

# Yves biography

## Church planter

From 1985 until 2005, I have been planting and/or maturing many churches all over the world.

Some were very large, growing by the hundreds, others were small and ... remaining at hundred. In some I remained a few months, in most others a few years.

Some were in well-known places like Geneva, Boston, Paris, Berlin, Zurich or Atlanta, others in unknown places like Wroclaw in Poland; Irkutsk, on the beautiful Baikal Lake near Mongolia; Gorno-Altai near the mountainous border of China; Barnaul in the cold plains of central Siberia; or Voronezh, in the heart of Western Russia.

## Every spiritual decision and change

I made in my life has always been motivated by that one question: "How are we going to have a Biblical Church that will have the greatest impact on the world for Jesus?" Because of this ongoing deep conviction, I have tasted the excitement of great evangelistic success, but I have known as well persecution, prison and intense spiritual deserts.

## Intellectual achievements

My intellectual and professional achievements are as diverse as my passion for life. I started my life with an apprenticeship and diploma in agriculture, (and particularly a specialization in organic agriculture), then I majored in painting and history of art in Geneva. I studied geo-politics in Paris-Sorbonne, earned a BA in linguistics from Russia, studied half a dozen of languages

which I speak fluently, (and have a good working knowledge of biblical languages as well), and I am currently doing a Masters in Global Leadership from Fuller Seminary in California.

#### Other professional achievements

I never wanted the churches that supported me financially to dictate my spiritual convictions, so there were times when I decided to "repair tents". I had secular jobs on a part time basis while working for the church. In this way, I worked two years as a salesman, three years as a general manager over many restaurants, and one year as a primary school teacher.

#### Family characteristics

I am Swiss, from a German mother and my father is Swiss French.

I met my Jewish Russian wife Anna in an airport while changing planes. After 30 minutes of intense conversation (that's all the time I had!), I took her phone number, and we got married 3 months later, the 6 October 1984! (In 2009, we will have been married for 15 years)

Our 2 sons, Yann (13 years old in 2009) and Joel (9 in 2009), have Swiss, Russian and American passports (born in Ohio). So they speak Russian with their mother, French with me, while my wife and I speak English between us, which they understand as well.

My spiritual journey: 4 major phases

The first part: All about Jesus

1979 - 1984: PASSION and SIMPLICITY

"The best remedy for those who are unhappy is to go somewhere where they can be alone with the heavens, nature and God." (Anne Frank)

In 1962, I was born in Geneva in, the French speaking part of Switzerland, and as I grew up in a family of unbelieving parents, I never went to church, never read the Bible or never really learnt anything about Christianity until I was 16 years old. Around that time, because of the deep spiritual vacuum which had prevailed in my life, I started to look for the real meaning of life, which led me to consider oriental religions and occultism. After many experiences and disappointments, which only increased the emptiness I felt within my heart, I decided to leave my parents who were at that time divorcing, and I isolated myself in the beauty of the Swiss Alps in working as a farmer and shepherd.

There, I accidentally found a Bible and for the very first time in my life I read on my own a book I had never even held in my hands! I was very surprised to discover who Jesus was, because I knew nothing of Him. With absolutely no one helping me, I immediately fell in love with Him, repented from all my sins and for the very first time in my life, I started to talk to God. Shortly after that, I came down to the valley to look for someone to baptize me, and then I went back to my mountains. There, for the following 3 years, while I worked as a shepherd and farmer, I was communicating all the time with my Lord. This way, a deep friendship grew between us, because I was praying and reading the Bible totally on my own, without any human help.

The second part: Forceful legalism

1985 - 1994: CO-PLANTING churches in EUROPE

(International Church of Christ)

"A religion that gives nothing, costs nothing, and suffers nothing, is worth nothing."

(Martin Luther)

After those first three years of "direct" personal training from God, I went back to Geneva and started to look for a Church that was similar to the one I had been reading in the New Testament. This is what I found in the Church of Christ, because they had the strong ideal of restoring the teachings and the practices of the NT Church.

