

Have I not written to you excellent things of counsels and knowledge, that I may make you know the certainty of the words of truth, that you may answer words of truth to those who send to you?

Proverbs 22:20-21

reality



Carpenteria is a beach community 80 miles north of Los Angeles. Reality has two Sunday services.

Reality Carpinteria creates an "afterglow" atmosphere for worship by having only stage lights to encourage worshipers to freely express praises to the Lord.

*story by Christmas McGaughey
photos by Geraldine Wilkins*

One block east of the beach in Santa Barbara County, Reality Carpinteria is not your typical Calvary Chapel. With colored lights and simulated smoke during morning worship services, this young fellowship has sent missionaries out to more than a dozen countries since it began several years ago.

Started by Britt Merrick, a college pastor who went from being a surfboard shaper to a fisher of men, the church has blossomed to nearly 1,500 people and has planted other churches—a testimony to the power of God in a surrendered life.

To the 'Carpenter's Shop'

Britt and his wife, Kate, are both native Carpinterians. "In Spanish, Carpinteria means carpenter's shop, so a carpenterian is a person of the carpenter," the tall, blond-haired Britt explained with a smile. Located

in Southern California 80 miles north of Los Angeles, Carpinteria has a small-town feel. God has used this hometown connection to demonstrate the power of His grace. Speaking of her husband, Kate said, "He was a notorious hooligan around town, and people here can't believe he's a pastor now. It's a powerful testimony of what God can do."

With dad Al Merrick as a longtime Christian and world-renowned surfboard shaper, Britt grew up neck-deep in the surf culture and in a Christian home. He went through a rebellious period in his high school years but then recommitted his life to Christ. God put a burden on his heart for the unsaved young surfers he knew, and in 1996 he started a Bible study at his parents' house—where many unchurched surfers accepted Christ. Then Calvary Chapel Santa Barbara invited him to be their college pastor in 1998, where he worked with

the college ministry called Reality. In early 2003, Britt and Kate both felt the Lord speak to their hearts about ministering in the place they had grown up.

"I feel so honored by the Lord that He'd let me serve Him here in my hometown," Britt said. He believes God has a special plan for Carpinteria and the surrounding coastal areas—Goleta, Santa Barbara, Summerland, Ventura—known by locals as "the coastlands." Britt and Kate both cite Isaiah 42:12-13 as the passage God used to show them His plan: "Let them give glory to the LORD and declare His praise in the coastlands. The LORD will go forth like a warrior, He will arouse [His] zeal like a man of war. He will utter a shout, yes, He will raise a war cry. He will prevail against His enemies" (NASB).

For six months they held prayer meetings in the warehouse-style building until they

serve
"I feel so honored by the Lord that He'd let me serve Him here in my hometown."

Pastor Britt Merrick



Once the lights are on, believers study God's Word.



Britt Merrick, senior pastor, teaches twice on Sunday.



Britt fellowships and encourages a group of young men after service.

"During worship, you're locked into the presence of God, and the Holy Spirit has a chance to minister to you what He's already spoken to you through the Word."

Pastor Britt Merrick



Teens have a separate time of worship in song and the study of the Word.



Reality sponsors many missionaries.

felt God say in September of 2003 that it was time to start the church. "In all of our church plants, we have a prayer meeting for at least six months first, then we start a church—with a building, a children's ministry, a worship team," Britt said. "We wait for Him to say, 'Okay, now it's time.' It's very important."

At that point, the Lord called him to leave behind his family's internationally known surfboard company and focus on being a pastor full-time. Britt felt God saying, "This is going to take all your attention."

Let them give glory to the LORD, and declare His praise in the coastlands.

Isaiah 42:12

Worship and the Word

Britt and his staff believe that worship prepares people to hear the Word of God, and the Word prepares people for worship. Sunday morning service begins with three or four songs, then a Bible study. Following the message is a longer set of worship, with an intimate atmosphere similar to an afterglow—a time where people wait to hear from God.

“During worship, you’re locked into the presence of God, and the Holy Spirit has

a chance to minister to you what He’s already spoken to you through the Word,” said Britt.

“When we started doing that (worship after the message), we immediately noticed our congregation grew in depth—not in size but in depth.”

During the afterglow-style worship, the lights are turned down in the windowless sanctuary with only the band illuminated by a few colored lights. People are free to come forward to pray or repent. Some



Church leaders, like Gerald Torres, are available to pray for and encourage believers.

stand, kneel or pray face down. “We just want there to be a freedom in worship,” Britt said. “In the Bible people kneel, lay prostrate or raise their hands in worship—so the environment allows for that. We never tell people to sit or stand; it’s whatever posture they want to take before the Lord.”

