

A Selection from
WHAT JESUS STARTED

An Incredible
TRUE STORY
of the
POWER
of the
LOCAL
CHURCH

By *New York Times* Bestselling Author

ELLEN VAUGHN

An INCREDIBLE TRUE STORY of the POWER of THE LOCAL CHURCH

(A Selection from WHAT JESUS STARTED)

By New York Times Bestselling Author

ELLEN VAUGHN

“Clear, compelling, and exciting. Ellen provides a much-needed reminder that local churches living in and by the power of God are the way He displays His glory and goodness to a broken world.”

ALISTAIR BEGG, Bible Teacher on Truth for Life;
Bestselling Author of *Pray Big* and *Truth For Life*

“Relaying the true-life accounts of simple believers who labor in small, dark corners of the earth, Ellen shows us once again how ‘weakness and humility’ open the way for God to perform His most powerful, kingdom-shaping work. The faith-forging stories you will read in this exceptional book will stir you—as they’ve stirred me—to roll up our sleeves and do the hard, modest labor that will impact our communities for Christ.”

JONI EARECKSON TADA, Joni and Friends
International Disability Center

“The apostle Paul said that God’s promises are ‘yes’ and ‘amen.’ One of His promises was to build the church, and, as Ellen Vaughn describes in these pages, He has. The stories she tells should inspire and encourage us to *be* the church where He has placed us, resting in the promise that ‘the gates of hell shall not prevail,’ but the church certainly will.”

JOHN STONESTREET, President of The Colson Center

“When Ellen Vaughn writes something, I read it—no question. What she writes is never boring. She makes history come alive—not just as facts or a compelling narrative but as a story she genuinely understands and helps you understand too, and in a way that points straight to the hand of God moving through it all. *What Jesus Started* is a rich, compelling, and beautifully written book that celebrates the local church as God’s primary instrument for changing the world. It will inform you, stir you, and challenge you to live differently for Christ.”

GREG LAURIE, Pastor at Harvest Christian Fellowship
and Evangelist for Harvest Crusades

“Jesus said, ‘I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.’ In this remarkable book, Ellen Vaughn shows how He continues to do that. The stories she shares are eye-opening and soul-stirring. I hope this book will be widely read and that the Spirit will stir us all to prayer and action.”

CAROLYN LACEY, Author of *Say the Right Thing*

“Jesus came to build His church, but we’ve often settled for building a crowd. If you’re longing for more than just ‘church as usual,’ the real-life stories in this book will stir your faith and call you back to the movement Jesus started.”

MIKE KELSEY, Lead Pastor at McLean Bible Church

“*What Jesus Started* will help rejuvenate a faith grown stale or one coddled by Western comforts. Ellen not only writes with the pen of a poet and the wisdom of a sage but with a passion for the local church. She calls us back to our thrilling roots. This is a book the church needs to read. And as we do, we’ll discover it’s the one we’ve wanted to read for a long time.”

KELLY MINTER, Bible Teacher and Author of
The Blessed Life

“Does your faith feel stagnant or small? Do you long to hear of God’s miraculous works in ordinary individuals across the world? Reading these true stories will set your heart ablaze with a fresh perspective on how very big and how very good our God is. In our broken world it brings very good news.”

SUSAN ALEXANDER YATES, Speaker and Author

“Ellen has captured stories that expand and challenge us all. I was blessed to travel with Ellen when she collected many of the stories in this book, and I can attest that there are thousands more that could be told! The Spirit of the living God is working in powerful ways to continue to build what Jesus started.”

JANICE ROSSER ALLEN, CEO and President of ICM

EXCERPT COPY: NOT FOR DISTRIBUTION OR SALE

A Selection from *What Jesus Started*

© Ellen Vaughn, 2026

Published by:

The Good Book Company

thegoodbook.com | thegoodbook.co.uk | thegoodbook.com.au | thegoodbook.co.nz

Unless otherwise indicated, Scripture quotations are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version (ESV), copyright © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved. Emphasis added is the author’s own.

Every book published by The Good Book Company has been written by a human author and edited by a human editor. While AI tools are sometimes used to assist with research and support certain processes, all content has been created by a human author and thoroughly checked by our editorial team to ensure it is biblically faithful and pastorally wise.