Nevertheless, after being 3 years with them, I was attracted to a group that grew within the Churches of Christ, which initially was called the Boston movement (because it started there) and which eventually called itself the International Churches of Christ. Their members had the same doctrinal foundation as the Church of Christ, but they distinguished themselves in their intense commitment to evangelism and making disciples, which created a pyramid-structure of authority and discipling, similar to the "shepherding movement" of the 70s.

Initially, this worked very well, as the Boston Church enjoyed a tremendous numerical growth. Every year since their beginning that group had doubled in size so that in 1985, the year when I joined them, the Church had grown from 1500 to 3000, and all the other US churches they had planted had a similar exponential growth. During that year in Boston, we put together a team of a dozen Americans of which I was the only native French-speaking leader. As we started the Church in Paris, we grew 100 the first year and kept on growing to 400 the following 5 years. In Berlin, we did the same with 200 in the first 3 years, and in Zurich we had 80 converts the first year. For Western Europe, this was an exceptional numerical growth, since unbelievers there are very

difficult to convert.

Nevertheless, over the years, I observed a trend that became more and more alarming: in many churches the rate of fall-aways was becoming as high as the rate of conversions. Progressively, the simple spirit of faith and love of the early days had slowly been replaced by legalism, pressure, guilt, abusive and manipulative authority.

Eventually, by 1994, I had all the signs of a church where the end justified the means and I could not bear it anymore. I openly expressed my views, and quickly I was accused of being critical and rebellious. As I understood it was too late to change anything and that very few leaders were willing to really question things, I decided to leave.

I immediately lost everything. All the churches I had helped start, all I had sacrificed for years went up in smoke. But the worst of all was the fact that most of my former friends were told I had become an apostate and that they should be careful in talking to me because of my "dangerous" views. This was a painful departure, but I am glad that God opened my eyes so I did not waste more years of my life in that direction.

In 2003, ten years after my departure, this movement completely collapsed as top leaders started to express openly their disagreements and eventually thousands of people and ministers left bitterly, while hundreds of churches completely fell apart. Today, this denomination that used to have 120 000 members worldwide at one point, has lost more than half of its membership and it is still healing from its spiritual bankruptcy.

The third part: Joyful legalism

1994 - 2002: PLANTING churches in RUSSIA

(Church of Christ)

"The greatest danger for most of us is not that our aim is too high and we miss it, but that it is too low and we reach it" (Michelangelo)

So in 1994, I came back to my "first" Church, the Church of Christ, who warmly welcomed me and sent me for a short mission trip to Russia.

As soon as I arrived in that amazing country, I met my future wife Anna. In fact, I met her in an airport while I was changing planes. I had 40 minutes layover, and as soon as I saw her, I said to myself: "If she is as beautiful inside as outside, I have 40 minutes to find out". It was an intense conversation, and as she left me her phone number, I called her back from Moscow, and eventually after two weeks of daily phone calls, I decided to visit her, 3 months later I decided to stay and work in Russia, and 3 months later we were married!

This new romance was a spiritual romance as well. For the following 8 years, I successfully planted many churches in Siberia and at the border of China and Mongolia, able to have a positive influence in a denomination that did not have the same experience in evangelism the way I did. In fact, the last congregation I had started became one of the fastest growing and largest Church of Christ of Russia, one of the very first to appoint elders. In many ways, I had everything to be the happiest missionary ever. I had the pleasure of being much loved by the Russian churches I had planted, well respected by the US church that was supporting me, I had good credentials and financial securities, and yet, within me I had a growing dissatisfaction in what I was observing in me and around me:

The vast majority of Churches of Christ outside the US were small, not really growing in numbers and too many were largely dependent on American money. They all had a lot of intellectual Bible knowledge, but little effectiveness in their evangelism. And in my own ministry, I had reached a plateau: I felt I was working very hard, but I had few lasting results. I needed something more.

At one point in my life, I had hoped that the "total commitment" and radical evangelistic life style of the ICOC would bring about NT growth, but in the long run, it was disastrous. I had therefore returned to the Church of Christ to have a more balanced and biblical way of converting and maturing converts, but the results were still not very encouraging. Even if I was doing way above the average within my own denomination, I was still not satisfied. There had to

be a more effective way, a more ...biblical way.

