

This excerpt is taken from uncorrected proofs. The text may change before the final edition is published. Please do not quote or circulate without express written permission from the publisher.

**Releases October 2007**

*intuitive*  
**LEADERSHIP**

EMBRACING A PARADIGM OF NARRATIVE, METAPHOR, AND CHAOS

TIM KEEL

The book *Intuitive Leadership* is © 2007 by Tim Keel



**BakerBooks**  
Grand Rapids, Michigan

# Contents

Foreword by Alan J. Roxburgh  
Acknowledgments  
Introduction

## Section 1: Entering Story

1. In the Beginning: Rediscovering the Power of Story  
A “Storied” Life • A “Storied” Faith • A Bible Story? • Our Missing Stories • An Unfolding Story
2. A Way in the Wilderness: Journeying toward a New Story  
The Cost of New Life • Meeting Jesus in His People • Living an *Organic* Way of Life • Losing What I Didn’t Know I Had • Finding a New Path • A *Kairos* Moment • Back to a Beginning
3. Making Sense of My Story: Interpretation and Experimentation  
Listening to My Life • Faith as a Way of Life in Community • Losing Community, Losing Faith • The Sins of Reductionism • Three Kinds of Experimentation • Telling the First Part of Our Story • Dreaming Up a Name for Ourselves
4. A Cautionary Leadership Parable: Recognizing an Alternate Temptation  
Resisting Change, Relying on Tradition • Israel in Transition • Of Arks and Totems • The Philistine Way • Success, Power, and Presumption • Moving toward Engagement







and sociologists to describe our cultural location and the flux in which we exist. These books sit atop bestseller lists and on the tables we pass when we enter local booksellers' stores—or perhaps more true to our time, their thumbnail images pop up when we open the Amazon.com webpage.

We are flooded with analysis that seeks to make sense of the tidal wave of change that has swept over the world in the last several years. Some of the analysis is cautionary and alarmist, warning of dire consequences facing us individually and collectively if we do not change our ways. Some of it is optimistic, holding visions of a chastened but nevertheless idealized utopian future secured through technology, human ingenuity, and willpower. And some of it is simply journalism, setting forth cautious and researched observations made from a particular angle that provide unique vantage points from which to survey broader issues affecting our cultural situation.

If we highlight only the writing coming out of those particular disciplines, we miss what is being expressed in and from the creative world. Response from the world of fine, graphic, and performing arts as well as the work of filmmakers, musicians, novelists, and poets has likewise been prolific, and while the creative world has given us less of an analysis of exactly *what* is happening, the arts have provided an expression for what it *feels* like to live in this quickly evolving world. In fact, some of the first intimations that reality as we have known it was fracturing came from the world of the imagination expressed in the cubist paintings of Picasso and Braque and the discordant, atonal compositions of modern composers at the turn of the last century. They have their contemporary equivalents, to be sure.

The book you hold in your hands is an example of the former genre of materials that describe, within the world of theology and faith, the ways in which our world is changing and how some people and communities and leaders are responding in ways different from what has come before. Of course theology

and faith and leadership are not practiced in a vacuum but in the same context of the larger network of issues and forces that so many of the books I describe are aimed at marking. As a result, *Intuitive Leadership* and other books in this genre are being written by people like myself who have sought (and continue to seek) to live life, express faith, and revitalize or birth new Christian communities in fresh and organic ways—as a response to God, our broader communities, and this emerging cultural context in which we are living. To do so we have become students of our world, including our individual places in it, in addition to being students of our Scriptures, theology, and church history.

This and other lines of books and resources come out of a particular cultural phenomenon within Christianity that is being labeled the “emerging church.” These nascent communities see themselves emerging from and into a world that is in transition (and will be for a very long time). While we do not know yet where or who we are fully, we nonetheless are increasingly able to say where and who we are not and what we are beginning to be.

At the most basic level within emerging churches, we recognize that the contexts and frameworks in which we have lived our lives and practiced our faith and expressed leadership are unalterably changed. Those within emerging church circles are not simply seeking to discover new techniques or methods proven in other places to grow megachurches, nor are we looking to retreat into a gloriously reimagined past. We want to engage where we are in creative and redemptive ways. In order to do this we are asking questions more fundamental than many of those asked by others likewise trying to engage the culture on Christ’s behalf.

For those of us lumped into this category of *emerging*, we know that we have experienced a shift in our cultural location, and we want to respond with integrity as natives of this new world, not as people trying to *reach* it. The growing tide

of relationships, communities, networks, and materials now available function to both name the change, mark some of its characteristics, and propose new understandings, frameworks, relational categories, and postures for engaging our way forward. The variety and diversity of responses to these realities function to illustrate the dynamic nature of the change we are undergoing.

