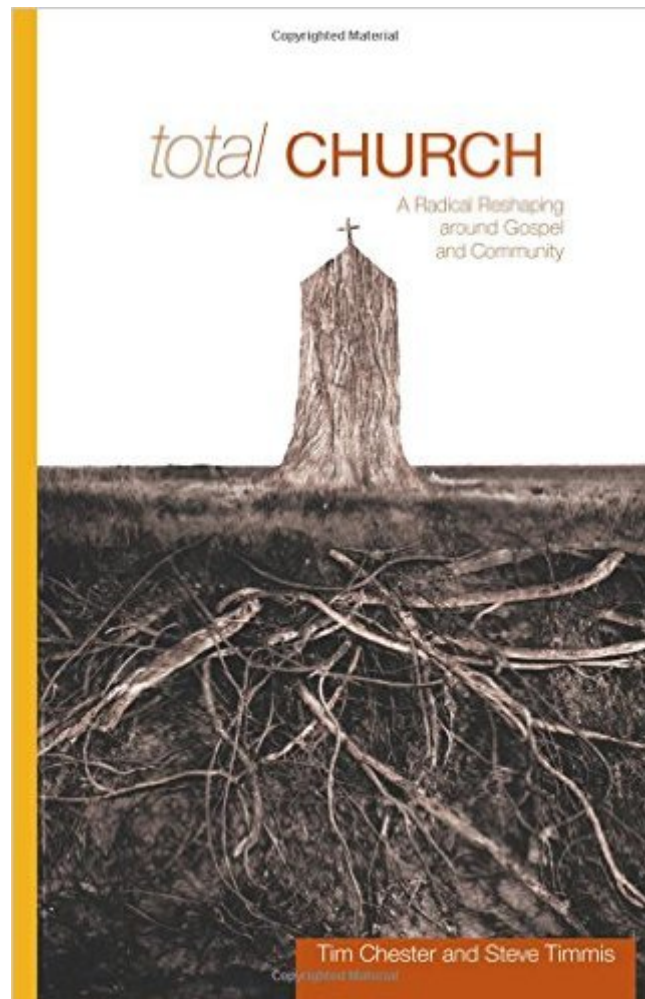


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# Total Church: A Radical Reshaping Around Gospel And Community (Re: Lit Books)



## Synopsis

"Church is not a meeting you attend or a place you enter," write pastors Tim Chester and Steve Timmis. "It's an identity that is ours in Christ. An identity that shapes the whole of life so that life and mission become 'total church.'" With that as their premise, they emphasize two overarching principles to govern the practice of church and mission: being gospel-centered and being community-centered. When these principles take precedence, say the authors, the truth of the Word is upheld, the mission of the gospel is carried out, and the priority of relationships is practiced in radical ways. The church becomes not just another commitment to juggle but a 24/7 lifestyle where programs, big events, and teaching from one person take a backseat to sharing lives, reaching out, and learning about God together. In *Total Church*, Chester and Timmis first outline the biblical case for making gospel and community central and then apply this dual focus to evangelism, social involvement, church planting, world missions, discipleship, pastoral care, spirituality, theology, apologetics, youth and children's work. As this insightful book calls the body of Christ to rethink its perspective and practice of church, it charts a middle path between the emerging church movement and conservative evangelicalism that all believers will find helpful.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

*Total Church* is one of the best books I've read in a long time and may be THE best books I've read on church. As the subtitle suggests, the authors argue that church is to be radically reshaped

around gospel and community. They argue for three things: "Christian practice must be (1) gospel-centered in the sense of being word-centered, (2) gospel-centered in the sense of being mission-centered, and (3) community-centered." (p. 16) The authors immediately nail their colors to the mast, distinguishing their perspective from both conservative evangelicals and the emerging church. With emerging church, they agree that conservatives are often bad at community. But with conservatives, they agree that the emerging church is sometimes soft on truth. This book proposes an alternative to both, churches that are both gospel-centered (with both a word-centered focus and a missional focus) and community-centered. "Rigorously applying these principles has the potential to lead to some fundamental and thoroughgoing changes in the way we do church," warn the authors (p. 18). This is no entrenched defense of traditional church structures or practices. I found the book stimulating, eye-opening, paradigm-shifting, and sometimes personally-threatening. Total Church is divided into two parts. Part one is on "Gospel and Community in Principle" and argues for each in turn. Chapter one, "Why Gospel?" discusses both word and mission. "Christianity must be word-centered," the authors argue, because "God rules through his gospel word" (p. 24) and "mission-centered because God extends his rule through his gospel word" (p. 28).

There are many people today who are talking about the major shifts that are occurring in culture and in the church in the West. Many are speaking of the return to a mission-centered approach to the Christian life. The problem is that many (myself included) tend to get bogged down in the talking and thinking phase. Tim Chester and Steve Timmis live in the UK, which, culturally speaking, is further down the road of secularization than we are in America, but not by much. It's therefore very helpful to learn from them, as they have had more time to work out the implications of what this means for church life. What they've found is that we need to retool our conceptions of what it means to be the church, and once again learn to live deeply as the body of Christ in our local communities. In Total Church Chester and Timmis propose that the two core components of church life are the gospel and community. They winsomely and compellingly show that the major responsibilities of the church, i.e. evangelism, discipleship, mercy ministry, pastoral care, etc. are all meant to be accomplished in community, specifically communities of Christians that commit themselves to living under the gospel together. So, for example, in the case of pastoral care--when a person is struggling with fear or anxiety the first place they should go is not to a professional, but to their community, where they can be reminded of the truth that they are secure in Christ and can find their rest in him.

Total Church is a book born out of longing: If only there were a different way of doing

church! Authors Tim Chester and Steve Timmis seek to orient the Church around two main principles: gospel and community. The content of our message is the gospel. The context of our message is the Christian community. Being gospel-centered means we will be word-centered and mission-centered. This book directly challenges the voices of some in the Emerging Church who downplay the Word in favor of community. But Total Church also challenges the traditional's church's failure to produce authentic community under the guise of "biblical faithfulness." The authors chose Total Church as the title in order to stress that church is not a place we go. Church is an identity that shapes our whole lives. Our life and mission must become "total church." (18) The book begins with the principles of gospel and community. I am glad the authors do not collapse these two principles into one. They rightly see the gospel as a proclamation. "The gospel is good news. It is a word to be proclaimed. You cannot be committed to the gospel without being committed to proclaiming that gospel." Reshaping the church around gospel and community leads to a rethinking of all aspects of church life. Evangelism? The centrality of the gospel word as proclamation is combined with the importance of the Christian community living with gospel-intentionality. Social involvement? Loving the poor means we will not only help them with physical needs but proclaim to them the gospel of salvation. The church is not to focus on being a respectable club for the upper class. We form a community that believes all worldly divisions are nullified at the foot of the cross.

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