All rights reserved. Except as may be permitted by the Copyright Act, no part of this publication may be reproduced in any form or by any means without prior permission from the publisher.

Ellen Vaughn has asserted her right under the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988 to be identified as author of this work.

Published in association with the literary agency of Wolgemuth & Wilson.

Cover design by Studio Gearbox | Design and art direction by André Parker

ISBN: 9781802544442

CONTENTS

1. Not a Religion
 2. An Unexpected Transformation
 3. The Church That Jesus Started
 4. The Church Universal and Particular
- Snippets of Stories You'll Find in *What Jesus Started*

Chapter 1

NOT A RELIGION

Religion says, "I obey; therefore I am accepted."

Christianity says, "I'm accepted, therefore I obey."

Jesus isn't one more teacher, come to tell you how to save yourself and find God.

He is God himself, come to save and find you.

TIMOTHY KELLER,
Gospel In Life Study Guide

Some years ago, I wrote a book with my friend and all-around groovy guy, pastor Greg Laurie. *Jesus Revolution* depicted the wild way in which the Holy Spirit moved in the early 1970s, a tumultuous time of unrest in America and hand-wringing despair among many.

In short, God worked among the least likely people—the drug- and sex-crazed hippies—to begin an awakening which then became revival for churches open enough to welcome people different from their usual parishioners and to participate in the tide of the Holy Spirit.

Well, the book became a movie or, as they say, "a major motion picture." (I live for the day when a book cover bears the banner, "Now a minor motion picture.") *Jesus Revolution* did well at the box office.

It lives on, approximately forever, on various streaming services. Aside from the fact that it's fun to write a book that becomes a movie, I don't think what we need today is a *new* Jesus revolution, as that can be so easily misunderstood in these politically volatile times. The Jesus revolution of the early 1970s had staying power precisely because many of its new converts became disciples through the fellowship and teaching of local churches.

Jesus did not come to start a revolution or a movement or a philosophy or even a religion.

The first-century Roman world was full of religions. The more, the merrier. The Greeks, in particular, were always intrigued by cool new philosophies, as if human beings could think their way to enlightenment. Meanwhile, the religions of the day centered around rules, rituals, and sacrifices or other methods to win the favor of often-volatile gods.

But Christianity was, and is, distinct from any religious system, ancient or modern, that teaches people how to find God. It is a relationship with God, initiated by God, who loved us enough to come and find us.

Many of us know this in our heads. I was reminded recently of what it looks like by a bearded guy from Hezbollah.

Chapter 2

AN UNEXPECTED TRANSFORMATION

Omer is in his mid-thirties and looks, perhaps, like Jesus. I met him in Turkey. He grew up in Diyarbakır, on a high plateau on the banks of the Tigris River. His extended family were Sunni Muslims who were Hezbollah radicals in a time when the Turkish government sought to eradicate activist cells.

As a child, Omer received propaganda and guerrilla-fighting training. In 1999, when Omer was about eight, several of his relatives were scooped up in a police raid and never seen again. In 2000, Omer's activist older brother, Umit, was arrested and badly beaten, but he escaped. Omer listened with wonder to his stories about great heroes like Osama bin Laden and the *mujahideen* in Afghanistan. Even as a child, Omer cheered *Allahu Akbar!* on the streets on September 11, 2001.

In 2003, Omer's older brother, Umit, saw an ad in a local newspaper: "Would you like to read *Incil* [the New Testament in Turkish]?"

The ad gave the address of a church. Umit had never read the Bible, but he thought this was a way he could infiltrate a Christian community and lead the infidels back to Islam.

Umit told his brothers, "I'm going to see the Christians. If I don't come back, come and rescue me!"

Umit did get rescued, though not in the way he had anticipated. In conversation and questions and answers with the Christians, he ended up surrendering his activist life to Jesus.

"This made an earthquake in our family," Omer says today. "My dad was called upon as a *mullah* [teacher of Islam] in that community, and then his oldest son goes and becomes Christian.

"They didn't kill him, though. 'He's still young,' they said. 'He'll come back to Islam.'

"Then my brother's character and life started changing," Omer continues. "He would spend time helping the younger ones in our family. I went with my brother to the church."

