

THE MISSIONALLY POTENT CHURCH

Inspiration and skills to seek and save the lost

By Terran Williams

This book is the first of 8 short books in a series on Missional Potency. (See the back page for the other titles.)

Many are available (and the rest will be in the coming months) at www.commonresources.co.za which is a resource website for Christians and church leaders created by Common Ground Church, a church in Cape Town, South Africa, that has grown from a motley crew of 50 people in the late 90's to a bigger much bigger motley crew, now spread over 10 congregations and 15 services each Sunday across the city of Cape Town.

This particular book does not necessarily reflect the view of all leaders in Common Ground. It has been written by Terran Williams, who has served variously as a congregational leader, teaching team and content leader, and missional potency champion in the last 20 years.

This book is the first draft. For an improved version (updated content and better formatting) please return to commonresources.co.za – and be sure to find new resources being added in the future, especially to the Missional Potency section.

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INTRODUCTION

God saved me by human instrumentality.

He never sent an angel. He sent a friend. He sent a church.

My only Christian friend, Nathan who collaborated with his church, Cape Town Baptist Church to reach me.

I was stunned by the gospel. Nathan and Cape Town Baptist had introduced me to Life at its best – an eternity long adventure of following a Saviour who loved me so much he would rather die than live without me. Just three days into my newfound relationship with Jesus, I remember being struck by an idea that grabbed me so deeply that I have never been able to get away from it...

What I have is too good to keep to myself.

I had witnessed firsthand how God used human instrumentality. Nathan was an ordinary person. Cape Town Baptist Church was an ordinary church. And yet God had conspired to conduit his kingdom into my life through this person, and this church. Before I even read the verse in Romans 10, I had seen it to be true: 'How will they believe unless they hear the gospel? How will they hear the gospel unless somebody preaches to them?'

I wanted to do for others what Nathan and my new church did for me.

I returned from that youth camp gripped by a sense of mission. I wanted my family and friends to know Jesus too. The seed of salvation sprouted forth in my life, and was now transforming me into a sower of the same seed to others.

Sure, not everyone I reached out to responded. But some did! The joy I felt seeing my friends trusting in Jesus felt almost as wonderful as the joy I had experienced when I had first trusted in him myself in the month before.

Happy-go-lucky surfer I was, the gospel did not take away my love for surfing, but it caused me to morph into a torpedo of mission. I wanted to do as much damage to the domain of darkness as I could, plundering it of its captives, seeing lost people found, blind eyes opened.

This passion – no, obsession – to introduce others to Jesus is the driving ambition behind a series of books I have written on missional potency, this book being the first and providing the overview of the rest.

What do I mean by 'mission'?

Church leaders use the word 'mission' in a variety of ways. Some use it to mean 'the call to be the countercultural people of God in the world' or 'seeking out opportunities to demonstrate compassion and justice' or 'bringing about cultural renewal' 'especially through work-faith integration'.

All of those are very, very important.

But when I use the word in this book I use as another word for evangelism, for introducing people to Jesus.

As I have set out to write 5 or 6 books on the subject, there's only so many times that one can use the word 'evangelism' – as someone writing on the subject, I welcome another word, even if other people might use the same word differently.

What's a missionally potent church?

It's one that is not only passionately committed to the discipling and care of everyone in the church, but also to reaching far-from-God people with the gospel – both by mobilizing its Spirit-filled people to connect with people who are far from God in everyday mission, as well as by inviting them into select meetings of the church, especially the Sunday meeting, where they are very likely to be impacted by the gospel.

Notice what I highlight in that definition:

- Mission is not the enemy of discipleship, but stands hand-in-hand with it.
- Mission is all of God's people spiritually engaging people far from God throughout the week.
- Mission is inviting people to come along to our Sunday meetings where they can find Jesus.

So easy to write it down. So hard to do.

I know because there are so few churches that I know that get it right.

I can count on my hand the churches that I know in my part of the world that are missionally potent by this definition.

Almost all churches I know are committed to caring for the people in the church – and devote much attention to doing just that. Almost all are committed to spiritually growing the people in the church, especially in small groups, Sunday meetings and other other settings.

They have noticed that as they focus on these things, indeed many people say:
'Thanks for caring – I went through that hard time and you were there for me'
'This church is helping me get closer to God'
'Wow, I have learnt so much about the Bible.'
'I love how our church supports those overseas missionaries.'
'I have discovered my spiritual gifts and love serving with them'
'I am so proud of our church for its work into the disadvantaged community nearby.'

All good! All of these things are so, so important. It's so encouraging to get things right that God wants us to get right!

But my experience is that a lot of (I am tempted to say 'most') churches hit it out the park in some or or all these ways, but (and this is a serious but)...

They hopelessly fail to do, and sometimes even try to do, the one thing Jesus said we should give our highest attention to, the one thing Jesus was determined to do – seeking and saving the lost (Matt 28:19, Luke 19:10).

I am not trying to beat up on us church leaders. I am sure that almost all of us would really like to see far-from-God people getting saved and joining the church.

But, based on my conversations with many pastors, I realize that the few things they have tried did not seem to work.

This leaves us in a difficult place. On the one hand we know how important evangelism is, but on the other hand we don't seem to be able to do it. At this point of frustration we are tempted to change gear...

Instead of making or keeping evangelism as the do-or-die priority it should be, we reduce it to an important thing that one day we will get round to. But for now, we focus as a church on other important things that we do seem to be able to do.

Aquarium swapping is over-rated.

If you lead a larger-than-usual church, you run the risk of congratulating yourself: 'Lots of people have joined my church, we are doing quite well.'

I have led churches that have grown rapidly in number. It feels fantastic. But we need to honestly ask ourselves the question: who are these people that are joining our church?

There are four kinds of people a church can grow with.

- 1) There's biological growth. This is church growth through having and adopting kids. (I must be honest, as a dad of five this has been my favourite kind. Julie and I grew our church by five people in this way.)
- 2) There's transfer growth. This is when people who are already churchgoing Christians relocate to your church, for either noble or ignoble reasons.
- 3) There's conversion growth. This is when your church grows with unsaved people who have found Christ through the ministry of your church and its people.
- 4) There's prodigal growth. This is when your church grows with saved people who fell away from God or church but have come home again.

I am sure that all growing churches grow with all 4 of these kinds of new people. The question is which is predominant.

I want to suggest if your church is growing with the second kind – transfer growth – that it is very affirming and exciting for your church, but I am not sure the angels in heaven are high-fiving each other as much as we are down here on earth. Your local church may have grown, but the universal church has not. Perhaps, what has happened in your church growth is not that much more significant than fish swapping from one aquarium to another – you have not caught new fish, the thing Jesus calls us to.

Especially, it's the third kind of growth, conversion growth, that we're shooting for, and of course the fourth too. We want to grow by reaching unchurched people. We long for the prodigals to come back home, and we long for the orphans to come home for the first time.

What kind of growth, if at all, is your church experiencing? It's not too hard to figure out. The first way to measure it is to count baptisms. The other way is to interview people in the new membership process and ask them about their background.

To whom much is given, much is required.

Leader of the larger-than-average church, do you mind if I pick on you one more time?

Years ago I stumbled across a question that has haunted me since.

'In your church, how many Christians did it take to make one new one every year?'

It's the great equalizer question. It suggests that the size of your church is not at all a valid measure of success. For example, if you have a church of 30 people, and you reached 2 people for Christ who joined the church, that means it took 15 Christians to reach one new one.

But if you have a church of 1000 people and you reached 25 people for Christ in the last year, that means it took 40 Christians to reach every new one.

As Jesus said, 'To whom much is given, much is required.' By the standards of stewarding Christian lives for the gospel, the church of 30 is doing more than twice as well as the larger church. The irony is that it is not the small church that should be learning from the big church, but the other way around.

Imagine standing before Jesus as a church leader one day, and he asks us, 'When I gave you so many, why did you do so little with them?'

Honestly, I don't think that large church is better than medium church which is better than small church which is better than house church. Size does not matter. Stewardship of the redemptive potential of the lives you have in your church is what matters. The question is not, 'How many people do you have?' but 'How many people do you reach with the people you have?'

(Let me throw in an aside: this is one more reason to plant churches. In one study of established churches, there are 3.4 baptisms per one hundred members, compared to new churches average 11.7 baptisms per year. In short, new churches reach new people – they are better at stewarding redemptive potential of Christfollowers.)

Comparison is futile.

The question of the missional stewarding of lives has another factor admittedly.

It's the quality of the soil that you're working in to.

I remember attending a Christian Surfers conference where surf ministry leaders from Japan, tears in their eyes, shared how hard it had been to reach the 4 non-Christian surfers they had been able to reach. After we cheered with them, the leader of the Brazilian mission, who lead a mission that had reached 1000s of surfers for Christ said, 'In Brazil for the last few decades it has been so easy to reach people for Jesus. I can walk onto a beach and shout the name Jesus and a nearby surfer will burst out crying and give their lives to Jesus.'

I realized then that some soil is harder than others.

The same amount of sowing in both Japan and Brazil yields a very different size of harvest. It's easier to see people saved in the South of the US than the North for example. Whole regions are called Bible belts, so receptive are they to gospel ministry. At the same time there are cities in the North East and North West where there are more dogs than Christians.

God factors all things together as he evaluates the degree to which we have stewarded the lives that we have for the sake of the Gospel. As we live before the audience of One, it's futile for the small church to compare themselves with the big church, and it's futile, for example, for the church in Southern Africa (where Christianity is on the up) to compare itself with the church in Europe (where Christianity is on the down).

Honesty is imperative.

Abraham's faith in God to provide a gift of a baby involved a brutal facing of the facts – he was infertile and his wife was barren. Facing the facts was not meant to so discourage him that he could not face the Father and trust him for a miracle, rather it was necessary so that one day he could credit God with an authentic miracle.

The church I am part of, Common Ground Church, grew to 800 in its first 10 years with relatively real conversion growth in the mix.

We had to face this fact. So we geared up our praying. 'God so far, the riverbed of salvations into our church has been a tiny trickle. But we're asking you to increase that flow, to increase it to a solid trickle, then to a small stream, then to a stronger stream, then to a river, and one day a mighty flowing river.'

Along the lines of our prayers, God gave us a prophetic message: 'You have experienced a decade of harvest, but it is preparation for decades of harvest.'

That was kind of God. He did not berate us. He did not say that all those years were a waste. But he did suggest that we had been low on harvest, and that he planned to increase our evangelistic yield – and this was something we should very intentionally pray about and plan towards.

What we discovered, like almost all other churches that would improve their transfer-conversion ratio of growth is that it takes time and lots of effort...

Missional momentum takes time.

Yesterday I was talking with another ideas person and we lamented how many ideas go wasted in the world, because they don't translate into action. Any successful endeavour is just that – an endeavour that involved lots of effort. Yes, there was probably a good idea at the beginning of it, and there was some good ideas along the way, but by and large it was sweat and tears that brought the change. Inspiration is important, but it comes to nothing without perspiration.

This book is going to give you the biggest and best ideas, insights and principles I have (I am sure there are plenty other things others could write) to help you come into a greater conversion growth in your church.

But, reading this book is only as good as having an idea, or only as good as faith without action. If 'faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead' (James 2:17) then ideas without implementation are dead too.