Eventually,

I came to face the following dilemma: if I really wanted New Testament results, I had to take New Testament means as well. I could not have one without the other. I decided therefore to seriously study the "Charismatic question", hoping that supernatural means would give me NT results. So, after one year of studying on my own the New Testament, while meeting various Charismatic pastors in order to elucidate the question on spiritual gifts and miracles, I became convinced that the supernatural power of the Holy Spirit was a biblical necessity for the Church today. What I did not know is what it meant practically.

So

in the summer of 2001, I went for three weeks in Texas and there God has some colossal surprises for me: I was able to meet Paul Cain and Bob Jones who directly spoke very precise prophetic words in my life, which really shocked me as I did not believe in prophets at that point; but more than anything else, I came for the first time in my life to have a living encounter with the Holy Spirit. I remember it as it was yesterday: when I approached Viola, the wife of Bob Jones, she simply touched me and I went into a trance for a few hours, shaking with convulsions while I got transported in another world. I felt such an intense heat and electricity all over my body that I thought I would die! For the kind of intellectual person like me, who had made fun of "those crazy charismatic people", it was definitely not the kind of experience I had expected or looked for!

What

followed was just incredible: I started to have wonderful supernatural visions at nights, as angels and even Satan "visited" me, I started to pray for sick people who received instant healing, I got specific prophetic revelations that completely took me by surprise, and within three intense weeks, my whole spiritual perspective was radically turned upside down. I was a completely different person.

With

such shattering spiritual revelations, another one came along which shook me even more: I started to question the very foundation on which the Church of Christ was built. This denomination believes that they are pretty much the only true believers on earth, which explains why they usually do not fellowship with others Christians. After much studying and inner turmoil, I finally concluded that such a view was not biblical, and I started to view the Body of Christ in a completely different light. This was a major change in my thinking, which explains why I have such strong convictions today in wanting to see all Christians working together, regardless of their doctrinal differences.

## The fourth part: Grace and Power

### 2002 - 2008: ISOLATION and SUPERNATURAL

#### Geneva - Switzerland

"The great battles, the battles that decide our destiny and the destiny of generations yet unborn, are not fought on public platforms, but in the lonely hours of the night and in moments of agony." - Samuel Logan Brengle

With those convictions, I lost all my support as a missionary, as well as the entire relational and financial network I had built over 10 years of being with the Church of Christ. For the second time in my life, just like when I had left the International Church of Christ, everything I had built in many years "went up in smoke", and I had to start all over again. For a few months, I looked for Charismatic churches in America that would either take me as their missionary, or on their staff, but no one was willing to welcome me. This forced me to go back to Switzerland in order to find a work in order to support my family. This was a very difficult beginning there, not only because I no longer had all the securities of the past with me, but I had none of the future as well. I really did not know where to turn, which job to take, which church to go to, and what professional plans were awaiting me. Everything had to be started all over again from scratch, just one day at a time.

Since I had been willing to pay such a high prize in losing everything for God, I assumed that that He would at least use me to work for a church, or being back on the mission field. This never happened. Instead, in spite of all my long and intense efforts, I never found a position to use my talents and experience, neither among the churches of Geneva, nor in the secular world. All the doors had been closed. To make things even "worse", God clearly showed me that I should not even start a church in Geneva. Instead, I was to stay at home and take care of the children, while my wife was working full time, something she freely chose and really enjoyed. My "job" was to learn God's lessons and serve individual people to whom God would lead me. So, for the first three and half years, I waited and served, daily wondering and agonizing about a "better"



future that never came.