I know such statements may strike some as inflated, if not grandiose. That is understandable. Change is the one constant, and the poet/philosopher of Ecclesiastes reminds us that in fact, there is nothing new under the sun. I don't deny this for a second. But does that automatically mean there are *no* times of unique change or upheaval when the broad frameworks and conceptual categories for how we understand our world and location in it should not be questioned? Is there really *nothing* different about this age? Do we suffer from some kind of age-related, era-centric hubris? Is it the case that this age is like every other that has preceded it? Is the phenomenon of the emerging church and the environment to which it is responding (a world in massive transition) overstated? I am tempted to liken those who think so to the proverbial ostrich with head neck-deep in sand—they respond to change by pretending there is nothing happening at all. In their insistence that all is as it has always been, they quickly make themselves irrelevant and are soon heard from no more. Time will ultimately be the judge.

But there is merit in questioning exactly what *is* happening: it needs to be allowed that the fact that our world and culture are experiencing transition does not mean that all people are experiencing that transition in the same way or on the same timeline. The transition we are experiencing is a staggered one: in some quarters the dynamics of the emerging world have been in effect for so long that for many there is little sense of a transition at all—this brave new world is all that is known. For others, the world and the way in which they live has ostensibly undergone very little change. In the same way as those native

to the emerging world, life in some cloistered quarters is as it has always been.

For most of us the reality is somewhere in-between. We lean more or less to one or the other end of the continuum, so there can never be a description or a solution that is one-size-fits-all. That aim itself is an example of modernity's hubris at work, which I will seek not only to deconstruct but also to move beyond into something that is hopefully more humble and more rooted in local context.

The truth is that one of the marks of this world to which we belong is that it is multifaceted, and characteristics that appear to be mutually exclusive in reality overlap all the time and defy any kind of easy categorization. Therefore any observation I make about the nature of life in the world around us must be made with humility and with the recognition that I describe a semblance of reality for only a small segment of people, in fact maybe only for myself. But that is where the broader community of which I am a part comes in.

We, the community of Jacob's Well Church, the broader community of the emerging church in general, and many of us connected to Emergent Village in particular are seeking to live life in common. We are in the process of responding to the lived context of our lives. Additionally, and critically, we have sought to abide creatively and faithfully within the lived narratives of our Scriptures and our history as a church through time. As we have done so, others have come alongside and found meaning and hope in our journey and in the many different ways it is being expressed. They have asked us to tell them our stories (but more often we have been asked to describe our "model"). So we have begun telling stories about the world in which we live and why, for increasing numbers of people, the world no longer makes sense in the same way it once did.

Telling these stories has begun to create meaning and new ways of understanding and living out our lives and our faith as disciples of Jesus Christ. Telling these stories has connected us



group that my book is primarily aimed. *Intuitive Leadership* lays out a story, a contextual understanding, and a paradigm for leadership that I hope will be useful to these brothers and sisters, for theirs is my tribe too.

Whichever your tribe or whatever your starting point let me clarify at the outset something of the nature of this book, specifically what this book is not. This book is not is a manual—a book of explicit instructions for operating a device or some other such machine. Manuals (leadership or otherwise) tell you at the beginning what you are going to learn and then provide the basic data to get you there in a step-by-step manner. Much of what is written in the genre of leadership could be classified within the framework of a manual. Such an approach toward leadership does have an implicit whiff of logic. If nothing else leaders are generally pragmatic, results-oriented creatures. Manuals are pragmatic guides that guarantee results—if you will simply do what they say. But therein lies the problem of leadership in a postmodern world: we need something beyond pragmatism. How can we be sure of the results we seek when who and where we are and what we are trying to do is no longer as obvious as it once might have been. In this context a manual is not only unhelpful, it is deceptive and dangerous.

Because leaders are being faced with profoundly different issues, circumstances, and contexts than what has come before, the ways in which we approach leadership must likewise be adjusted from previous approaches. In *Intuitive Leadership* I invite you to join me on a journey of exploration—the same journey that I undertook when all the paradigms for leadership and maps of the territory I found myself in proved to be, if not deceptively drawn, at least so out-of-date they were dangerous to myself and others. It is the journey that I believe every leader must undergo in one way or another if they want to engage God, themselves, and the world they are a part of.

I have divided this exploration into three parts as a sort of map that charts the trajectory of this journey. The first section







tion misrepresents more than it illuminates because for every bitter, angry, arrogant, and reactionary emerging person or community out there, I know ten hopeful, passionate, humble, and creative counterparts that are actively engaging God, themselves, their community and the larger context of the world in which they live. I also know that they are bearing fruit in these contexts. And that too draws attention.