As a dad of many, I have spent a lot of time pushing kids on swings and spinning kids on merry-go rounds. I like the way Rich Birch in his book, 'Church Growth Flywheel' (pp. 42-43) uses the analogy of the merry-go-round (which I understand he adapted from Jim Collins) as a way of helping churches to start doing the things that will help them fulfil their mission:

'In many ways, the merry-go-round is like a giant flywheel. If you've never heard of it before, a flywheel is essentially a speed-regulating device that requires momentum in order to keep the engine moving. It's a huge, heavy wheel that requires a large amount of energy on the first push in order for it to get moving. As you push it more, the weight of the wheel takes over and propels you forward—just like on the merry-go-round. Among other commonalities, both of these spinning devices require some amount of momentum—and so does your church.

Momentum is a precious commodity for your church and also for you as a leader. As church leaders—and church members, in fact—we must learn to nurture it. That's a part of the job: to nurture momentum in the body.

*In order to nurture it, you first have to gain it.
Once you gain it, you must capture it.
Once you capture it, you have to push towards it and harness it.
Then and only then, you can nurture it.*

*In our churches, when we push long enough in a focused direction, we eventually behave as if we're kids on the merry-go-round who go from pushing hard to hardly pushing. Often times, people will look at a growing church, and wonder what's making that church over there grow so quickly? Churches grow because their leaders and members put in a lot of effort, and the energy is thus applied in the same direction over an extended period.'*¹

With that picture in mind, this book consists of the kinds of pushes which when done consistently and repeatedly will most likely lead to conversion growth in your church. No doubt, many of my ideas and insights will not immediately take. Many of the skills and practices will take real time and continual effort to apply. But my prayer is that the early work you put in with few results to show will be eventually eclipsed by comparably less work and greater results. That's the power of missional momentum.

How 1 book became 7

I set out to write one book, but instead I write 8. (This is the introductory one.)

The reason I created 7 books is that this book would have been in excess of 500 pages!

Instead I had mercy on you. I finally decided it would be better for you, the reader, to get a big picture of missional potency before mining into the related depths of detail and skill.

Once you read this one, I hope you don't stop with this book. For the sake of the lost, I still want you to know everything I believe you need to know. So I have created other books that dig much deeper into the first 7 chapters I have included. This is what you will find...

- 1) *Persuade the church that mission is our mandate.*
 - a. *Plus a punt for the 'Motivated for Mission' book.*
- 2) *Get your leaders to agree on the same evangelistic philosophy.*
 - a. *Plus a punt for 'The False Trichotomy: Rediscover The Sacred Synergy'*
- 3) *Mobilize and equip each one to reach ten.*
 - a. *Plus a punt for 'Ten: Introducing Those we Care About to the One Who Loves Them Most.'*
- 4) *Make every Sunday meeting magnetic*
 - a. *Plus a punt for 'Magnetic Sunday Meetings: Winning People To Jesus Every Sunday'*
- 5) *Preach in a double impact way.*
 - a. *Plus a punt for 'Double Impact Preaching'*
- 6) *In-reach: Equip parents to reach their kids.*
 - a. *Plus a punt for 'Reach Your Kids: Inspiration and Skills for a Christian Parent's Most Important Job'*
- 7) *Have a plan to disciple and integrate new believers.*
 - a. *Plus a punt for 'Ignite: A 31-day Journey Into The Bible For New Believers'*
- 8) *Run Alpha.*
 - a. *Plus a punt that you use Alpha's resources.*

I hope that the relatively short chapters in this book will give you an overview of the key ideas and insights into missional potency, but at the same time they will bait you to download the other books. With eternity at stake for the many people you and your church have access to, that's hardly too much to ask.

Enjoy.

Chapter One: Persuade the church that mission is our mandate.

If you make introducing people to Jesus an optional extra in your life and the life of your church, it will never happen.

It must be a do-or-die commitment.

For a simple reason: it is an all-out war to see the captives freed up.

Last year I took my kids to watch the sequel to the Incredibles. The storyline revolved around the superhero dad trying to rescue the superhero mom. The plot twist was that the superhero mom's mind had been taken captive, so that the dad found it incredibly difficult to rescue her. To the shock of the dad, his captive wife did not allow him to rescue her because she did not know she needed rescuing.

How do you rescue someone who does not think they need to be rescued?

This simple fact about evangelism was the first thing I discovered as a new Christian. I got saved at a youth camp, and was so excited to tell my friends about Jesus when I got home. I thought to myself, 'Once I tell them about Jesus, they're all turn to him too.' What a shock to find people so disinterested or even hostile.

Evangelistically defeated in my first week, I returned to the youth leader and asked him what had gone wrong. He explained that 'The god of this age has blinded the mind of people far from God so they cannot see the light' (2 Cor 4:4).

But what can be done for them, I asked? He reminded me that my recent conversion was itself a miracle of God. He explained that the 'God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," made his light shine in our hearts' (2 Cor 4:6).

My youth leader said that God would not be so cruel as to leave me to try reach my friends just on my own steam. The saving God still saves, he explained. Reminding myself of the miracle he had done in my life was all the encouragement I needed to keep on keeping on.

I am so glad he gave me this more sobering understanding about evangelism. God would do it, but the hoards of hell would try withstand the work of God in darkened lives. The work of outreach would not yield easy results, but as I learnt to do it in the power of God, results would come.

Over twenty years later, I must admit that I have wanted to quit trying to reach people for Jesus many times. Those blindfolds don't come off easily. When I do get to see people's eyes opened I rejoice, all the more because I know what a miracle has taken place. (The other day someone asked me if I have seen any miracles happen, and I answered, 'Yes, every time someone comes home to Jesus.')

So how we do feed the missional priority of the church? I suggest we need to preach it, pray for the success of that mission, and celebrate when our prayers are answered and our efforts pay off.

Preach the mission.

The thing that has caused me to keep on keeping on, both in my own personal outreach to friends and family, and as a church leader trying to lead a missionally potent church, is the sheer biblical conviction that mission is my and our mandate.

I am very familiar with the Scriptures that articulate the non-negotiable mission that God has given to us. The nail of missional conviction has been pounded deeply into my heart and mind not just from one or two Scriptures, but from many different ones – each of them highlighting yet another weighty reason to live my life for the lost, and as a church leader to organize our church around mission.

That's true not just of me, but all Christians. My experience is that nothing moves God's people to action like a watertight argument from Scripture.

For this reason, over the last many years as a preacher, I have preached the biblical arguments for the missional priority again and again, from many different texts.

All of my reasons for being so passionate about this have been encapsulated in the short book, *Motivated for Mission*. It's free for you to download from www.commonresources.co.za. To keep *this* book from being too long, I'll simply state a one-liner summary for each of my reasons below:

Motivated for Mission: 11 Unassailable Reasons to Reach Out'

1. *The wonder of salvation* – what I have been saved out of is so horrid and what I have been saved into is so wonderful that I'd be cruel to keep something this good to myself.
2. *The compassion of Jesus* – God's heart beats with love and compassion for people who are far from him.
3. *The mission of Jesus* – Jesus lived with a laser-sharp sense of intentionality to seek and save the lost, and he has extended his mission, by commissioning us to join him in it.
4. *The worthiness of Jesus* – mission exists because worship doesn't; the price Jesus paid makes him worthy of the saved ones he has purchased.
5. *The call to discipleship* – at the heart of Jesus' original call to 'follow me' was the call to join him on his mission; forms of discipleship that seek personal transformation unrelated to missional living are questionable.
6. *The overflowing love in the Trinity* – The Triune God did not create or rescue us because of some sense of deficiency, but rather as the outflow of exploding inner joy, life and love shared between Father, Son and Spirit; salvation is an invitation into the ever-growing circle of God's own joy and love.
7. *The opportunity of the harvest* – Jesus compared lost people to a harvest at various stages of readiness; he wants to open our eyes to reach those who are currently reachable before it is too late.
8. *The promise of the Spirit* – the Spirit of God is poured out upon us not to turn us into an inward-focused bless-me club, but rather to send us out, directing and empowering us in a supernatural rescue operation.
9. *The possibility of the catch* – Jesus compared lost people to fish; he wants to guide us into a remarkable catch.
10. *The sheer joy of it* – when Jesus was asked why he spent so much time with the unchurched, he told three stories that revealed his joy-motive: there's no thrill like seeing people you love finding the One who loves them most.

11. *The command of Christ* – in all four Gospels and in the book of Acts, Jesus gives us our marching orders; we are to go to where people are and preach the gospel to them, in season and out of season, anticipating God's supernatural support.

Missionally potent church members, I suggest, are very familiar with many of these, and perhaps other biblical angles on the evangelism priority, because they come up in preaching often enough. I imagine that a person who has been in the church for six months should be able to figure out from the message content alone that God is undeniably committed to reaching the lost, and that this church (as all churches should be) is on mission with him in this saving adventure.

Pray the mission.

Not just the preaching content, but the prayer content of church leaders should make it clear that evangelism is the God-given name of the game.

Jesus is the great evangelistic intercessor. Every earthly church leader takes their lead from the Senior Church Leader who prayed both for our salvation as well as for our evangelistic success: 'My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me' (John 17:20-21).

Christians are meant to pray for the salvation of all people. 'I urge, then, first of all, that petitions, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for all people... This is good, and pleases God our Savior, who wants all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth' (1 Tim 2:1,2,4). Paul modelled this kind of praying: 'Brothers and sisters, my heart's desire and prayer to God for the Israelites is that they may be saved' (Rom 10:1).

Christians should pray for boldness and power in our outreach efforts. The book of Acts mentions many church prayer meetings. In only one of these accounts is there also a detailed disclosure of what they prayed for, a request which was soon answered. Listen in: 'On their release, Peter and John went back to their own people and reported all that the chief priests and the elders had said to them. When they heard this, they raised their voices together in prayer to God. "Sovereign Lord... enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness. Stretch out your hand to heal and perform signs and wonders through the name of your holy servant Jesus." After they prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly.' (Acts 2:23-24,30-31)

There should be an intensity about these prayers. I must admit that only on very few occasions have I wept in prayer for the lost, but in the very least there should be a pleading with God for souls to be saved. I quote Charles Spurgeon in full as he trains us fellow pastors to pray for conversions in ministry:

We must see souls born unto God. If we do not, our cry should be that of Rachel "Give me children, or I die." If we do not win souls, we should mourn as the husbandman who sees no harvest, as the fisherman who returns to his cottage with an empty net, or as the huntsman who has in vain roamed over hill and dale. Ours should be Isaiah's language uttered with many a sigh and groan "Who hath believed our report? and to whom is the arm of

the Lord revealed?" The ambassadors of peace should not cease to weep bitterly until sinners weep for their sins. God has sent us to preach in order that through the gospel of Jesus Christ the sons of men may be reconciled to Him. Here and there a preacher of righteousness, like Noah, may labour on and bring none beyond his own family circle into the ark of salvation; and another, like Jeremiah, may weep in vain over an impenitent nation; but, for the most part, the work of preaching is intended to save the hearers. It is ours to sow even in stony places, where no fruit rewards our toil; but still we are bound to (pray for and) look for a harvest, and mourn if it does not appear in due time. (Source: http://www.thespurgeonfellowship.org/journal/hr_sp09.pdf)

Church prayer – whether in Sunday meetings, leadership meetings, dedicated prayer meetings – should cover these same themes: God's heart for people far from me, our heart for people far from God, God's drawing people to himself, God sending us out to them with great effect, and God guiding us and empowering our specific efforts.

