking about church: the real setting for the personal growth and fruitful ministry of church members is to be found not in their Sunday roles or their weekday volunteering for church-led programmes, but in their position as disciples of Jesus Christ in the daily lives they already have – in their families, neighbourhoods and workplaces. The key responsibility of the gathered church thus becomes to resource and encourage its scattered members to be confident and fruitful in the roles they already have.

*Scattered & Gathered* comes out of the LICC's focus on three questions:

- What does it mean to be a disciple of Jesus?
- What sort of churches grow these sort of disciples?
- What sort of leaders serve these sort of churches?

Having highlighted the three questions, Neil explains:

*I want to start by focusing on the central task of the church. I believe that the church's primary vocation is to make disciples of Jesus. If we can keep that at the forefront, then we can explore how our life together as church communities serves that goal. And if that's clear, then the role of leaders becomes much clearer too.*

*But it is important to note that I am talking about people becoming a certain type of disciple. I have encountered so many people who have testified to the way their lives changed once they recognized that their everyday life, their 'sleeping, eating, going-to-work, and walking-around life' (Romans 12:1, MSG), fits into God's plan for his world. These epiphanies happen in all sorts of ways, but they are often defined by a sense of joy at a new purpose, a renewed enthusiasm for the places where they work and live, and a desire to know how to serve God faithfully in all the different stages of life. It has been absolutely liberating, and more people need to experience this good news for themselves.*

*As a church leader myself, it's what I want for everyone who belongs to my church community. But, too often, the inner life of the church - rotas, services, meetings and more - become the urgent things and so get most of my time and attention. And that is the challenge. It's easy for church life to take on a life of its own and become a resource-hungry machine that means Christians don't feel fruitful unless they are serving that machine.*

*We need to break this pattern.*

*If our hope is that all worshippers will see the significance of their own lives as part of the mission of God, our life together as a church community has to change. That will have implications for church leaders - lay and ordained, paid and unpaid, full-time and voluntary. If Christian leadership is fundamentally about service to the wider body of Christ, there needs to be a clarity about the qualities needed by leaders if the outcome of all that leadership is to be the fruitfulness of others. Leadership is vital, but we need to know what the fruit of all our leadership should be.*

*A quick scan of the above three issues is enough to show that it's impossible for one book to be exhaustive about any of these areas of concern, let alone all three, but what will be highlighted are these truths:*

- disciples are called not only to be loyal to Christ in their personal, private lives but also to live out the implications of the lordship of Christ in their everyday, public lives;*
- churches that support and nurture these sorts of disciples are communities that keep people's everyday contexts in the forefront of their planning of week-by-week ministry;*
- leaders of churches able to serve these churches are consistently curious about the lives of those they minister to - they ask certain kinds of questions, they act in certain kinds of ways and they see their own ministry through certain kinds of lenses.*

*Hopefully, by the end of this book, it will be very evident that, while this can sound obvious, basic and fundamental, many churches need more than good resources; they need a fundamental change of culture.*

*Most church leaders have always wanted people to live out their whole lives as authentic followers of Christ. Unintentionally, though, many have ministered in ways that suggest the really important acts of ministry happen when they are church-sponsored activities, the engagements of the gathered church. It's why many church leadership meetings are still dominated by items of business about gathered church activities. Reflections on worship services, issues around the building, fears about attendance, conversations about pastoral concerns, these are all worthy of discussion, but there are other, even more important issues that often get sidelined. Many church leadership teams still do not ask how their gathered church life is helping people in their scattered lives, nor how they need to respond as a church community in the light of these scattered contexts. Churches that do not take this into account are missing so much.*

*Most worshippers who spend much of their week away from gathered church activities know that being a Christian means there is a responsibility to live, act and speak differently, but they often do not know what that might mean in their particular setting. For some, that lack of clarity is allied to the sensitivities of identifying oneself as a person of faith in a society that increasingly suspects faith is the source of many problems, not the cure. So, it is not hard to understand why some struggle to know how they can live as confident disciples of Jesus in their own circles of family, friends and colleagues. We may know that we are the scattered church. We are sometimes not so certain as to what that can mean in practice.*