In Sunday school, Omer heard about Jesus, "but I didn't remember anything about Him except He was from Nazareth, born in Bethlehem. What I remember was the love of those people in the church. They loved children and actually paid attention to them.

"At the same time I was going to church, I was going to Hezbollah [youth] gatherings; though I was a child, I would compare them."

Umit left town to perform his compulsory military service, and Omer drifted away from the church, though he never forgot the love there.

Omer's father took him to the leaders of Hezbollah.

"My son is your son," he said. "You can teach him from now on." Over time, Omer studied to be a *muezzin* (the man who calls Muslims to prayer) of the local mosque. He immersed himself in religion, learning *sharia* law, and worked on his Arabic so he could understand the Qur'an, not just recite it. Wearing a white headdress like an Arab, he connected with Hezbollah cells in Lebanon and lost friends who were fighting for Al Qaeda in Syria.

"Every once in a while," he says, "I'd see my brother, who now lived in another town. I was thinking he was so stupid for converting. I thought, 'I need to kill those people who made my brother Christian. According to the Qur'an, my brother should be killed.'"

But Omer couldn't kill his brother.

One day, as they were walking to visit family, Omer burst out to Umit, "Why did you become a Christian? How is that possible?"

"Look," said Umit, pointing to the end of the road. "If someone told me, 'Your death is waiting for you down the street,' I would run toward it. When I was Muslim, I would run the other way."

"Impossible!" shouted Omer. "You've been brainwashed to know you'll have life after death! Even Muhammad was not sure he would be in heaven. Ask any Muslim if he's going to heaven, he'll just say *inshallah* [God willing]."

Omer couldn't get his brother's words out of his mind. After all, the only way in Islam to be sure of paradise was to die in *jihad*. That's why Omer wanted to do it. It was dying for Islam—and you get a bonus. All those virgins!

A few more years went by. Omer's mentorship in Hezbollah continued, as did both his radical convictions and some nagging questions as he understood more of the Qur'an. A few years later, a cousin came to faith in Jesus. Omer and the cousin got stranded in another city, and a Christian friend of the cousin's paid for their transportation home.

So, Omer was indebted. Courtesy demanded that now he had to go to the church youth meeting to thank the guy. It was the same church community he had visited as a kid with his older brother.

“When I entered the house, everyone was clapping and cheering, ‘Ah, Omer!’ They remembered me from when I was a child! They knew my story. These people knew I would want to kill them, but they were so happy to see me.

“That meeting was a turning point for me. I had to go again. For one month, I went to just the youth meetings—never to Sunday church. I didn’t want Muslims to see me. But I saw the same love I had received as a child. It touched me.”

Omer spent an anguished year trying to know what to do. He felt like he would be sinning if he rejected Islam and became an infidel. The *mullahs* visited constantly, trying to convince him to continue in his Islamic studies and religious practices. His father was furious and beat him badly until his mother intervened.

“I wasn’t Muslim, and I wasn’t a Christian,” Omer says. He lied to everyone, went to church and to the mosque. “I prayed, ‘Allah, I know you exist, but whose god are you? God of Christians or god of Muslims?’”

There was no single dramatic moment. No nighttime vision. Just a steady, growing sense of the truth, then repentance and a heart that began to change.

Omer’s father disowned him, kicked Omer out of the house after making him remove the clothing and shoes that “I bought you, and now you are an infidel,” forbade family members to help him, and divorced Omer’s mother for allowing him to convert.

Omer had nothing. He went to the church, where Pastor Ahmet, a faithful, mentoring Christian leader in this part of Turkey, took him in. Omer was baptized. He worked cleaning the church, which paid him a small stipend.

He was young, hungry, wearing borrowed clothes, separated from his family, and confused. One day he was praying during the worship service, worrying and wondering what to do with his life. “As I prayed, I felt someone tapping me on the shoulder. I turned around, once, twice, no one was there. I opened my Bible, and suddenly these verses popped out.”

Omer had never seen them before. He took them to heart. They gave him the faith to carry on.

Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on ... your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.¹

Today Omer is married, has a family, and serves as a deacon in his small church of about 60 people. He’s had educational and theological training, and is responsible for discipleship, as well as youth ministry—which pulled him in, years ago—and also evangelistic outreaches. He is also helping with church plants in four other cities.

The spiritual soil in Turkey is hard, but he presses on.

¹ Matthew 6:25, 32, 33.

“God is working miraculously,” he says. “God is bringing Hezbollah people into the church. We have one guy who came to us from the political arm of Hezbollah. ‘I heard about you!’ he told me.

“Another young man came to church to harm us. He came for a few months, then disappeared. After a year he came back, completely changed. ‘I saw you were so different,’ he said. ‘I couldn’t hurt you. I started to change inside, and now I am a believer!’”

Omer says the church’s goals are pretty simple: “We share the gospel with people so they might believe and accept salvation, and we teach them so they will share with others.”

Most important, in this Muslim land, “we are teaching that Christianity is not a religion. It’s a relationship that lives inside of you.”

So, the former revolutionary, former religious zealot, now teaches people about a living relationship with Jesus Christ.

Just like the first-century Christians in the book of Acts.

Chapter 3

THE CHURCH THAT JESUS STARTED

“But what about you?” [Jesus] asked. “Who do you say I am?” Simon Peter answered, “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.” Jesus replied, “Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by flesh and blood, but by my Father in heaven. And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it.”

MATTHEW 16:15-18, NIV

The church is constituted as a new people who have been gathered from the nations to remind the world that we are in fact one people. Gathering ... is the foretaste of the unity of the communion of the saints.

STANLEY HAUERWAS, *In Good Company*

As our brother Omer says, Jesus didn’t start a religion. He started a *church*. Think about early on during Jesus’ public ministry, when ordinary people were intrigued by His teaching and gobsmacked by His miracles. One day Jesus asked His followers who the crowds thought He was.²

The responses were mixed. A prophet like Elijah, perhaps, or maybe John the Baptist, whom Herod

² Matthew 16:13-14.

had executed.

Then Jesus asked His closest friends who *they* thought He was.

Poor Simon Peter often missed the point, but he got this answer right: “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.”³

Remember that Jesus, who liked both puns and nicknames, had started calling His friend “Cephas” in Aramaic, which was translated as “Peter” in Greek.⁴ Both names in their respective languages sound like the word we know in English as “rock.” So, after Peter had gotten something right and declared that Jesus was the Messiah, the Son of the living God, Jesus blessed him. He said that God Himself had revealed this to his rock-like friend.⁵

“And on this rock,” Jesus continued, “I will build my church.”⁶

It would be an unstoppable force, stronger than the gates of hell.

Whether Jesus meant that He would build His church on Peter himself or upon Peter’s confession of faith is a matter that various faith traditions interpret differently. But the point is, the church is not a human enterprise. Jesus Christ is the One who builds it.

But before it could get off the ground, someone had to come: the Holy Spirit.

After Jesus rose from the grave and returned to Heaven—before the Spirit arrived and the church began—Jesus’ first followers brimmed with passion and urgency. Jesus had been dead, really dead, and now He was alive! He was the promised One, the Savior of the world! He was coming back soon, probably within the next year or so! Time was of the essence!

Jesus had told them their calling: “You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”⁷

In other words (paraphrasing what my friend and pastor David Platt says), Jesus’ charge was basically this.

Go to where they hate you (Jerusalem, where Jesus had just been executed).

Go to people like you (Judea).

Go to people you hate because of traditional ethnic bias (Samaria).

And, oh yes, also go to really faraway places that you don’t even know exist, assuming you don’t fall off the edge of the world first.

But the disciples could not obey that calling by the power of their own enthusiasm. Jesus had said, “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you.”⁸ Only then would they be able to be His witnesses.

So, the newly galvanized Jesus followers didn’t get to gallop off right away.

Wait, He told them before He went up to Heaven. *Whoa. Do not leave Jerusalem but wait for the gift my Father promised. In a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.*⁹

3 Matthew 16:16, NIV.

4 See John 1:42.

5 Matthew 16:17.

6 v 18.

7 Acts 1:8.

8 v 8.