When I lead meetings or preach sometimes, with a warm smile on my face, I admit that I (or we) have been praying for 'those of you who are new to church or back after a long time' that 'God will make himself real to you today,' or that 'you will come to know the peace that only a Heavenly Father can give.' I take my cue from the chained apostle Paul who, after sharing his testimony and the gospel with far-from-God people, said, 'Short time or long—I pray to God that not only you but all who are listening to me today may become what I am, except for these chains' (Acts 26:29).

Celebrate salvation stories.

I like how Greg Stier of 'Dare to share' ministries makes this point: 'In churches that are effective at evangelism stories of changed lives and saved souls are told consistently. These stories inject gospel urgency into the congregation. And it gives church members a sense that reaching the lost with the hope of Jesus Christ can truly change their church and their community. True stories of disciple multiplication help believers move all this talk about evangelism from the "fiction" shelf of their mental library to the "non fiction" section.'²

If you want more of something, celebrate the little bit of it you already have.

I have learnt this as a parent. If I spend all my time chiding my child for their failure in an area, they don't become better, only more discouraged. The key to behaviour change in kids is to catch them doing something right, then splash it with praise and commendation. Like a tiny flame, it's as if I nurture it with the gentle breath of encouragement, it grows.

In the same way, whatever we intentionally and continuously celebrate is what people in our church tend to duplicate. How do we best celebrate salvation?

Retell the stories. In Common Ground, we create video renditions of salvation stories that we play in our highest attendance meetings in the year, such as Christmas for example. We then re-play them again in future meetings. These real-

life samples of changed lives in our midst become the threads that weave into the tapestry of our church's sense of self. As people watch story after story of a changed life, people begin to think about the church in a new way: 'We are the kind of church where people are saved, where lives are changed. That's who we are. That's what we do.'

Make the most of baptisms. Every person who plunges their body into that water has a story to tell of how they have been plunged into the goodness of God. If the person being baptized is willing, do these baptisms with as many people watching as possible. Also encourage these people to invite their unchurched friends and family.

In meetings where several people respond to the gospel, create a celebration moment. For example, when many people indicate that they want to receive Christ or recommit their lives to him in a meeting, after I have led them in a salvation prayer, I will often say, 'Jesus told us that when just one person comes home, it's such a monumental occasion that our heavenly Father's face lights up and all the angels in the vicinity stop what they're doing and throw a big party. Would you mind if we – with handclapping – join that heavenly celebration of God's goodness to these homecoming people now?'

If you don't have your own stories, borrow from other churches that do have these stories.

The power of sharing stories of *actual people in your church* is that it communicates that God is in the business of changing lives *and he is doing it through us*.

But what if you have few of your own salvation stories to date? If you have not got a testimony to profile yet, you cannot yet demonstrate the second part that 'he is doing it through us'. But by borrowing video testimonies from other churches you can show that 'he is in the business of changing lives'! That at least creates faith in people that it can be done.

The Internet is full of video testimonies of people's salvations. My favourite collection of them is found on the app available at the www.yesheis.com. Another set of video collections is www.iamsecond.com.

Whenever we have shown these videos, whether the ones we created or the ones we borrowed, we always get a flood of requests from our members: 'Where can we get that video – we want to show it to someone?' That's why we put it on our social media sites straight after the public showing of it – it doubles up as a faithsharing tool for our people.

Chapter Two: Get your leaders to agree on the same evangelistic philosophy.

In the many years I lead a church that was seeing many people come to Christ, I realized that the battle was being fought on four fronts:

- There was the spiritual front. We were marching onto Satan's turf and plucking people from the flames (Jude 23). This necessitated prayerful reliance on the Spirit and spiritual alertness to the enemy's schemes and resistance.
- There was the discipling front. We had to keep on discipling our people to reach out to people far from God.
- There was the methodological front. We had to keep on organizing our church's methods in order to make people coming to Christ more, not less, likely.
- There was the leadership unity front. The key leaders of the church (elders and senior staff) had to stay united on our top priorities as a church.

If we failed on any of these fronts, we would fail in our mission.

It might surprise you on which front the fiercest battle was fought in the church I led... the fourth one.

We really struggled to arrive at a place of complete unity as a leadership team in terms of what our chief priorities were, and in what order they should be arranged.

The conversations that happened in our own leadership meetings reflected much of the debate I was also noticing in the blogosphere where church leaders of various emphases were criticizing each other:

- 1) As important as trying to get people saved in our Sunday meetings, surely seeing our people powerfully encounter God and being disciplined is more important?
- 2) Are we meant to be drawing non-Christians into our meetings, or are we meant to be sending Christians out to do evangelism out there during the week?

Especially if you were to go online and read what church leaders (especially in the US) were saying about their preferred way of doing church, you could notice the same thing:

Some churches were organizing themselves around *discipleship*. Very often, they would criticize the so-called attractional church for trying to cater to unsaved people in their meetings when they should instead be focusing on deepening the disciples of Jesus they have.

Some churches were organizing themselves around *mission*. Very often, they would criticize some of what was happening in the discipleship churches (which they deemed to be introspective) as well as the attractional churches (which they believed was not sufficiently mobilizing their people to incarnational mission).

Some churches were organizing themselves around *attraction*. Very often, they would criticize churches that unchurched people would not like to attend, as well as pointing to their numerical growth as a way of diminishing what the more

organic missional churches were trying to do, which did not have large crowds as a measure of success.

What I noticed is that this larger conversation worked its way into our leadership meetings. Influenced by what each of us as individual leaders had read as well as what we personally preferred, we were not in complete unison on whether discipling our people, attracting nonChristians into our meetings, and sending out our Christians on everyday incarnational mission were equally important.

More than that, many of us carried a belief that somehow these three priorities were in competition with each other. If we focused too much on trying to draw unbelievers in we would not pay enough attention to sending believers out on mission. If we tried to evangelize unchurched people in our midst we would reduce some of the discipling potency in the Christians in our meetings.

These conflicts of opinion became fault lines that kept on coming up in our leadership meetings.

During those 'conflict of perspective' years I also read *Sticky Church* by Larry Osborn. I found myself underlining these several paragraphs early in his book³:

'I consider maintaining the unity of our eldership and our staff as one of my most important leadership priorities, far ahead of other worthy goals—including even evangelism, church growth, and community outreach—because without unity, everything else falls apart.'

'As a farmer needs to clear the land before planting his crop, a pastor needs to clear out any conflict (of perspective) within the board, staff, or congregation in order to plant and reap a spiritual harvest.'

Hungry to know how he resolved this severe drainer of leadership energy (which in turn drained evangelistic potency), I read on. He summarized his strategy to do so...

'(This list) forms my working definition of a unified leadership team. Your list may differ. But this is a good place to start: 1) Doctrinal unity 2) Respect and friendship 3) Philosophical unity.'

It was especially that third item – 'philosophical' unity - that jumped out to me. It is one thing believing a few things are biblically important, it's another agreeing on their order of importance and whether they rival each other in some ways, or in fact are symbiotic.

Eventually we did come to a consensus of philosophy.

Since that I have done some more work on this proposed unity of philosophy that I believe can be helpful to all church leadership teams. I have written a short book called 'The False Trichotomy: Discover The Sacred Synergy'

It is not a how-to-book at all. It is all philosophical – it deals with the relationship between:

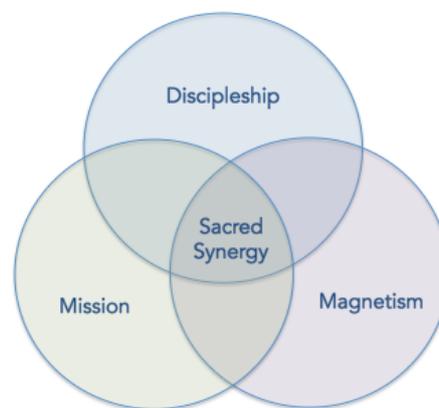
- Discipleship: trying to bring our people to spiritual maturity.
- Mission: trying to mobilize our people to everyday relational evangelism.
- Magnetism: trying to draw unsaved people into our Sunday meetings.

In the book I speak of:

- discipleship being catalytic – we organize our church to stimulate spiritual progress in the lives of people.
- mission being centrifugal – like rays emanating from the sun, so Christ and this church sends people out on daily mission.
- magnetism being centripetal – like the sun's gravity, Christ and the church issue a powerful pull on people who don't normally go to church.

I offer the book to you, in the hope that you can get your leadership team to read it together. The goal? To overcome our tendencies to a false trichotomy, and to find the sacred synergy that really does exist between discipleship, mission and magnetism.

The book makes no suggestions about strategies – that will be the dignity of your leadership team to work on.



Chapter Three: Mobilize and equip each one to reach ten.

In my previous point, I used the word 'magnetism' rather than 'attraction' because 'attraction' has come to be used, especially in the US, as a way of lumping together some fast-growing churches that try draw unchurched people into their meetings.

Jared Wilson, in his book 'Prodigal Church' delineates several unhealthy hallmarks of the so-called attractional church. Though I don't think his description is fully true of all fast-growing churches in the US, there is one area of concern that I share with him: they lose the mission in the magnetism. On the one hand, they put too many of their evangelistic eggs in putting on amazing Sunday meetings and encouraging their people to invite others to come along. On the other, they put too few in the basket of discipling and equipping their people for lives of daily mission.

Jared Wilson points to a body of research that shows that most of the large attractional churches in the US are not growing with completely unchurched people at all, but rather with re-churched and ex-churched people.

Why could that be? On my read of why that is happening, I propose that the problem might not be what Jared Wilson says (he argues that these churches are not 'Gospel-centred' enough) but rather that they are not missional enough.

No matter how evangelistic potent your Sunday meetings are, unchurched people will not be getting saved in them if your Christians you have are not been: 1) building relationships with their unsaved connections, 2) engaging skillfully in spiritual conversations, 3) showing God's love to them over a long period of time and 4) when appropriate, inviting them to events where they can hear the Gospel.

As one example, I think of North Point church. Although I have been helped in many ways by North Point church, I have been concerned by how little emphasis they put on 'sending out' Christians to share their faith with their friends. North Pointers are instructed to: invest in the relationship, invite them to come along.

That may work in Bible belts, but it certainly will not work in post-Christian parts of the world. As important as relationship building and invitations to church meetings are, I believe every believer must do the sowing work of having lots and lots of skillful, well-timed spiritual conversations.

We cannot leave all the communication of the gospel to a Sunday preacher when we are meant to be gossiping the gospel in the context of the relationships we already have with far-from-God people, as well as in the relationships that we are still to develop. Everyone is to be a missionary. Everyone is to be a preacher – though the communication of the gospel is bits-of-truth-at-a-time, two-way and not nearly as eloquent as a Sunday sermon.

Missionally potent churches must mobilize and equip their people to start and strengthen their friendships with family members, neighbours, colleagues and hobby-mates

If church history, especially the earliest church, is anything to go by the most effective form of evangelism is relational. Starting in the Gospels, then also in the

book of Acts, Christians are best at introducing those they care about to Jesus. The gospel flows along relational lines. According to Michael Green in his book, 'Evangelism in the early church', this tendency of passing the faith on to people we are in relationship with accounts for the early church's continued growth of 40% per annum over a 300-year period, despite state-sponsored persecution against Christians.