The book is structured as follows:

## **PART 1 : SCATTERED ON THE FRONTLINE**

*The primary calling of any church is to become a discipling community. Our common task is to help one another hear that compelling call of Jesus. Therefore, church leadership is primarily about enabling a community to create whole-life disciples.*

### **1. The invitation to whole-life discipleship**

It's easy for people to confuse an invitation to follow Jesus with an invitation to get involved in church activities. We need to learn the way of Jesus together; keep prayer central; explain clearly; invite people to follow Christ.

### **2. Developing vision for everyday disciples**

As followers of Jesus, we bring everything under his lordship, offering our everyday activities to him and supporting one another as we do so. One way of doing this is 'this time tomorrow' – asking people to share their frontline challenges at church.

### **3. Discovering the joy of frontline mission**

It's important that ministry on the frontline is not seen as a chore, a burden. It's about allowing Jesus to work with you and through you. It's about sharing hope.

## **PART II : GATHERED FOR FORMATION**

We are the body of Christ – a diverse, gifted group of people, a living, breathing demonstration of what Jesus is like.

#### **4. Worship that inspires us for the frontline**

Most Sunday gatherings are encounter-centred (people come expecting to meet with God) or education-centred (people come expecting to learn something). The temptations are a focus on feelings or a focus on information. Nothing actually changes in people's lives. Our worship needs to widen our imaginations, develop a different perspective on our different situations.

#### **5. Preaching that equips us for the frontline**

Preachers must make the connection between scripture and people's frontline contexts – the situations they face in their daily lives. They need to understand where it is that people spend most of their time, and what the challenges are.

#### **6. Small groups that encourage us for the frontline**

We know that small groups are effective – they have been shown to create confidence, the ability to connect faith with everyday life, strength in prayer, acceptance of others and closeness to God (see Roger Walton, [Disciples Together](#)). The group should be clear about its purpose – one model is to follow the 6 Ms outlined in *Fruitfulness on the Frontline*, focussing on our character, work, grace, culture, justice, and message.

#### **7. Friendships that sustain us on the frontline**

We all need friends – 'holy' friends, who will know us, challenge us, affirm us and dream with us. Friendships sustain our determination to be fruitful on our frontlines.

### **PART III : LEADING GATHERED CHURCH FOR SCATTERED LIFE**

#### **8. Encouraging clear partnerships**

Leaders need to join their church, developing partnership. Quote from Sweet: *'in one sense, the last thing the church needs is 'more vision'. The vision is Jesus. We need a vision for the kind of life we want, not a plan for the kind of church we want. A leader needs to help every person become a jigsaw piece – what are people already doing? How can we support one another in that? Encouraging people to have clarity on the difference between gathered church and scattered living helps to see how God uses all of our contributions. If the gathered church is the network of relationships that primarily help me grow in the ways of Jesus, our scattered lives are the locations where these skills are primarily put to use.* 165.

#### **9. Developing creative perseverance**

*Every member ministry can too easily be limited to filling up rotas instead of provoking the dispersed ministry of God's people throughout the city.*

*If the systemic life of the church is going to be shaped around the simple philosophy that the gathered life of the church is for the sake of the scattered people of God, rather than the other way round, leaders need to take a strategic role in making this sit at the heart of everyone's responsibilities.*

Nicholas Henshill (Dean of Chelmsford): *It is a missiological disaster, in which the priest becomes sheepdog, not shepherd, rounding up an ever smaller flock, and serving the perceived pastoral needs of an entitled and increasingly inward-facing group who have reconstructed worship as the cultivation of an esoteric spirituality rather than the clarion call to community engagement.* 182

#### **10. Clarifying constant progress**

*What I am proposing is that the way we help one another to serve God's purpose in our own places is by taking one another's lives really seriously... to embrace the places where we spend most of our time as the places that God has put us to live out the difference that following Jesus makes.*

What is measurable? How many TTT stories are shared over a year; how many visits you have made to meet people on their frontlines; how often you preach through the lens of the scattered church; whether the midweek groups have used resources which help them think about their frontlines; whether the church has prayed for people in new jobs; conversations about frontlines.