It is also worth observing that many of the people who initially get excited about the conversation that is taking place around postmodernity do so because they perceive postmoderns as their next target to be *reached*. But for most of us in the conversation, that is not the goal. We aren't trying to reach anyone, at least not in the way that phrase and the energy behind it has been understood. Yet people are being reached. It is happening accidentally or, better, as a byproduct of something else. My experience tells me that when you try to *reach* someone or some group or some thing, you end up chasing not just a nonexistent caricature but the wrong thing altogether.

### **Exegeting the Experiences of Observers**

Because we have a Sunday night worship gathering, we experience a steady flow of leaders and groups who come to observe what is happening in our church. When I see such people and groups arrive at our church, I always have mixed feelings. I hope these people sometimes arrive hungry to meet God and participate in our life, but more often they show up impressed by an outward manifestation of that life, whether it be the size, the number of young people, the worship liturgy, or the creativity. They then seek to discover what is unique in our environment that they can then export to their churches in order to *reproduce* whatever particular manifestation of life they see in our community and long for in theirs. Such efforts are doomed to failure.

But when people come and worship with us, whatever their motivation, often something significant happens that most people aren't expecting. They have an encounter with God *among* us. That is not to say that every person who comes into our space and community has some kind of transcendent encounter and experiences something significant. Often people come and very quickly discover that there is nothing attractive to them about our church. But sometimes in the course of our time together some people there to *observe* stop watching as experts or leaders or spies or outsiders or tourists and actually begin participating as humans beings made to know God and people made in his image in the context of our community. When they snap out of it, they are usually confused. That is when I begin to hear stories. I have sat at countless meetings with people in Kansas City and all over the country and world and listened to people ask about or discuss their experience among us. As they do we begin to deconstruct their expectations and what they were coming for and then ultimately what happened and what the significance of that was—and what it means for them *in their context*.

People come to us and see the fruit, and they want to know *how*. I have spent a lot of this book describing the ways leaders have been trained to go questing for a silver bullet—a magical model or technique that, when placed in the barrel of their ministry gun and fired, will allow them to hit their target (some group of people their community is short on that they want to *reach*). In this scenario, emerging churches are the next stop on the “cutting-edge ministry tour” that began in the 1980s with the contemporary worship movement, went on to the small group movement, continued into the 1990s with the seeker-targeted church movement, and later evolved into packaged ministry expressions such as the Alpha evangelism ministry and Purpose-Driven Life curriculums like *40 Days of Purpose*. Let me give you an explicit example of this.

In the fall of 2006 our community was profiled in a large Christian magazine, *The Christian Century*, as an example of

an emergent church. In the issue that preceded the one that carried the Jacob's Well story, the last page of the magazine told readers that an upcoming issue would profile an emerging church. This teaser prompted one reader to email Jason Byassee, the editor responsible for the article. He writes:

I was just reading the latest edition of *The Christian Century* and noticed at the bottom that you have an article on the "emergent church" coming soon. I really look forward to that. Last week I attended a conference on worship our denomination put on. We heard the word "emergent" countless times, but after several hours of workshops and plenary discussions a classmate leaned over to me and said, "I still don't know what emergent worship is, but now I am convinced that neither do these presenters." It's true. I have heard these supposed experts and still have the looming question, "What in God's name is emerging worship?" My hunch is that it's not in God's name so much as it is in the name of meeting people's perceived needs, fueling our addiction to visual technologies and our ADHD culture, and mixing in a few ancient practices (a little incense burning here, a little chanting there) to make it seem edgy and new because the old edgy and new has ceased to be edgy and new these days. It was a total waste. Part of me wants to be wrong about emergent worship. Here's hoping that you can convince me I am wrong.<sup>3</sup>

Do you hear what is going on here? I edited out the silly experiential exercise that was given as an example of interactive preaching from the email because it was one more example of what is going on in the name of being relevant but in reality is too goofy and painful for me even to type. Emergent/emerging worship is being branded as the next new cutting-edge thing. Someone somewhere has extracted some principle of worship from some place and turned it into a technique that is being packaged now as "emergent." And here's the thing: it doesn't surprise me. It saddens me, mostly because I know the impetus and heart behind such attempts. I know the frustration and desperation many pastors feel leading their churches. Leaders



were looking for God. And they were looking for God in a way that was pure and integral enough to make everything they did and everything they touched give glory to God.

We cannot reproduce what they did because we approach the problem in a way that makes it impossible for us to find a solution. We ask ourselves a question that they never considered. How shall we build a beautiful monastery according to the style of some past age and according to the rules of a dead tradition? Thus we make the problem not only infinitely complicated but we make it, in fact, unsolvable. Because a dead style is a dead style. And the reason why it is dead is that the motives that once gave it life have ceased to exist. They have given place to a situation that demands another style. If we were intent upon loving God rather than upon getting a Gothic church out of a small budget we would soon put up something that would give glory to God and would be very simple and would also be in the tradition of our fathers.<sup>4</sup>

Merton is talking about a community of monks in the twelfth century who were seeking God. And from this primary pursuit they produced, as a byproduct of their holy longing, an architectural style that was beautiful and had integrity because it developed organically from their context. As a result the architecture was still speaking to people eight centuries later when Merton was writing. Against this backdrop, Merton laments the fact that in his day architecture is not allowed to develop in the same way it did in the Cistercian context. His peers, rather than seeking God, sought instead to *reproduce* a style, something mimicking the *rules* that arose from a different community's life. But reproduction is not possible because "a dead style is a dead style," as the context that birthed it is no longer available.