A church nearby to the one I planted had a motto: 'each one reach one'. The pastor explained to the church he led that if each member could win just one person to Christ, the church would double. I really like that. It's do-able (by the grace of God of course) and it acknowledges that each of us do mission.

That said, I still think 'each one reach one' is aiming too low. I opt instead for 'each one reach ten'. A few weeks ago I preached in one of our congregations and I got everyone to write down the names of 10 unchurched people that they have a good relationship with – people they live with, play with, work with or live next door to. I then challenged them to associate their ten fingers with those ten people.

Holding up my outstretched hands, I said, 'These 10 people are your mission field. They are an extension of your life. You get to lift them up to God in prayer, reach these people, serve these people, hold on to these people and, God willing, bring these people into God's kingdom, short time or long.'

At the end of the meeting, I asked everyone to lift up their 10 fingers to God, lifting up their friends and family members in prayer. I stood on the stage as I witnessed a sea of fingers held out by people whose faces were lit up with love for their lost loved ones and friends.

In a flash, my focus as a church leader came clear. It dawned on me that the primary mission field of our church, for the next while, is those 1000s of people far from God, each of them only one degree removed from the Gospel.

Whenever we speak about reaching the lost, there should be little mystery involved in guessing who these lots people may be might be. In the case of that congregation, it's those 5000 people (there were 500 people in that congregation with ten fingers in the air). When we equip our people to reach out, we equip them to reach those people. When we create meetings that are great for unchurched people to come to, we are creating environments that will host those 5000 people. When we invest money into evangelism, and hire staff, we are sowing towards the salvation of those 5000 people.

If you lead a church, can you imagine the same? Each person in your church represents 10 other people. Your best chances of leading the whole church into that combined mission field is to disciple and equip the people you do have to know their mission field, and then sow into it through Christlike and caring, invested and inviting, praying and probing, gospel-sharing lives.

How to equip each one to reach ten

You might be wondering *exactly* how to equip your people to reach their ten.

I am busy writing a book (which might be finished by the time you read this) called *Each One Reach Ten*, in which I share everything I have learnt about being a contagious Christian that reaches friends and family far from God.

I hope you not only read it, but if you find it as helpful as I want it to be, recommend it to every follower of Jesus you know. If you are a church leader, I hope it becomes a repository of training for you to keep on training your people in missional living towards their ten.

Model and speak about the missional lifestyle.

The best way for church leaders to create a culture, where biblical values and priorities are actually lived out in the church is for the preacher to often share, sometimes only in passing, how they have been doing something in the last week because Jesus wanted them to do it. Over time, people can tell the difference between something the preacher tells us all to do, and the things the preacher actually does as the ordinary course of their life.

More is caught than can be taught. People catch it when the vocal leaders of the church don't just tell us to do something, but do it themselves. These are the values they will actually imbibe into their lifestyles.

However, this culture-forming principle jeopardizes the entire enterprise of missional living. For the reason that us church leaders and preachers are neck-deep in the life of the church ourselves. Of all Christians, we seem to have the least time, capacity or energy left to connect relationally with people far from God. We justify this absence of missional living by telling ourselves that our job is to lead Christian people into the ministry and the mission, and it is there job to do it.

The problem with this is that we cannot infect people with something that has not infected us. If we as leaders and preachers do not know who our ten are, and we do not have a lifestyle of relationally connecting with people far from God, then when we speak about it to others, we will communicate a sense of obligation rather than opportunity.

It's only as we do something ourselves, and see how it works, that we can contagiously recommend the same to others. It is Jesus who said, '*The student is not above the teacher, but everyone who is fully trained will be like their teacher.*' (Luke 6:4). For example, pastors who are passionate about Bible study tend to incite their congregations to study their Bibles too. Church leaders who love to pray tend to infect their people with the same prayerfulness. In the same way, leaders who connect with people far from God are able to inspire their people to do the same.

Training people in relational mission

One way to ignite people in living to reach their ten is to get them to read a book on the subject, like the one I am writing. But there are other things that can be done:

- *Do a preaching series* on evangelism over several weeks every two or three years. The book I have written contains the kind of content you can include in that.
- *Do a self-standing message on evangelism at least once or twice a year.* This talk may fit into another series. For example when we in Common Ground Church preached through the beginning of John's Gospel, we preached on evangelism for two weeks as we went through John 1. Towards the end of the chapter, Andrew introduces Peter to Jesus, and Philip does the same for Nathaniel. Stretching out these two stories, we trained our people in person-to-person faith-sharing. We did the same as we went through Exodus, and came to the part where Moses lead his father-in-law to faith in Exodus 18. We did the same in our Acts series when we looked at Philip's ministry to the Ethiopian eunuch in Acts 8. A pastor friend of mine, going through the book of Colossians with his people stopped for several weeks on the verse in the first chapter where Epaphras, after being introduced to Jesus by Paul, went back to his home town and paid the kindness forward to his friends and family, who in turn became the original church in Colossae.
- *Call all your small groups* together for 3 weeks to equip them on the matter. Or work through video-based training in small groups. (I hope to create this in the future.)
- *Have an annual evening or Saturday half-day or Sunday afternoon* where you call the committed core of the church together to equip them in relational outreach.

Though there is much ground to cover when it comes to training people in missional living, there is one simple activity that yields the greatest fruit. At least once a year, get everyone to re-identify their ten people. I suggest in a select meeting you hand out to people a piece of paper with the outline of two hands with ten fingers. Then ask everyone to fill in the names of their ten in the fingers. Ask them to put that piece of paper somewhere in their home, so that they will see it everyday.

Once these ten have been identified, I suggest that small group life can include people sharing their list on an annual basis with the rest of their small group. Then monthly time can be made in the groups to share any progress reports and request for prayer as they have sought to love and serve those ten.

Chapter Four: Make every Sunday meeting magnetic

The three most evangelistically strategic turning points in the history of the church I am part of are:

- 1) The day we decided to go multi-congregational – this allowed us to plant lighthouses for the gospel in new parts of the city, multiplying our missional impact to new populations.
- 2) The day we decided to preach the gospel in every message – this allowed us to evangelize not-yet-believers and renew believers every Sunday, bringing two birds to life with one stone.
- 3) The day we decided to make every Sunday a good Sunday to bring your unchurched friends.

In this chapter I speak about the third decision: making every Sunday meeting magnetic.

As already stated in the second chapter, Sunday meetings are not primarily for evangelism. They are primarily to edify and equip believers for discipleship and mission. But they are definitely also for the engagement and evangelism of nonChristians.

Common Ground's journey to magnetic meetings.

Two decades ago I joined a church with a passion to reach the lost. Rigby Wallace, the leader of the church, held a twin passion in his heart that he regularly articulated with this maxim: 'God has a double heart beat. Baboom, baboom. His heart beats for the church – baboom. Then it beats for the world – baboom. The church – baboom, the word – baboom.'

What a great starting theology for the church that we would grow into. Rigby stated our church's vision in a way that held discipleship (God's heart for the church) and evangelism (God's heart for the world) side by side.

What wasn't so clear in the early years was exactly how we would expect to see people saved. We were a very charismatic church. In our weekly prayer meetings, we leaders would pray rabidly for God 'to bring in the lost'.

We were on fire for God, but a few years in, we wondered, 'We have seen our church grow, but these new people who are arriving are all already Christians. Where are the lost people we're hoping to reach?' We began to wonder why the people in our church were not doing the thing they were meant to – 'invite your friends.'

Desperate to see more unchurched people coming in, we experimented with what we called 'Guest Sundays'. Twice a year, we'd choose two Sunday meetings where we would work hard on creating a meeting that would be particularly attractive to unchurched people. We'd encourage everyone to bring their unchurched friends to those.

There were two problems with that approach though. One is that the meetings we put on didn't feel like us. We were stiff and awkward in the way we led worship and the way we preached. Worship leaders and meeting leaders were trying on armour

that they had no experience in putting on. I think our unchurched guests picked up on this awkwardness because they would generally not come again. Two is that those guests who did like what they experienced would come back the following week only to feel like they were coming to a totally different church.

At a leadership level, we were not united on whether nonChristians should be in our Sunday meetings at all. The church movement we were part of had warned us against the dangerous watering down of Christianity that was happening in the so-called Seeker Services of megachurches in America. As much as we wanted to reach people we would not dare be unfaithful to God by avoiding difficult topics and texts nor failing to enjoy God in our times of corporate worship.

This all changed when I came across an article written by Tim Keller (I was the first of my friends to stumble across this Presbyterian pastor in New York) called 'Evangelistic Worship'⁵. In it, he argued that the presence of nonChristians in worship services was something the Bible encouraged, and that we as the church, without negating our attempts to edify believers and exalt God, should organize our meetings in an attempt to entice and evangelize not-yet-believers too. As a leading preacher in our church, I was especially taken by his charge that we should seek to preach to 'a mixed audience' and that, in fact, it was possible and beneficial for both believers and unbelievers that we did just that. He shared that our members, though benefiting from our meetings themselves, could intuitively sense whether inviting their unchurched friends would be helped by what we do on Sundays. No matter how much we told them to invite their friends, they would not bring their friends if they felt it would actually have the reverse effect on the people precious to them, possibly putting them off Christianity somehow.

With Rigby's full endorsement, I called together all the preachers in our church and trained them in (what I called) 'Double impact preaching'. I explained, based on Tim Keller's prediction, that if we preach in a way that engages both believers and not-yets, that believers would find themselves wishing that they had invited that friend to this one. If, for four or five meetings in a row, they had that same sense, then eventually they would bring their friends. Especially if we promised that every Sunday meeting would be a good one to bring their friends to.

So we started our attempt at Double Impact preaching. As Tim had predicted, when we preached as if nonChristians were there, nonChristians started to arrive. Wonderfully, many of them made professions of faith after several weeks or months of coming. We were elated.

To be honest, changing our preaching style was difficult, and we would fail to do it well many times, but the more we gave thought to it, and practiced it, the better we got at it.

Once we were committed to Double Impact preaching, we quickly realized that the message was only one part of the meeting. We asked ourselves, 'What does double impact hospitality, meeting leading, singing, announcements, offerings and the exercise of spiritual gifts look like?'

Without diluting our worship of God or our discipleship potency, and without avoiding difficult texts and topics, we started to make the tweaks. I'm glad we did, because our efforts were soon rewarded. Our numbers began to swell.

Sure, God was at work. But without taking away from what only God can do, I realized there was something purely mathematical about what was happening. The person who goes fishing 54 times catches 18 times more fish than the person who goes 3 times. In the past, we had committed to try reach people far from God in three meetings per year (the two Guest Sundays and Christmas). Now we were trying to reach them in 54 meetings a year. No wonder we were being 18 times more effective at doing so!

We had stumbled across something that is not only biblical, but also works wonders.

So what are the tweaks that we made?

How to win people for Jesus every Sunday.

I have written a book that deals thoroughly with the subject of making Sunday meetings more magnetic. It is freely available. To lure you to read that book, as well as give you an idea of the kinds of tweaks that we made in Common Ground (and try to continue making) here is the table of contents, with a little bit of a description next to each chapter heading.

Magnetic Sunday Meetings: How to Win People to Jesus Every Sunday

PART 1: Magnetic Meeting Principles

Before even thinking about service components, there's some broad principles that affect what people will experience in our Sunday meetings:

Chapter 1 Seek evangelistic grace, faith and intentionality.