9 Paraphrased from Acts 1:4-5.

So they waited for the Father's gift, whatever that baptism would look like and no matter how strange and frightening it might be. They gathered in Jerusalem, about 120 men and women, devoting themselves to prayer.¹⁰

And one fine day, the thunderous, fiery wind of the Holy Spirit descended.

Outside the open windows of the house, foreign visitors to Jerusalem from Asia, Egypt, Rome, Libya, and Mesopotamia heard—and understood—the tsunami of praise that day. “How is it that we hear,” they marveled, “each of us in his own native language ... we hear them telling in our own tongues the mighty works of God.”¹¹

The rest of the book of Acts describes the mind-blowing reality that the good news of Messiah Jesus was not only for the Jews, like those who heard the thunder of the day of Pentecost, *but also for non-Jews*. The gospel was for all the nations, meaning not geographical countries per se but ethnolinguistic groupings of people all over the face of the earth to whom Jesus followers had the responsibility to preach the gospel and make disciples.¹²

The believers knew it was not a human movement. They did not expect the new church to be built through the established structures of political, cultural, military, or religious power. Certainly, people from those arenas experienced the pull of the Holy Spirit and came to faith, but the believers did not look to the kingdoms of this world to advance the Kingdom of God.¹³

So, what did this new thing look like?

When Jesus told Peter He would build His church on the rock, the Greek word Jesus used, *petra*, means a mass of *connected* rock, which is distinct from the similar word that means a detached stone or boulder. This fits, for the church is communal, not individual.

Certainly, God first calls us to Himself as *individuals*. As I've said, Jesus saves us intimately, by the power of the Holy Spirit. We will one day stand before Him on our own.

But Christianity is not a private, individualistic relationship between a person and God. When Christ saves a person, He places him or her in a group. The new life in Christ is, by definition, *corporate*. Jesus calls us out into a new Kingdom community.

Yes, hermits and those in solitary confinement and others in enforced isolation can know Jesus and enjoy intimate fellowship with Him. But the New Testament norm is that faith in Jesus is lived out in connection with others. The Lord's prayer is a corporate prayer. *Our* Father. Give *us* our daily bread. Forgive *us*. Lead *us*. Deliver *us*.

Every New Testament metaphor for the church is communal in its fullness.

The church is known as *the body* of Christ: one body of many parts, each one uniquely fulfilling its purpose, just like our human bodies, so that we build up the whole.¹⁴

Similarly, the church is *God's household*, made up of members doing various tasks while all holding fast

¹⁰ Acts 1:14-15.

¹¹ Acts 2:8, 11.

¹² Matthew 28:18-20.

¹³ Though the disciples had originally thought the Messiah had come to establish a kingdom on earth by banishing Roman political power and setting up a theocracy, after Christ's resurrection, they slowly got the idea.

¹⁴ See Romans 12:4-5; 1 Corinthians 10:17, 12:12, 12:27; Ephesians 4:4-5; Colossians 1:24.

to our common hope in Him.¹⁵

The church is also called *the temple* of God, built with living stones—us—with Christ as both foundation and cornerstone.¹⁶

The Greek word Jesus used for church is *ekklesia*.¹⁷ It means the “called out” ones—an assembly of people. It was used in Greek culture to denote a gathering of citizens, as on occasions when they convened out of their houses to vote.

In the New Testament, *ekklesia* referred to both the micro and the macro: the word was used for individual local congregations, like my church or your church. This is called the church particular. It was also used for the universal church: all believers worldwide and through history.

Chapter 4

THE CHURCH UNIVERSAL AND PARTICULAR

I grew up hearing missionary stories. My family was part of a missions-focused denomination, and my parents practiced the gift of hospitality. Whenever missionaries were on furlough in the US, visiting various churches that supported them financially, they would stay at our house. They’d pull out the tech of the day—their Kodak photos and their little cardboard-bordered celluloid images shown on their handy slide projectors. They’d tell about people who had never heard about Jesus, and how they had responded to the good news about His love for everyone. They talked about families giving up their household idols, being baptized in their new church communities, learning how to read the Bible in their own languages, and reaching out to others as their churches grew.

Those rich dinner-table stories weren’t just stand-alone, self-contained episodes of exotic locales and faraway happenings. Their power lay in the fact that I knew I was *connected* to these people in Vietnam or India or South America. Though the people in their stories spoke different languages than I did and ate different foods and lived in different types of houses than my suburban rambler, we were connected.