## Ministry as Idolatry

I believe the most acceptable and common form of idolatry in churches today is *ministry*. I believe many leaders and many



word *organic* used often in the context of emerging churches. It means that we allow life to grow naturally out of the environment in which it exists. Unfortunately, many of us do not operate with this perspective. Rather than listening to God and discerning God's presence among us, rather than listening to our people and discerning God's provision through our people, we look beyond our communities and try to make something happen based on what has worked for other people. Tragically our people, whom we know and who support us as leaders, are often taken for granted as we go questing in an attempt to reach some unnamed, unknown person who will validate our relevance. But a converse leadership situation is often at work as well. Often leaders come into communities wanting to shepherd and disciple a group of people who would rather run programs and attract people. Such pastors are often chewed up and spit out for not producing the external signs of life our broader culture tends to value, particularly when shaped through metaphors of the organizational age.

### **My Expert Answer: "I Don't Know"**

When I was speaking on this topic at an event for evangelical denominational leaders, one pastor raised his hand to ask me a question. He said he was a pastor of a seventy-five-year-old church in the Pacific Northwest. As he introduced himself and described his community's context, I knew what his question was going to be before he asked it. He listened to me describe the context of a "post" world, the necessity of engaging incarnationally in contexts of specificity, and how we work within systems and structures that either inhibit or empower such engagements. He wanted to know how what I was saying applied to him in his context, an aging denominational church, as compared to Jacob's Well, a first-generation, independent Christian community. It is a great question, and it is one I hear all the time.



own context—but not because he has a new set of answers. He will be able to engage because he has a new set of postures that open him and his community up for new possibilities. I believe that in our world how we posture ourselves and our churches is a critical issue. I believe we have been postured in a way that has kept us from being able to be responsive: to God, ourselves, each other, the Scriptures, and our neighborhoods. The last thing we need is answers, because when we have answers, we assume the posture of an expert, and experts are a big part of the problem. We need to discover some basic postures of engagement that allow us to see and respond to the possibilities that are available because of God’s activity out in front of us.

In closing, let me say this: *God is alive and at work in you, your community, and your context. Our world is filled with possibility because of who God is and what he is doing in creation. God longs for our participation with him, and at the same time God is on the move. Jesus said, “Follow me” and he meant it. He is going somewhere, and if we are to keep pace, we must follow. That means we must move. I can’t give you any answers. All I can do is propose some postures—ways of positioning ourselves that allow us a greater chance of catching God at work among us.*

It is to these postures that we now turn. As we do so, let us hope that, as the Cistercians did, we too can look for God in a way that is “pure and integral enough to make everything we do and everything we touch give glory to God.”<sup>5</sup>



**Tim Keel** is the founding pastor of Jacob's Well, a growing church in Kansas City, Missouri. He is married to Mimi, and together they have three children: Mabry, Annelise, and Blaise. Tim received a BFA in design from the University of Kansas and an MDiv from Denver Seminary. An avid learner Tim

loves reading, exploring, writing, and teaching. He is passionate about creating spaces for people to connect to God, themselves, others, and the surrounding world. Tim also serves on the board of directors for Emergent Village.

---

"Tim Keel has written a fascinating and engaging book that will quickly become both a starting point and a standard bearer for thinking about leadership in the emerging church. In addition to reimagining the nature of leadership, it also offers an implicit and enticing portrait of the type of community that will be formed in response to the vision and values described in these pages. In other words, if we follow the direction set forth in this volume, things will start to look different in the church. For many of us, that's a reason to hope that this book is widely read."

John R. Franke, professor of theology, Biblical Seminary

"Deeply personal and human in its approach, *Intuitive Leadership* both charms the mind and informs the heart. The result is a wise and gentle tracing of the contours of postmodernism that is as healing as it is liberating."

Phyllis Tickle, contributing editor in religion, *Publishers Weekly*

"Erudite, eloquent, and engaging, Tim Keel's *Intuitive Leadership* is a landmark in pastoral ministry, for he brings together the multiple streams of emerging church, postmodernity, media theory, biblical interpretation, church planting, cultural studies, and holistic, missional life. This book is destined to be a church leadership classic."

Tony Jones, national coordinator of Emergent Village; author *The New Christians: Dispatches from the Emergent Frontier*