In the same way God gives people spiritual gifts, he gives some churches extra portions of converting grace. Be sure to ask God for this gift. Seeing people saved will be affected by your levels of expectation and faith – as Jesus said, 'according to your faith it will be to you'. Reaching nonChristians in your meetings will not happen by accident – you need to make it a do-or-die commitment and be willing to unlearn and learn whatever skills are required.

Chapter 2 Help volunteers connect their service to the mission.

Nothing motivates the many volunteers that are required to pull off a Sunday meeting like the understanding that each of them have a crucial part to play in the winning of lost people to Christ. Every volunteer can lead people *towards* Jesus, even if they don't get to (like the preacher does) lead people *to* Jesus.

Chapter 3 See the Sunday meeting through outside eyes.

Church members are fond of giving church leaders feedback for how to do meetings in a way that is more helpful to them. As helpful as that feedback is, if we only listen to insiders, eventually we will have no outsiders coming. We need to find ways to get and prize feedback from unchurched guests.

Chapter 4 Mobilize a culture of warm hospitality.

As important as upfront welcoming and a dedicated Guest Section is, these things cannot substitute for unfriendly church members. We must train our people and create a culture where everyone who calls this church their home look make new people feel at home too.

Chapter 5. In a family rich context, give massive attention to kids and teenager ministries.

In parts of a city where there are lots of families, the most strategic way to win whole families is to win their kids. We must invest money and our best staff into the kids and teenage ministry. This not only can win entire families, but also targets the age group who are in fact the most receptive to the gospel in the first place.

Chapter 6 Develop your website, signage and information accessibility.

Research into what turns off first-time guests revealed these three things as major factors.

Chapter 7 Optimize your location, venue, cleanliness and atmospherics.

Guests are not only responsive to people, but to spaces. Everything about us says something about us.

Chapter 8 Mobilize a culture of invitation.

No matter how evangelistically potent your message, meeting and hospitality is, it counts for nothing if there are not nonChristians there. It's not rocket science what will bring these guests – our people need to invite them. As leaders, we must guide and assist our people in inviting their nonChristian connections.

Chapter 9 Create high-attraction Sundays and series.

In Common Ground I noticed that, on any given year, that over two thirds of our guests arrived in less than one third of our Sundays. Through planned 'big days' and more attractational sermon series, we can plan and leverage these big days in advance. Not all with return in the meetings that follow, but many will.

PART 2: Magnetic Meeting Components

Broader principles aside, let's look at the nitty-gritty's of tweaking the components of our Sunday meeting so that they do more than just edify saints, but also engage and evangelize sinners.

Chapter 10 Call people to worship in a way that includes unsaved people.

If you do a brief call to worship upfront, say something that includes guests, drawing them in yet at the same time removing any pressure they might feel to participate.

Chapter 11 Select songs that have great content, have cultural resonance, ooze joy and are upbeat.

The first two songs in a worship set should preferably not be about us but about God and the gospel. The songs should be joyful in tone and upbeat. In Common Ground, when we let this slip, we noticed a reduced impact upon nonChristians.

Chapter 12 Aim at musical excellence.

Shoddy music and singing does us no favours. Unchurched people are not looking to forgive poor artistry (as we Christians are) and are far more likely to be put off by it.

Chapter 13 Whoever takes the mic should bring energy to the room, not drain it.

Many of us are energy-blind. We don't realize how some people have a way of draining the energy out the room as they speak, while others have the ability to infect the rest of us with awakesness and anticipation.

Chapter 14 When you welcome people, include the guests.

In the parts of the meeting when you welcome everyone, think very carefully how best to welcome guests. What can you say to reassure them they are in the right place, as well as increase our chances of getting a brochure to them, and connecting with them afterwards.

Chapter 15 Let guests off the hook with regard to giving.

Without pulling back on the giving moment, make it very clear to guests that there is no pressure to give at all.

Chapter 16 Think carefully through the announcements.

Announcements that are too long, not filtered well, not presented compellingly and that don't underline the lived values of the church do more harm than good.

Chapter 17 Preach in a way that is double impact.

Although this point is dealt with in another book, nothing holds the possibility of winning nonChristians for Christ like the 35 minutes of preaching. Yet at the same time this is not a pure evangelism message. It is a message for Christians which doubles up as a message to unsaved people. Preaching to a mixed crowd is a skillset that must be learned – and is well worth it, especially when you see people getting saved regardless of what text or topic you have just preached on.

Chapter 18 Throw out the net skilfully

Part of the gospel message itself is a summons to turn to Christ. Evangelistically potent preachers do more than entice nonChristians throughout their whole message/ At the end they call them to trust in Christ. There are many different ways to help people cross the line of faith.

Chapter 19 Do communion thoughtfully and after the message.

Always connect communion to the gospel, and use it as a time not only for believers to renew their experience of Christ's finished work and their spiritual unity with each other. It's also a chance to press unbelievers to trust in Christ so they too can join the feast. As for the 'fencing of the table' we can find ways to do this without nonChristians feel unwelcome or spare.

Beware of loving your model more than the mission.

In this chapter, I have been giving examples of changing the way we do things, even while we hold to the timeless truths and practices that should be evident in all churches in all cultures. Church leader, Carey Nieuwhof makes this point masterfully in a 2016 article. 6

Many individual congregations and some entire denominations won't make it. The difference will be between those who cling to the mission and those who cling to the model. When the car was invented, it quick took over from the horse and buggy. Horse and buggy manufacturers were relegated to boutique status and many went under, but human transportation actually exploded. Suddenly average people could travel at a level they never could before.

The mission is travel. The model is a buggy, or car, or motorcycle, or jet.

Look at the changes in the publishing, music and even photography industry in the last few years. See a trend? The mission is reading. It's music. It's photography. The model always shifts....moving from things like 8 tracks, cassettes and CDs to MP3s and now streaming audio and video.

Churches need to stay focused on the mission (leading people into a growing relationship with Jesus) and be exceptionally innovative in our model.

I quote this because it re-inforces the point I have been making in this chapter. When it is clear what you want to do (reach nonChristian people on Sundays without forfeiting your meetings' edification potency of Christians) it then begs the question, 'How will we do that?' My book, 'Magnetic Sunday meetings' is a model-book that encourages us to keep on adjusting our model which changes over time, even while we give ourselves to the mission which is as timeless as the Lord that issued it.

Chapter Five: Preach in a double impact way.

In the previous chapter I shared how Common Ground Church became convinced of the need to preach to both believers and unbelievers every message.

By far the most evangelistic important part of the meeting is the preaching of God's Word. As important as it is for the unbeliever to sense something of God's presence and transcendence in this meeting, or to see God's love evident in the volunteers, or to notice the sincere whole-heartedness of the people in the singing, God's sharp edge in the conversion of people is the anointed preaching by his messengers. 'How can anyone preach unless they are sent? As it is written: "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!" (Rom 10:15)¹

Paul's conversion strategy hinged on a primary conviction, that 'the gospel is the power of God to save people' (Rom 1:16). Despite the variety of plotlines in the 100s of salvation testimonies I have heard over the years, I have heard hardly any that did not involve, at some point, the saved person hearing someone try explain the gospel. I, for example, have two ways of describing my journey to faith: a long one and a short one. The long one involves the death of a father, the pursuit of Christian friends, my best attempts to escape the hound of heaven, and going on a surf camp organized by a church. The short form of my testimony is this: I was not saved, then I heard the gospel preached and God opened my eyes and I became a child of God.

My point is that the articulation of the gospel is a non-negotiable if we wish to see people saved in our meetings.

The Spirit's anointing on that message is just as important. When Paul, reflecting on what led to the conversion of people in the Thessalonian church, said, 'Our gospel came to you not simply with words but also with power, with the Holy Spirit and deep conviction.' (1 Thes 1:5). What we learn from Paul is that for people to get saved, they need more than our words. The Spirit must be at work, anointing both our words and opening up the eyes of unbelievers so that they are enabled to perceive 'the light of the gospel that displays the glory of Christ, who is the image of God' (2 Cor 4:4).

Sunday preaching is not only evangelistic preaching.

Sunday preaching is not only for unbelievers. It's, perhaps first and foremost, to edify and equip believers. Those who feed God's people must not only preach the gospel but the whole counsel of God (Acts 20:27). The preacher must not 'hesitate to preach anything that would be helpful' (Acts 20:20) to God's people. The breadth of the material that is to be preached means that preachers over the centuries have developed the skill of preaching all of God's Word to all of God's people.

This is fantastic! But it comes with a problem. If we have not tried to engage nonChristians simultaneously over all the years of our preaching, then we have unwittingly developed a kind of preaching that tends to work on Christians but not nonChristians.

This leads to the absence of unchurched people in our meetings. As I said earlier, our people often do not invite their friends because they intuitively believe that your

preaching will either leave their guests cold or will have the opposite effect of what we hope for – it will push them further away from the gospel.

The solution is to *always preach in a double impact way*. Earlier I defined 'double impact' as preaching that both edifies and equips believers as well as engaged and evangelizes not-yet-believers.

This is a whole skill set on its own. All Christian preachers know how to preach to a all Christian audience. Some Christian preachers know how to preach to a primarily nonChristian crowd – we call this 'evangelistic preaching'. But few know how to engage both groups *at the same time*.

Learning a new skill

In my own experience, learning to preach in a double impact way each and every Sunday has been one of the more difficult skills to learn, but is by far the most important for a greater harvest.

Within this next year I will write a short book on how to preach double impact. It will develop some of the training lectures I have given on the subject. (To listen to those, go to www.commonground.co.za, then click the Discover tab, then the Church Leaders tab. In the mix of lectures I have done on preaching look for the two of double impact preaching.)

For now, let me share some of the most important skills of double impact preaching.

The basic advice I give to preachers in Common Ground is that they prepare the first draft of their message and then admit that they, like almost all preachers everywhere, have a default setting to preach Christian messages to Christian people. I then tell them to think of one or two nonChristian people they have socially connected with lately. I tell them to then imagine these outsiders sitting in the front row. I then say, 'Now overhaul your message so that not only do you edify and equip Christians, but that you compellingly engage and evangelize these specific unchurched friends.'

I then give them 11 quick bits of advice to make their message more double impact:

- Get to the point and keep your message under 35 minutes. People's concentration muscle is gone. The only times people in our culture listen to a monologue is to a Ted Talk presenter or a comedian, where hardly any real effort of concentration is required.
- Speak well. If they think you're a lousy, boring or hard-to-follow speaker, they will shut you out and miss your message. People would rather believe a lie told well than the truth told poorly. As important as good content is, you must learn to communicate in a way that grabs and holds the attention of people.
- Directly address 'those who are new to church or back after a long time' early in their message, so that they know that this message is for them too.
- Engage culture, because this is the water that your friends are swimming in. Where possible, quoting respected or popular cultural voices that echo biblical truths is a way of building a bridge towards people who do not recognize biblical authority.
- Descend the ladder of abstraction – don't only affirm doctrines, also show people the positive difference this makes to their daily lives. As a general rule

unchurched people are less concerned about 'what's true' than 'what works', so show them the difference the gospel makes. Let them try Christian living on for size even while they consider Christ.