During

that time, I felt like I had been thrown in a mental and spiritual prison, of which God alone had the keys. In what was for me one of the most depressing and confusing times of my life, I tasted what Saint John of the Cross described the "dark night of the soul". Everything within me was being crushed and molded, as I started to experience a loneliness I had never experienced before. This was partially caused by the rejection and indifference of most people around me, as they could not understand why I was not happy in my "internal exile in Switzerland", but this was mostly caused by what I discovered in my own heart. The more I was seeking God, the more I was discovering in me roots of legalism, arrogance, and particularly a self-reliance which had characterized most of my former religious life. In my prayers, I not only started to have tears for myself, but even for the very religious people whom I had left. I was somehow being healed of all my judgmental attitude and self-righteousness, and tasting Grace in ways I had never experienced before.

By

taking away every known security from the past and concealing every one of the future, God was not only forcing me to develop a daily reliance on Him, something which was not natural for me, but He was revealing the very core of my being. For much of my life, I had spiritually defined myself through the successes of my ministry. Forcefulness, Bible knowledge and a rich experience as a church planter were my ways to shape my identity, and now that I had no full time paid ministry, no church to lead, basically "nothing" but just wait and completely depend on Him, I did not know who I was! This was confusing, but liberating at the same time.

The

most direct result of that crucial revelation is that prayer became the cornerstone of my walk with God. Not only I was taking far more time than I had ever done before, but instead of asking God to back up and bless my ways, I was waiting until He would reveal His. If God chose to be silent, I would learn to have peace and still praise Him, regardless of my impatient feelings. Just enjoying His presence is all I needed, and such a relationship, I discovered, eventually became essential in having effective results in the supernatural.

For

instance, the Holy Spirit started to lead me in the wildest directions to learn every possible lesson with Him. I was "forced" to cast out demons of people, in which for instance I saw the complete deliverance a voodoo priestess who had made a pact with the Devil; I saw the full healing of people who had MS or brain cancer; I was led to deliver precise prophetic words to city officials; I saw my prayers being answered in the most surprising ways. In challenging, and yet exciting ways, God was preparing me in every possible area of the supernatural.

My prayer for discovering the power of God, which was the very reason I had lost everything of my past, was answered. It did not come in the nice package I had expected, but it came, and it came with power!

Finally, in the beginning of March 2006, I decided to go on a 40 days fast, with the hope that God would give me some clear revelation about my "professional" future. This did not really happen, but instead He gave me the supernatural peace of completely surrendering my destiny into His hands, and the joy of becoming a substitute primary school teacher, a job where I learnt a lot about ... myself! This clearly ended the darkest phase of my isolation time in Geneva, and prepared me for the last phase of that period.

The fifth part: Final refining

2008 - 2012

Vancouver - Canada

Eventually, in September 2008, a pastor from Vancouver called us. Having heard about me through the grapevine, he decided to invite us, as he wanted to learn more about the healing. In a succession of amazing events, God opened all the doors for us to make an incredibly smooth transition to Canada. His incredible favor could be felt in absolutely every detail of the move. It was extremely obvious that God wanted to close this long isolation time of six years in Geneva with an overwhelming demonstration of His grace, and that he wanted us to move to Canada. My prayers had finally been answered, my lessons learnt, I was ready for a new adventure, on a new continent, with a new heart.

At this time of the writing, I believe that I have entered in is the final convergence of everything that has happened in my life until now. As I look back to all of this, I can only say with Paul that "I was shown mercy, so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display his unlimited patience". Twice in my life, I had everything taken away. The first time, God allowed it so that I would learn the power of His grace and compassion. The

second time, so that I would discover the supernatural power of His Spirit. Yes, my Lord saved me while I was only a young man, but in the following 25 years, He patiently kept "saving" me from legalism, religious arrogance and all the vain ambitions of doing things in my own way. What an amazing patience! What a powerful and wise Master! Yes, to Him alone be the Glory!

What

the next step will be, I do not know. I only know what God has put in my heart ever since the first day He called me: I dream to see a fully restored Church, where Jesus' compassion, power and glory will be so obvious that it will impact entire nations during our generation. Every passion, every decision, every gift, every experience and every suffering I had until now have prepared me for this very purpose. It is therefore my destiny that the remaining of my life will be involved in what I believe is the greatest move of God in the history of humanity: the full restoration of His Church for the coming of Jesus. What an exciting time in which we live! "Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory for ever and ever. Amen! "