*If the church does not come to terms with the obvious fact that all our activities are not for our own sake, things will not change.*

### **REFLECTION AND RESOURCES - ALISON MORGAN**

Often we focus on the biblical passages about 'gifting' when we think about our contribution to the church; often we reassure ourselves that just 10% of the body of Christ are gifted as evangelists – and so everyone else can relax and get on with their secular lives and their contribution, if they have time for one, to the life of the gathered church. Neil

is calling for something more: that instead of asking 'what is my gift?', he is suggesting that we ask 'how do I follow and represent Jesus in my everyday life, and how can I support others as they do that too?' Key questions would seem to be:

1. **What is a disciple?** If a disciple is simply someone who has made a commitment of faith in Jesus (as in 'making new disciples') or, even more simply, a church member, then the gathered model is fine, and it's OK to see church as a weekly gathering which provides encounter/education. But if a disciple is someone who is following Jesus and asking themselves each day what it means that Jesus is beside them in this or that situation, then things change rather, and the focus moves outwards into the community. It stops being about gifts, and starts being about presence. And that in turn depends on whether Jesus is in fact present within and among us, or whether he's just a historical figure in whom we happen to believe. If we are indeed to move from a gathered to a scattered understanding of church, then the task of the church becomes to help people deepen their relationship with Jesus, deepen their relationships with one another, and allow who they are becoming to spill out into their encounters with their families, friends and colleagues – in a way which is authentic for them. I still remember the day when it occurred to me that instead of trying to tell my hairdresser about my faith, I could just take an interest in her and see what happened...
2. **What do we do on Sundays?** Some leaders feel it's best to rely on the tried and tested pattern of traditional church. The problem: for many would-be church members, that's boring – church attendance figures tell the story. Some leaders feel that it's best to break away from that, and offer something challenging, creative, all-age, well-resourced. The problem: that's resource-hungry – and tends to be possible only in large, city centre churches. To focus on people's frontlines may turn all that on its head – might it not bring a bit of a breakthrough for ministers and congregation alike?
3. **What kind of resources do we need?** Neil talks about making space for sharing, prayer and encouragement on Sundays, and he talks about the importance of midweek groups in which people support one another in the shared task of following Jesus in their everyday contexts. Above all, of course, he talks about having the courage to think about church differently. LICC provides both training and resources to facilitate these things – see below.

#### Resources from the LICC ([www.licc.org.uk/ourresources](http://www.licc.org.uk/ourresources))

The LICC website has a resources page with details of written, video and digital material. Click on the images to find out more, or on the publication links at the beginning of this article for summaries of their key publications.



*Frontline Sundays (new)*  
*Imagine Church*  
*Fruitfulness on the Frontline*

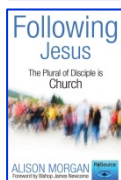
#### Resources from the Mathetes Trust (<https://mathetetrust.org/publications>)



*Beautiful Lives* is an 8 week small group course which helps people to focus on their everyday contexts – 1 Peter 3.2-4 speaks of the beauty and reverence which should characterise our lives as Christians, and this course is founded on the conviction that it is beautiful lives, lived in the power of the Holy Spirit, which point others most effectively to Jesus. Click on the image to find out more.



*Shining Like Stars* is the third in the group discipleship series *The God Who is There*. It focusses on what it means to live as effective Christian disciples in the midst of the challenges of daily life, and its aim is to equip people to live with compassion and integrity as Christians in the community and in the workplace. Click on the image to find out more.



Alison Morgan's *Following Jesus* "challenges us to think afresh about what it means to be a disciple of Jesus Christ and for churches to be communities where people help one another to develop their relationship with Him. A wise and prophetic book" Archbishop John Sentamu. Click to find out more.