- Take out all church- or theology-jargon. If you opt to keep it in, immediately define these terms so that your friends don't feel excluded. But more than merely making truth clear, make it real. Especially use stories and metaphors that help drive concepts from the head to the heart.
- Reveal some of your humanity and struggles in your message. Unchurched people are especially going to be more receptive if you break their (wrong) perception that you are 'holier than thou'. In a culture where authenticity is king, don't dare let anyone think you're aloof.
- Perhaps include a whole point in your message directed to 'those of you who do not believe in Jesus or who are not sure what you believe' – this will necessitate taking out some stuff that you would have included if you were only speaking to Christians.
- Imagine some of the objections and concerns that nonChristians are likely to have about major things in your message. Instead of denouncing their concerns, affirm it but then winsomely say something to dismantle it.
- Make sure that your message is not moralistic in tone – what a tragedy if the overall impression of your message is that Christians are those who merely try harder to be a good person.
- Related to the previous point, make sure your message lands in a proclamation of the gospel of Jesus. Highlight some aspect of the gospel which the topic or text you are preaching on allows. Highlight something of who he is, what he has done and the difference this all makes. On this final tip, I quote Greg Stier of Dare2Share ministries: 'After visiting a church in our community a few years ago, the pastor of the church (whom I have known for awhile) texted me after the service and asked me to give him an honest evaluation of the church. My text response was this, *"Great service! Friendly people. Good sermon. Great worship. The only thing I'd say is that if I was lost when I came in I'd still be lost when I left (because the gospel was not clearly given)."* When you give the gospel consistently in your church meetings then the church members know that any time they bring an unreached person they will hear the gospel. When I was a pastor I gave the gospel at the end of every sermon and we saw people come to faith weekly. Why? People invited friends, family and neighbours to church because they knew that the gospel would be given clearly and consistently.'⁷

The trickiness of teaching on evangelism in a Sunday meeting

As I argued earlier, I believe every Sunday should be a great Sunday to bring someone to church. We church leaders need to come at every topic and text not only with believers in mind but also not-yet-believers.

Let me demonstrate how absolute this principle is by thinking about how it applies when we preach on the subject of evangelism. Some might suggest, surely that kind of topic should be pushed out of the Sunday meeting. It seems like the one topic that it would be better for all the people to be Christians. As one of my friends put it, 'You don't lay out a net while the birds you are trying to catch watch.'

I disagree. We certainly can and must preach on evangelism and can skillfully, even winsomely, in front of the very people we're trying to reach.

If I can persuade you about this point, then I think you start to grasp how double impact preaching is not only evangelistic preaching. It is also preaching to Christians about Christian things *while nonChristians listen in, seeking to win them in the process.*

Last month I preached on evangelism. I strongly preached the missional mandate, as well as some of the things I do to reach people far from God. I challenged the church to live on mission for their ten. Then at the end of the message, as I always do, I invited new people to trust in Jesus. Guess what? Many came to faith!

The drawing power of God aside, how did I teach on evangelism and still win the lost? The answer is that I have worked hard at developing a 'double impact' mindset and set of skills. I have learnt to preach to Christians and nonChristians in the same audience regardless of the topic.

I did several things to include nonChristians in my message, rather than merely making them wish they had never come, or making their Christians friends wish they had not invited them. If I recall...

- Right up front I said, 'Those of you who are new here, welcome. I don't know if you know, but we are a church where you are welcome to belong before you believe. Most of our messages are equally relevant to both followers of Jesus and to those who are still just looking in. I must admit this message is exceptional and leans far more heavily to followers of Jesus. That said, I don't think it's a mistake you're here. I believe that there's some things that you will find really helpful on your journey.'
- A bit later in my message, I highlighted that there is one main reason that we share our faith with others – simple love. I explained that what we have is too good to keep to ourselves. 'If you had a cure for Aids and you didn't share it with your sick relatives and friends and neighbours, you'd be the cruelest person ever.' I also said, 'Those of you who are not yet convinced about Jesus, I am sure you can see the logic. Even the famous atheist Penn Jillette of illusionist duo Penn and Teller realized this. In a youtube clip he speaks of a man who shared the Christian gospel with him. Although he still didn't believe, he was so touched by the love. He said, 'If you believe that there's a heaven and a hell, and people could be going to hell or not getting eternal life, and you think that it's not really worth telling them this because it would make it socially awkward... how much do you have to hate somebody to not proselytize? How much do you have to hate somebody to believe everlasting life is possible and not tell them that?'
- Later in my sermon I said, 'Maybe some of you who are not followers of Jesus are saying to yourself, 'This is one of the reasons I could never become a Christian. They're always trying to convert everyone.' Maybe you're saying, 'Everyone should live and let live. If it works for you great, but keep it to yourself.' But can't you see that you have one way of seeing the world ('live and let live') and you're encouraging me to see it like you see it. I have another way of seeing the world ('come to Jesus and live') and am encouraging you to see it like I see it. My point is you are trying to convert me every bit as much as I am trying to convert you. You're doing the very thing you're telling me not to do. But that's not a problem. That's how society moves forward: people share their best insights and discoveries with each other. You have the freedom to reject what I share every bit as much as I have the freedom to share it. As for me, I am so glad that people did feel the freedom to share the gospel with me all those

years ago – had they not I would not have made the greatest discovery of my life: a relationship with the One who knows me best and loves me most. And dare I say it: I think you're in line to make the same discovery. I don't think it's a co-incidence that you're here today. I believe God is drawing you with his love. Just thinking aloud.'

- Near the end of my message, I looked for all the gaps I could to articulate aspects of the gospel. For example, when I gave Christians samples of the things they can share in twenty-seconds with their friends in the context of a conversation, I was not just equipping followers of Jesus, I was evangelizing non-Christians in the room. For example I said, 'You can tell your friends, I used to think Christianity was a religion, but I realized in fact it's a relationship' and 'I used to think that only good people get to God and heaven, but I realized none of us are good enough. It's not good people but forgiven people that get to God and heaven.'
- All the way through, I spoke of evangelism not primarily as something you *have* to do (even though I believe it is) but as something you *want* to do. As a Christian I do not live under the heavy weight of obligation. We are not under the law, rather we are under the Spirit who inspires our love and obedience from within. Doing God's will is a joy. I was trying to make sure people saw even the obedience of evangelism in this light: 'You just try tell a grandparent to tell no one about their first grandchild. It's the same with someone who has just discovered that there's more to life than flesh and blood, molecules and mayhem – there's a God who made you, who wants to know you, who has a purpose and a destiny for your life, who wants to walk with every day, this day, tomorrow and forever. When you discover something that good, it's hard to hold it in.'

Read more.

If you would like to dig into the skill of double impact preaching from other resources, you can read the 5 resources that have helped me the most on the subject:

- 1) Tim Keller's article. Search 'Evangelistic worship Keller' online for a free copy, or read chapter 23 in his seminal work, 'Center Church'.
- 2) Read 'Deep and Wide' by Andy Stanley on his chapter entitled, 'Double Barrel preaching'. (I promise I thought of double impact before I heard his term.)
- 3) Download the free notes of Spurgeon's lecture in his Lectures to my Students entitled 'On conversion as our aim'. Search the lecture title online.
- 4) Download the free ebook by Vincent Antonucci titled, 'Sermons for the unconvinced'. Search for that resource online.
- 5) Read Tim Keller's book, 'Preaching' – in particular chapters 2-4.

Chapter Six: Equip parents to reach their kids.

I remember listening to an older man speaking at a men's event. Several of his children were in Christian leadership. We asked him what he had done to see this come about. He explained that he had 'evangelized them thoroughly'.

I remember not liking the thought of evangelizing one's own kids. 'Disciple them' sounded softer, less invasive.

But years later I have come to agree with him. That's exactly what parents must do for their children. Not brainwash or manipulate them. But certainly we must thoroughly evangelize them – like we would anyone we loved.

What too many Christian parents tend to wrongly do is to assume that their children have been evangelized and have been discipled, just because they have grown up in a Christian home or have gone to church for years. What a mistake that is.

The most agonizing part of church leadership is putting in all this effort and prayer to reach new people who come in the front door, and then noticing that some of the people *you thought you had* have drifted out the back door.

Closing the back door of any church is a major subject. For example, people are likely to stay if they feel they are being fed spiritually, are being challenged and equipped to grow as a disciple of Jesus, have meaningful relationships with each other, have meaningful opportunities to serve, own the vision of the church, and respect and trust the leadership of the church. As church leaders we no doubt put a lot of energy into these things.

What I didn't realize sufficiently is that the most concerning group of people exiting through the back door of the church are *our children* – first as they enter their teen years, but far more so, when they go to university. In the US for example, churches are seeing a loss of 70% of Christian children leaving the church in their twenties!

70%!

It turns out that we failed to win our kids to Christ if, when they get the chance, they gap it. This is doubly sad: not only did we fail to win the ones we love the most, but we failed to send them out into the world they are destined to win for Christ.

Read that last sentence again.

Our job was not just to lead our kids to Christ, but to send them out into the world to lead others to Christ. To lose them showed we never reached them, but to lose them means we lose a lot more than just them.

Much analysis has been done on this pattern of fallout. The same trend is not present to the same degree in other countries, though I suspect that post-Christian cultures are seeing the same thing happen. But that sheer number (70%!) is enough to make us ask ourselves what is happening?

The chief answers I have settled on is that 1) we parents are not motivated enough to evangelize and disciple our kids; 2) even if we are, we don't know how; 3) so we outsourced the evangelism and discipleship of our kids to the kids and teen ministries of the church. The problem with this is that our children grow up unevangelized and undisciplined in the very environment (the home) that was best suited to do both. Next Generational ministries are important supplements to our parent-discipling of our kids, but are weak substitutes for it.

(Notice that in this chapter I collapse the words 'evangelize' and 'disciple' because, especially when it comes to our kids, they seem to be two sides to the same coin.)

If you're a parent, I hope I have motivated you to reach your own kids. If you are a church leader, I hope you are keen to equip the parents in your church to reach and disciple theirs. If you are a Kids or Teen ministry leader, I hope that you don't try reach and disciple the young lives under your care alone – but recruit and equip parents to do the same.

The good news is that I have written a short book for all Christian parents to enable them to disciple their kids. To motivate you to download that book, as well as give you a sense of the kind of training we should give our parents, here is the outline of the book.

Disciple Your Kids: Inspiration and Skills for the Christian Parent's Most Important Job

PART 1. SEVEN REASONS TO DISCIPLE OUR KIDS

- 1. The Great Commission necessitates that you disciple your kids.*
- 2. The home provides an unmatched environment for the discipleship of young lives.*
- 3. Scripture is clear that the discipling responsibility rests on the parent's shoulders.*
- 4. The book of Proverbs stresses parent as discipler and child as disciple.*
- 5. The Bible offers no guarantee that your kids will follow Christ – a fact that should deter spiritual laxness.*
- 6. Satan is intent on counter-discipling your kids.*
- 7. Jesus teaches powerfully on our responsibility to welcome, serve, reach and disciple the next generation.*

PART 2. 10 WAYS TO DISCIPLE OUR KIDS

- 1. Get to know God as Father.
As you experience God's wonderful parenting you begin to reflect some of that to your kids.*
- 2. Pray for your kids.
Arguably nothing impacts your children – their salvation and discipleship, their heart and their destiny – more than your prayers for them.*
- 3. Read God's Word with your kids.
Depending on their age, you should be reading various forms of Scripture to your kids most days of their young life. In the years between 8-12 I have created a*

system which allows you to do two cycles through 210 select Bible encounters. I use this system with my kids.