I was a kid, but I got it. In my mind, the missionaries sitting at my family’s dining room table might as well have been Paul or Barnabas or some first-century Christians who had traveled to faraway lands and were now reporting back on what God had done in those places. The faraway people that the missionaries talked about were my brothers and sisters in Christ, just like the people in Acts. We were part of the same family. And when I worshiped God in my little church outside of Washington, DC on Sunday mornings, I was part of something so much bigger.

¹⁵ See Hebrews 3:6; 1 Timothy 3:14-15; 1 Peter 4:17.

¹⁶ See 1 Corinthians 3:11, 16-17; Ephesians 2:19-22; 1 Peter 2:5-6.

¹⁷ Also spelled *ecclesia*.

As I got older, my theology got fancier, but the main points were the same. I knew from the Bible that I was connected to the great “cloud of witnesses”—all the believers throughout time who had preceded me.¹⁸ I was also connected to all the Christ followers alive today, all over the world. This church universal is an invisible superstructure that spans the world as well as the centuries of human existence. It’s a house or a castle or a palace not built with human hands but by the Spirit of God Himself.

The church universal is the great fellowship of all throughout eternal history who have been redeemed by the blood of Jesus. We will not all be physically together until God establishes His “new heaven and new earth.”¹⁹ The church universal is the Bride for which Jesus will one day return—the people from every tribe and nation who will one day worship around His throne in Heaven. In that great day, there will be no more individual, particular churches. Just the glorious ultimate body of Christ—the people bought by His blood, whose names are written in His book.

It is a good thing to hold this cosmic vision of Jesus’ big-C Church in our minds. Every Christ follower is part of the same church universal. It’s invisible right now, and we will not see it in its fullness until we stand in eternity.

The Church Particular

For now, we deal in the realm of the church particular. Your local church. My local church. The gatherings of Christ-followers in various places around the globe, whether they meet under a mango tree in Africa, in a village prayer house in India, or in a megachurch in Albuquerque. One hesitates to list its identifying characteristics; some renowned pastors say there are nine marks of the church, others say twelve or six or four.

I’m not a theologian expositing the book of Acts or the rest of the New Testament. But certainly, we can see common characteristics of the local *ekklesia*. The early believers were devoted to Scripture and devoted to one other. They ate meals together, particularly obeying Jesus’ sacramental instructions in His Last Supper before His death and resurrection. They were devoted to prayer, unity, and generosity for those in need. They shared the good news and baptized and mentored new believers. They were joyful and full of awe—because, in all of this, they were filled with the non-human, supernatural presence of the Holy Spirit.

Again, they weren’t devotees practicing some new religion; they were transformed people living out the reign of King Jesus on this broken earth: a hint of what will one day be realized in its fullness. As J.I. Packer wrote years ago, echoing John Calvin, “The task of the church is to make the invisible Kingdom visible” in every ordinary sphere of human life and need.²⁰

Whether in first-century Palestine or modern-day Brazil, Botswana, Buffalo, or Bangladesh, this is the pattern of God’s new community. People come together to worship, pray, learn, eat, share, take the sacraments, be held accountable, and walk with one another in the joys and messes of everyday life. Then they go out to share their overflow of God’s grace with outsiders.

¹⁸ Hebrews 12:1.

¹⁹ Revelation 21:1.

²⁰ J.I. Packer, *Concise Theology: A Guide to Historic Christian Beliefs* (Tyndale, 1993), p. 194.

And it is the unity of the local church that shows the world that Jesus is the Son of God. He prayed, "... that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me ... and loved them even as you loved me."²¹

This oneness is not based on the local church being made up of people who share the same background, education, ethnicity, inclinations, and opinions. The world has those. They're called clubs. The church is different. Its unity of disparate personalities and preferences testifies to the supernatural power of God.

C.S. Lewis wrote that...

... the Church is not a human society of people united by their natural affinities but the Body of Christ, in which all members, however different (and He rejoices in their differences and by no means wishes to iron them out) must share the common life, complementing and helping one another precisely by their differences.²²

To happily summarize for our purposes going forward, every Christ follower is part of the same church universal. It's invisible right now, and we will not see it in its fullness until we stand in eternity.

