

# GOD'S PROJECT

Let's see . . . the elements of a house church? First, you'll need a perfect house that's always immaculately clean. And of course gourmet chef to prepare all the meals. Most importantly, you must only have perfectly behaved children that sit quietly in church and memorize scripture in their spare time. Isn't this what the Bible Says? Or, does it say, "Wherever two or more are gathered in His name, that's where He'll be?" And didn't Jesus say, "Let the children come unto Me," when they were disturbing the adults? What is the perfect church? I've heard it said that there is no such thing as a perfect church because there are no perfect people. This being said, we all have our own preconceived notions of what church should be, built on our experiences, teachings, and maybe even the Bible. A group in Austin, Texas is expanding the borders of their concept of church, and I'm fortunate enough to be a part of it

This all takes place at a housing project called Meadowbrook. Yes, housing project (where drug busts, domestic disputes, violence, and fatherless children abound) is a prime location for a growing church. We gather in a tiny corner apartment every Sunday at noon. We are greatly outnumbered by children. It's hot, and the only air conditioner is a window unit plus several moody fans that only work sporadically. The kids argue and horseplay, as we go out to several other apartments to invite others to church. After we've eaten (an event about as calm as opening a bag of peanuts in a herd of starving elephants), we start strumming the guitar and singing some worship songs. At the sound of the music, all the kids

that were outside come lumbering in to request their favorite songs. The worship is modest—there are no great musicians, but the singers are sincere. Usually several prayer requests are heard at some point during the afternoon. The requests are vivid reminders of where we are: unpaid bills, alcoholism, violence, drug abuse, suicide attempts, fear, and sickness. The members of this assembly believe in prayer; they've seen it work many times. They have new hope in Jesus, and you can see the joy in their eyes. There is not much that is traditional about this church, but there is a lot that is right.

How did this ragtag group come together? Several months ago, Felicity Dale, who was involved in a growing home church in her own home, felt led to start a church at Meadowbrook. She and her husband didn't know a soul there, but a group started prayer walking the area. So, fairly frequently, they would make the drive to the other side of town, and walk through Meadowbrook and pray. On one such trip it started pouring down rain, so they ducked onto the front porch of a friendly resident, named Lily. God is good at arranging introductions, and so they began making frequent trips to her home to pray for her and her family. Lily became a Christian and decided to come to church with Felicity. Every week Lily and her family were picked up and brought over to the Dales Home church, and every week the group got bigger and more vehicles were needed. It seemed that every week someone in their group was receiving Christ, or sharing an incredible testimony or new insight. Finally, the decision was made that Lily Would start a church in her home. My Husband eagerly elbowed me and suggested that we go and help. Inside I was kicking and screaming,

but on the outside I was pretending to be a supportive wife. The mega church that I used to attend hasn't prepared me for this.

The first week at Meadowbrook was a bit chaotic, to put it mildly. We Started at 10 a.m.,which we later learned was too early for this area.We moved to noon to make sure everyone was awake by church time. I was to work with the children, so after praise and worship, I was sent out with another hapless victim, and we taught the kids incredible messages. The truth is that we couldn't get them to stop fighting long enough to listen to us. I left that day frustrated and wondering if we'd made a mistake. My husband was more excited than ever, telling me all about the awesome things God did with the adults as they studied the Bible. I spent all week long praying that something would come up so that I wouldn't be able to go. Next Sunday rolled around, and I had no good excuse. The adults had a great time again; the kids had two or three fights and one bloody nose.

Lily's son, Ray, who is about 19 years old, was really growing in the Lord. He was asking all these great questions and was so hungry for the Word. It seemed that every week in the adult group they were dealing with some major issue: anger, sexual purity, the Holy Spirit and on and on. I really enjoyed seeing Ray's desire for more of God. They were all hungry, and they were all being filled.

Each week I could feel God tapping on my heart. He was taking the hardness away. I would listen to their testimonies and hold back my tears. I would watch the kids, who had been trying to kill each other a moment ago, sing praise songs with all their heart, and I knew

that God loved this. It broke my heart when I heard that one of our 11-year-old boys had tried to commit suicide. I spent the night crying, and I asked God what we could do and how we could make a difference in these circumstances. The answer came not in a booming voice from Heaven, but in the voice of my sister from Tulsa. "What can you do? Just be there. Be there for them and love them. They may not have anyone else in their lives that does that." It was simple, obvious answer. It changed my heart.

The next week as we pulled up and I saw those little dirty-faced kids running up to our car, my heart leapt, and I jumped out to hug them. I took them in my arms, and I did the only thing I Could do, I loved them. I Had secretly dubbed one little trouble maker "the thorn in my side." That week "the thorn in my side" hugged me and told me that I was his best friend. Something was right about this! It can be done. A little apartment in a neighborhood that's not completely safe at night can become a house of God.

Appreciated

Appreciated is a word that most people can't say it  
But I'm a man because of y'all my family made it  
Making it through hard times and worries  
And I wouldn't care who hears me  
That one simple word I hope brings a smile to