4. *Teach your kids select memory verses.*

Teaching them to memorize Scripture is one of the best ways to get God's word 'into' your kids. I share the 30 Bible verses I teach my kids – along with an object lesson to drive each verse deeper in.

5. *Partner with others.*

In the same way it takes a village to raise a child, so it takes the help of other Christian families, next generation ministries and your church to assist you in raising your kids into Christ.

6. *Disciple them towards a great kingdom destiny.*

We need to cast a vision for our kids that goes beyond them merely becoming well-behaved church attenders. We are to raise up and send out kingdom-advancing, sacrificial, courageous, all-in, others-serving arrows for God.

7. *Teach your kids to pray.*

If Jesus' disciples needed coaching in their prayer life, how much more our children.

8. *Using Gospel resources, major on the heart.*

We run the risk of utilizing behaviour control as we 'Christianize' our kids. But good deeds without a vibrant relationship with God are not what we're after. As for the obviously bad fruit in our children's lives, there's nothing like the gospel to deal with the bad root in their hearts.

9. *Be on the lookout for spiritual conversations.*

Most of our discipling of our kids involves the spontaneous conversations that crop up as we go through life together with them. As good pastors, we are on the lookout for these teachable moments.

10. *Disciple them differently in adolescence.*

It's no secret that many teens decide to abandon their faith or church-life, usually enacting their exit when they leave home. As parents, we have got to create a safe space where we talk about the numerous questions and gripes they may have with the church and their faith.

APPENDIX 1: FAMILY BIBLE ADVENTURE: 210 BIBLE ENCOUNTERS

APPENDIX 2: 30 OBJECT LESSONS WITH MEMORY VERSES

Chapter Seven: Have a plan to disciple and integrate new believers.

In the next ten years of ministry I hope to do this better than in years gone by. I have seen too many people respond to Christ, even continue coming for a while, and then they disappear. Is there anything that we as church leaders can do that will make it more likely that these people stick? I suggest the following:

1) Create a short new believers book.

You are welcome to adapt the one I created called 'Ignite: a 31 day journey into the Bible for new believers'. It's freely available via www.commonresources.co.za.

2) Train believers to follow through when their friends respond to Christ.

In the New Testament there is no such thing as a believer outside of a church. Acts 2, for example, does not count how many people believed the gospel, only how many people joined the church (Acst 2:41). We must not only train everyone in our church to reach their ten, but also to then commit to walk alongside those who respond until they are properly connected into the church.

I have seen too many believers put in the years of hard work and prayer which eventually brought their friend to faith. But then they imagine that their friends' crossing of the line of faith is somehow a finish line. It is not. It is a starting line.

New believers tend to come under much spiritual attack. We are most vulnerable when we are babies – both physically and spiritually.

We must train the friends of new believers to say to their friends, 'Now that you have responded to Christ, I'd like to do what I can to help you on your spiritual journey. Especially I'd like to pray for you – this means I will often ask you what you need prayer for. I'd like to help you get into the Bible. Also, I'd like to help get you connected into a supportive small group. Would you mind if I do that?'

As I write this, I have a friend who came to faith, and even came to Alpha> Unfortunately, they do not seem to be taking to church. I have asked her, 'Do you mind if I keep on your case till you find you way into spiritual community?' She agreed, so I am working on that.

3) Start new groups for new believers.

New believers are generally terrified of joining a group where everyone seems to be advanced Christians. They tend to feel inadequate and intimidated. They are far more likely to join a new group for new believers. We should therefore create such groups for them.

The most important things to teach new believers are:

- 1) *A basic understanding of the Gospel*
- 2) *An assurance that, having trusted in Jesus, they are now a child of God.*
- 3) *A basic understanding of the Bible and a commitment to read it daily.*
- 4) *The importance of baptism.*

- 5) *An understanding of the importance of being part of church – both Sunday meetings, which they should attend every week and small group, where they can develop spiritual community. (New believers tend to assume that they will come to church whenever they feel like it or when there's nothing else on, but we need to winsomely coach them to change from being feeling-driven to obedience- and value-driven.)*

One idea is to have a new believers group that loops over and over the same content for six sessions. Someone who is really warm and has a real heart for new believers can run it. The new believer joins in on whatever week and then cycles through the next 6 weeks.

Another idea is to run Alpha. Alpha was originally a new believers course, which then realized its potential as an outreach course. The Alpha experience is a worldclass introduction to Christianity as well as a great first taste of spiritual community. If you use Alpha for new believers, be sure to create a separate new believers table from the tables for unconvinced people – the two groups will sabotage the Alpha experience for each other if mixed.

If people do this new believers course, make sure that they then integrate into an existing or new group. Do not leave them to their own devices to find a group for themselves.

4) Give people next steps the minute after they respond to Christ.

Straight after people have responded to a salvation call in the meeting, give them an upfront list of next steps. It's important to almost memorize whatever words you use so that it doesn't take too much time, and it keeps the sharpness it requires.

'Those who responded, I'm excited for you. Can I suggest 4 next steps:

- 1) Collect our gift (hold it up) – an Ignite book, a 31 day journey in the Bible for new believers. It's on the stage / at the Involvement Desk.*
- 2) Tell the person who invited you the good news.*
- 3) Come back next Sunday and the next – no one can follow Christ on their own.*
- 4) Sms 'I begin' to the number on the screen right now – so we can pray for you and send some encouraging Scriptures this week.*

If you run with the fourth of the next steps I have suggested, straight after people respond to Christ, the following should go up on the screen:

Jesus said, 'Heaven rejoices when even one person comes home' (Luke 15:7). If you've just responded to Christ, sms 'I'm home' to 0834565543.

5) Appoint staff or volunteers to process the people who message 'I'm home'.

Once people send you that message, they're basically inviting your encouragement. So encourage them and start communicating with them. There's two ways:

- 1) For seven weeks, starting the very next day, send them a daily message.
- 2) On the Wednesday following, via the most popular messaging device, get someone on the staff or a skilled volunteer to contact them, offering to help them in whatever way they need:

For seven weeks, starting the very next day, send them a daily message.

Using a scheduled messaging app, starting the very next day Monday, start sending them messages. In the block below is a sample of the messaging. Notice that it tracks through the Ignite book, holding their hand as they work through it 5 days a week. Notice also that in the Saturday texts you are priming them for church.

Week 1, Monday

Congrats on coming home! Did you know that Jesus alone can truly find us? Religion is humanity's search for God; Christianity is God's search for humanity. Every other religion puts forward a pathway by which you should try to earn salvation. But the Bible insists that our sinfulness has created an uncross-able gulf between God and ourselves. Neither good deeds nor religious devotion can span that gap. 'But God demonstrates his love for us in this: while we were still sinners, he died for us' (Romans 5:8). Through his death, Jesus spanned the gulf! 'It is by grace you have been saved, not by works – so that no one can boast' (Ephesians 2:8).

Week 1, Tuesday

Home is where forgiveness is. Did you know Jesus alone can ultimately forgive us? Whether we realise it or not, we all stand guilty before a Holy God. Many times we have sinned against God in thought, word and deed. Just as when someone commits a crime there is a penalty to be paid, so there is a penalty for violating God's standards. 'The wages of sin is death' (Romans 6:23). The result of things we do wrong is spiritual death – being cut off from God. We all deserve to suffer that penalty. But God took our sins and put them on Jesus on the cross, and punished them there. Now we can stand before God forgiven; guiltless.

Week 1, Wednesday

Home is where fullness is. Did you know that Jesus alone can truly fill us? In every heart there is a God-shaped vacuum that God alone can fill. We may try all kinds of things to fill this hole – success, love, thrills, money, adventure, achievement – but the satisfaction is always short-lived. That's because material things can't fill a spiritual void. Jesus said, 'I am the bread of life' (John 6:35). He is the only one who can satisfy our deepest hunger. He promises to fill us 'with joy in his presence, with eternal pleasures at his right hand' (Psalm 16:11).

Week 1, Thursday

Home is where freedom is. Did you know that Jesus alone can truly free us? The things we do wrong have an enslaving hold on us. Jesus said, 'Everyone who sins is a slave to sin' (John 8:34). Jesus died to free us from this slavery. He gave us his Spirit so we can be free to start living the sort of lives that deep down we have always wanted to live – lives marked by 'love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control' (Galatians 5:22-23). This change may not be instant though. It's progressive. 'If the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed' (John 8:36).

Week 1, Friday

Home is where you will never be forsaken. Did you know that Jesus alone won't forsake us? Though we avoid the subject of our death, we must face up to what happens when we die. Outside of Christ's grace, we are separated from God forever. Jesus came so that 'by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death – that is, the devil – and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death' (Hebrews 2:14). To know Christ here on earth guarantees we'll be with him forever. 'Neither death nor life ... neither the present nor the future ... nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord' (Romans 8:38-39).

Week 1, Saturday

Tomorrow's church. I hope you're coming. If you take a burning log from the fire, it soon dies out. It needs other pieces of wood to keep burning brightly. In the same way, our passion for God dies out if we try to follow Jesus alone and don't connect with a church that loves God. In heaven the headlines are not about politics or movie stars. They're about what's happening to God's Church all over the world. The Church is God's family. It exists to reflect him and his message in the community in which it's placed. It's not a building or a meeting. It's people. We belong not only to God, but also to each other. The Christian life is about togetherness. No lone rangers allowed! By the way, at church tomorrow grab an Ignite book if you haven't got one yet – we're going to get into on Monday.

Week 2, Monday

Just making sure. Have you trusted in Jesus yet? Pray this prayer: God, you created me and you have the right to lead my life. But I have sinned against you, a Holy God, and I have been separated from you. Jesus, I believe you are the unique Son of God who died for my sins, rose again and who is still alive. You are Saviour and Lord. Be my Saviour: forgive my sins, and give me the gift of eternal life. Make me a brand-new child of God. Be my Lord: take my life. I choose to turn my back on everything which I know displeases you. As I follow you, help me to live a life that brings you joy. Thank you that you hear my prayer of faith. You promise that if anyone calls on you, they will be saved. Thank you! Amen.

Week 2, Tuesday

*Have you got a Bible written in understandable English? If you don't be sure to get the Bible app at www.bible.com. I suggest the New Living Translation. God didn't write the Bible. But he did inspire its 40 writers, including a poet, a king, a shepherd, a doctor, a tax collector and a fisherman, who wrote different books over 1600 years. The Old Testament (39 books) was written before Jesus. The New Testament (27 books) was written after he came. God made sure they wrote what he wanted them to and that it contains the truth of who God is, what he's done and is still doing, and how to have a relationship with him. The historical world of the Bible has changed, but its message remains as true and relevant today as it ever did. By the way, if these messages are irking you, unsubscribe **here**.*

Week 2, Wednesday

If you haven't started the Ignite book already, why not do Day 1 today. You'll need to find Isaiah 6. Go to the Table of Contents. Scroll down till you find Isaiah. Clue: Isaiah is one of the 37 books within the Old Testament, the part of the Bible written before Jesus came to earth. In the first few verses of Isaiah 6, we learn what God is like. We see he is: 1) The eternal King (v1). Though earthly kings come and go, God remains on his throne. 2) High and exalted (v2). He is incredibly great. Holy (v3). This means that he is absolutely pure and totally unique. 3) LORD (v3). The Hebrew word for this is 'Yahweh' which means 'I am who I am'. 4) Almighty (v3). The Hebrew word is 'Shaddai' which means the one who is powerful enough to act on behalf of those who desperately call out to him. 5) Creator (v3). He created the whole universe. 6) Glorious (v3). God's glory is the magnificent radiance of his perfect character. His glory fills the universe.