And in our lives here on earth, we are called to become part of local, particular congregations. These churches are humble, imperfect, full of flawed human beings, just like in the book of Acts. But it is the local *ekklesia* that God has called to show the world what the Kingdom of Heaven looks like. As the church is a beacon of love, joy, truth, worship, peace, and unity, it foretells what the Kingdom will be like in its ultimate fulfillment.

This was God's plan, to be carried out by ordinary human beings but built by Christ Himself and fueled by the Holy Spirit.

It's the church that Jesus started, made up of the people called by His name. It is irrepressible, a forever family woven together of people from every tribe and nation—people who dwell in the various nation-states of this world but whose highest and eternal allegiance is to the Kingdom of God.

I've had the opportunity to visit many book-of-Acts-type churches. So, like those missionaries who sat at my parents' dining room table so many decades ago, I need to tell the stories of ordinary Jesus followers in these churches around the world, and the secret to their durable faith.

In *What Jesus Started*, I share some of the tremendous stories I gathered during my travels. These experiences show some important characteristics of the early church. Not didactically but through the power of story. All of the stories are from churches that cleave to the fundamentals that have distinguished real Christianity since its beginnings.

²¹ John 17:21, 23.

²² C.S. Lewis quoted in *The Collected Letters of C.S. Lewis, Vol. III: Narnia, Cambridge and Joy, 1950-1963*, edited by Walter Hooper (Harper, 2007), p. 68-69.

SNIPPETS OF STORIES YOU'LL FIND IN WHAT JESUS STARTED

The Germans assigned to Gulshamal's house were a grandmother, a mother, and her little daughter, who was Gulshamal's age. The German girl picked up Kazakh quickly. Every night the girl's grandmother would tell her bedtime stories, and then every day, after the adults had gone to work in the fields, the German girl would tell them to Gulshamal...

Before the auction, Antônio met with his pastor and a group of local Christian leaders. They spread out a map of the Sertão like generals plotting a battlefield. They decided that Antônio would bid on the areas with the lowest percentages of Christians...

A neighbor who was a strictly observant Muslim, never on the street without her coverings, ran in the rain toward Elmas. She was barefoot, sobbing, wearing only a sleeping shift...

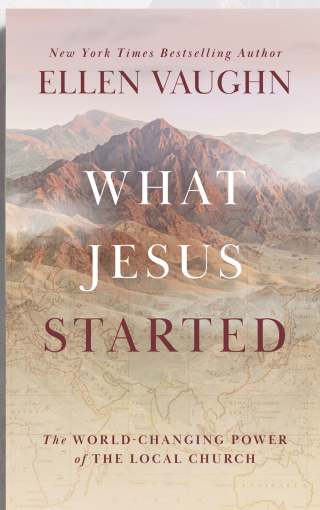
Eventually Zilan's mother started attending Pastor Paul's church, in order to investigate just what it was her daughter had gotten into. To Zilan's surprise, the investigation was thorough. Her mom came back week after week...

One Sunday, Azad walked all over his town, looking for a church. It wasn't as if there were signs on the street: "Church this way." He could not find one. Ditto the next Sunday...

It was Bertha, with her strong heart for traumatized women, who first took a rickety boat offering transit service on Lake Kivu to the neglected Rwandan island of Nkombo, just across the water from the Democratic Republic of the Congo...

Slava Lesyk, a tall, salt-and-pepper haired pastor with rectangular glasses, jolted awake in his 18th-floor Kiev apartment to the sound of explosions. He peered at his phone: a massive attack on the city. He grabbed his wife and child and prayed that God would show them what to do...

GET THE WHOLE BOOK



Be reinvigorated by the power of the gospel through these and many more compelling stories of God's ongoing work through his people around the world. Written by NYT Bestselling Author Ellen Vaughn, *What Jesus Started* reignites faith by showing how the church that Jesus started over 2,000 years ago continues today: around the world, in your church, and in your life.



You can purchase your copy for 25% off using code **WJS25** at The Good Book Company

Buy Now

Also Available Wherever Books are Sold!

Amazon