Worship leader Dominic Balli said that he believes the worship time can be one of great spiritual breakthrough and victory. “That’s why we have a time for repentance and prayer,” he said. “There’s a huge amount of spiritual warfare that goes on during worship.” Citing 2 Chronicles 20, Dominic said that the Lord gave the people

the victory while they were singing praises to Him. “As they were singing and praising, the Lord conquered their enemies. He was battling on their behalf. That’s a huge part of worship,” Dominic said. “I’ve really seen the Lord doing that here.”

Sending and Planting

Although the church is only a few years old, Britt said, “We have seen a lot of people get saved, and we’ve seen a lot of people go out on the mission field. It seems the Lord is really equipping people and sending them out.” People in their church have gone on long-term or short-term missions to more than a dozen countries, including Thailand,

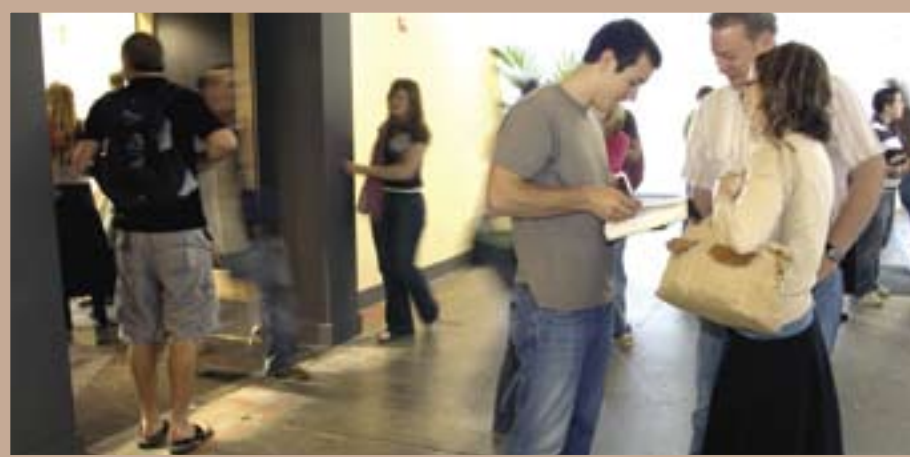
China, Indonesia, India, Kenya, Tanzania, Russia, Germany, Sweden, Mozambique, Argentina and Mexico.

With a monthly missions newsletter and consistent emphasis on missions, Reality Carpinteria has a program that allows people in the fellowship to volunteer as they feel led, under the authority and counsel of an established sending team at the church.

“We knew the Lord was going to have us raise up missionaries from within instead of looking for people outside that we could support,” said Associate Pastor Gerald Torres, known by the flock as Pastor G. “We never told people that; it just hap-

pened. People come up and say, ‘I feel called to Africa.’” One young man served in Mexico for a year, and a young woman is serving in China as an English teacher for three years. Britt regularly reminds the congregation from the pulpit to pray for her and their other missionaries. The support team at Carpinteria keeps in touch with their missionaries, sending them care packages and encouraging emails. The church also sends people overseas to encourage the long-term missionaries.

“We go to Mexico often, but we are more connected to Thailand,” the associate pastor said. The church has helped build an orphanage in Thailand and taken the youth



On a typical Sunday, there are believers of all ages and different cultures.



Reality derived its name from the certainty of God and the truth of His Word.



Preschoolers hear the Word of God in a kid-friendly environment.

on several trips to play with and minister to the orphans.

“I’m just in awe of the whole thing,” Britt said. “Here we are just over two years, we’ve completed our first building project, and we’re still able to send hundreds of thousands of dollars overseas. It seems the more we give financially, the more He blesses us here.” God has also used them to plant churches elsewhere in Southern California: Reality Isla Vista and, most recently, Reality L.A. When planting the church in Los Angeles, Britt said, they waited on the Lord—praying for nine months before starting the church.

In the future, Britt envisions having a school of ministry in Carpinteria that would help prepare people for long-term service. “God told us back when our church started that

people would go from here to the nations,” Britt said, “and that people would come here from the nations, get equipped and go back to serve in their home countries.”

Home Groups: Key to Discipleship

With an obvious call to be a sending church, Britt said, Reality Carpinteria prioritizes discipleship for individual believers. Instead of having a mid-week Bible study at the church, Britt encourages the fellowship to attend weekly home-group meetings. “We feel discipleship happens through relationships, and those relationships can develop through a home-group setting. We believe that in the Bible the Lord requires both—coming together in one accord in the temple, and then breaking to fellowship in the homes.”

He referred to the church’s early practices in Acts 2:46-47: “So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved.”

Reality Carpinteria continues to minister to the local area through outreaches and nightly radio broadcasts on KWVE, and more church plants are in the works. ☞

Reality Carpinteria
www.jesusisreality.com
office@realitycarp.com
805-684-5247