Week 2, Thursday

Imagine you wanted to talk with a fish in a pond – you couldn't. The only way to do it would be to become a sh. It's the same with God and us. God, in his massiveness, is easily misunderstood. So he took the ultimate step in making himself known in the clearest way: he became a man. Jesus is God's way of saying, 'Look at my Son and then you'll see me.' On day 2 of Ignite we get a good look at Jesus. In your Bible find John 8. Again, go to the Table of Contents. John's Gospel is one of the 27 New Testament books, the part of the Bible written after Jesus came. Read verses 1-11.

Week 2, Friday

Flip to day 3 in your Ignite book. And flip/scroll to Romans 3 (a chapter in the New Testament) in your Bible. Tomorrow we will see how Christ rescues us, but today let's think about what he rescues us from. Have you ever seen how naughty little children can be? Have you ever asked, 'Who taught this kid to disobey its parents? To lie? To steal?' The Bible tells us that it is our sinful, rebellious hearts that lead us astray. The word sin means 'to miss the goal'. God created us to live our lives toward the goal of reflecting his love and holiness in the world. But left to our own devices, we always seem to miss the goal. We will never understand the thrill of our salvation till we understand our need for salvation.

Week 2, Saturday

Church again tomorrow. Read Acts 2:42-47 in your Bible. It's a snapshot into a life in community, where no one stands alone. Get your heart ready to meet God in singing, to hear God in his Word being preached. If you have a friend at church, message them about meeting them there. If you don't, be brave. You don't know those people yet, but you will. Go to guest section if you want – we so want you to feel at home. If you haven't got the Ignite book yet, get it tomorrow. It's at the Involvement Desk.

Week 3, Monday

On Friday, we realized our need for salvation. Today we see how he saved us. Go to day 4 in your Ignite book. And Mark 15 (Mark is one of the four accounts of Jesus in

the New Testament). It's a tragic story of an innocent man's death. What happened there on the cross changed everything. In World War 2 a group of scientists were constructing the atomic bomb. One of the mechanics dropped a spanner into a radioactive device. Knowing that this would cause the bomb to explode in seconds, one of the top scientists reached in and grabbed the spanner. He saved the lives of all, but lost his own life because of radiation exposure. It's a story that echoes the message of the cross, where Jesus died for our sins so we wouldn't have to.

Week 3, Tuesday

Just a reminder to flip open your Ignite book to Day 5. Find John 14 in your Bible. Ignite will tell you all the rest. Such important questions at the end: Have you stopped trusting in your own ability to earn God's acceptance? Do you now trust in the trampoline of Jesus alone, and his undeserved grace, for your acceptance with God? Is anything stopping you from jumping?

Week 3, Wednesday

Ignite. Day 6. Go. Bible. Luke 15. Go. Dig into those questions at the end: Is there any sin or pain that keeps you from coming home to God? From the story in Luke, how is God different to your earthly father?

Week 3, Thursday

Have you ever wondered if Jesus is still alive, if Christianity is true, and if there is life after death? One spectacular event in history answers all your questions. Find it in Ignite on day 7 and in your Bible in Matthew 28.

Week 3, Friday

Jesus didn't come to create Christians, but disciples or Christfollowers. What does following Jesus even mean? Ignite day 8 and Matthew 4:17-23 reveals all. By the way, which of the six aspects of following Jesus challenges you most?

Week 3, Saturday

Maybe today you want to catch up on reading you didn't get to? Also notice the cool real-life stories interspersed throughout Ignite. Need I say it – church is happening tomorrow, not just in our church! 30 million churches worldwide will gather in Jesus' presence with Jesus' people to hear Jesus' word. So exciting. Hope you're making progress in meeting some people.

I stop there, because I think you get the idea: Track with them by doing a day of Ignite everyday, Monday to Friday. Draw out enough content to drive them to the Ignite book and Bible for themselves. Saturdays is for catching up on reading and getting them pumped for church the next day. Give them a breather from your messages on Sunday.

On the Wednesday following, via the most popular messaging device, get someone on the staff or a trained volunteer to contact them, offering to help them in whatever way they need.

Gather a team of leaders to figure out how best to walk with these people. Ask yourselves: 1) What do we need to know about this person so we can help them? 2) Where would we like to guide this person?

Regarding what we need to know about this person, I suggest something like the following messages:

'Hi, my name is Claudette. I'm delighted you sent that message 'I'm home' on Sunday. Would you mind if I offer some help to you in these early stages of your spiritual journey? Don't mean to harass you, so feel free to say no.'

If they answer affirmatively, then ask...

'Some questions for you ...

What's your name? Are you a guy or girl? And decade of life?

Last Sunday, did you commit your life to Christ or recommit to him or something else?'

Are you involved in a church? If so, which one?

Did someone invite you to church?

'Is there anything I can pray for you on the stage of your spiritual journey?'

Regarding where we can guide these people, we can use the following kinds of questions...

'Have you been able to get to the Ignite book and the Bible? Are you finding it helpful?'

'How's coming to church going? You finding it helpful?'

'By the way, we're starting a small group for new people. Would you be interested in coming along?'

'If there's any question you have, please shout. I'm here to help.'

'Would you mind if I keep you posted about events that might be especially helpful to you?'

I offer this all as an example of what can be done to support new believers. Many of the Common Ground congregations are experimenting with some of these things. I hope to experiment with these ideas some more in my determination to help new believers not fade away. In the future this chapter will be updated with what we learn.

Chapter Eight: Consider running Alpha.

If you'd asked me three years ago what I'd most likely invite an outsider friend to, I would have said a Sunday meeting. But then I ran my own Alpha. Between my neighbours and myself, we invited 4 or 5 unchurched couples to a single dinner. I remember how I invited some of my friends...

'What you doing next Wednesday night? No pressure at all, but my neighbours and I are getting some friends over for a dinner at my house, then we're going to watch this short introductory Alpha video. You heard of Alpha? It's this London-based interactive experience where people of all creeds and cultures ask questions and explore the meaning of life from a Christian angle. Something like 30 million people have done it! Very very interesting! If people hit it off like we hope they do, and if they like what they see, we will meet again the following week for dinner and the next video. But either way, the night's gonna be a blast. You keen?'

Getting people to that first night was all the trick. Of the 8 couples we invited, 5 of them came. We were delighted that 4 couples agreed to come the second week. To our surprise a brand new couple joined in on the second week – so we had ten unchurched people coming along. By the end of that Alpha course, almost all of them had responded to the gospel, and we became a small group afterwards.

I remember returning home after the second or third week of this course and thinking, 'I don't know of a better tool to reach people for Jesus. All I had to do was find another couple to run it with, put a date in the diary, think who we could invite to that, and the dominoes fell from there.'

I am not saying that Alpha is the best evangelism tool there is, but I'd be hard pressed to find one that the Holy Spirit seems to prefer to use. I think it is so effective because it is a kind of evangelism that is relational rather than impersonal, conversational rather than confrontational, process-orientated rather than one-off, collaborative rather than individual.

To be honest, I thought I could improve on the content. Years ago Common Ground created our own course called God Sessions. It kind of worked, but the problem was getting people to come in the first place. It lacked the social proof that comes in the invitation: 'millions of people have done it'. Oh well, I thought, if you can't beat them, join them. So we went back to Alpha. Since they have created compelling videos it has become even more effective.

Earlier I said that I came to prefer Alpha to Sunday meetings as a first invitation of a non-Christian friend. Here's why: it takes the same amount of courage, timing and thoughtfulness to invite someone to both, yet if I can invite them to Alpha, they are very likely to come to the next week, and the next. With Alpha, one exposure to the gospel naturally leads to many. The same is seldom the case if someone comes to a Sunday meeting. I need to re-issue the invitation once again.

I must admit though to one weakness in getting them to Alpha rather than a Sunday meeting. The context in which people find faith is the context that they assume they will continue their faith in. I have seen many an Alpha come to an end

where attenders had responded to the gospel, but somehow didn't start attending Sunday meetings. The reason is that Sunday meetings were a foreign environment to them. One way to mitigate against this are to become a permanent small group afterwards, which will lend more time to help disciple them into church attendance. The other way is to invite the entire Alpha group to a church meeting at a certain time and place, usually about four fifths into the Alpha journey, thereby making it part of the experience.

Another use of Alpha is to help consolidate the people who respond to Christ in a Sunday meeting. As I said in the previous chapter it's such a great tool not only for evangelism but for new believers – especially if the group of new believers doing Alpha become a permanent small group after the course is finished.

Let me offer ten tips for doing Alpha well. From my experience of running Alpha, I have noticed that it works best when:

- 1) The leaders of the church buy into it and give it the highest profile in their meetings, really encouraging people to invite friends to the opening night.
- 2) Sufficient budget is allocated under 'evangelism' is given to run Alpha well.
- 3) There is great hospitality, and a great venue with delicious food.
- 4) A dedicated team of Alpha volunteers run the course again and again, who themselves have been exposed to Alpha done really well elsewhere.
- 5) The opening night has an extra draw-card like a well-known musician who will play during the meal or a celebrity who will share their testimony for 10 minutes before the video introduction is shown.
- 6) The table leaders are socially competent people who are trained with enough advance time to fill up their tables with their invitees.
- 7) There are at least two Alpha courses per year (but better yet three) so that as one Alpha is ending, attendees are being encouraged to invite their friends and family to the next one.
- 8) A leadership pipeline is forged as attenders in one course become group helpers in the next, and then group facilitators in the next.
- 9) Non-Christians are the majority in their group so that they don't feel irritated or intimidated by the Christians who often come on too strong in the discussions.
- 10) The Holy Spirit day or weekend away is emphasized – most people who respond to Christ respond at that time.

Finally, if you have not yet discovered all the resources freely available to churches, go to www.alpha.org. It's quite amazing what one generous church has offered to the rest of us in the name of love and mission.

LET'S RECAP

I know it's a lot to do. You need to seek God's wisdom for what you will implement from this book.

But you have time to build these strategies into the life of believers and your way of doing church. You don't have to focus on all of them at the same time. You can build one layer at a time into the way you do church, and the way you disciple your people towards mission.

I hope you are not confined to traditions that hinder your missional flexibility. Precisely because we are meant to be passionate about the mission, and not that precious about the model, we should always be ready to make changes in the way we do things.

Our courage to change comes from our love for those who are far from God. When we get God's heart for them, we are ready to do anything for the lost, short of sinning. Like Paul, we become all things to all people, so that by all possible means we might win some. (1 Cor 9:22-23).

I am sure there are other things you can develop in your life and church to become more missionally potent, but based on my experience I suggest these 8 skills and strategies:

1. *Persuade the church that mission is our mandate.*
2. *Get your leaders to agree on the same evangelistic philosophy.*
3. *Mobilize and equip each one to reach ten.*
4. *Make every Sunday meeting magnetic*
5. *Preach in a double impact way.*
6. *Equip parents to reach their kids.*
7. *Have a plan to disciple and integrate new believers.*
8. *Consider running Alpha.*

I wish you the best on your missional adventure into greater evangelistic potency.

Please feel free to give us feedback as you do – info@commonresources.co.za

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