

THE MISSIONALLY POTENT CHURCH

Inspiration and skills to seek and save more of the
lost, more of the time.

By Terran Williams

This book is the first in a series on Missional Potency.

It seeks to give you, a church leader, the big picture of missional potency before mining into the related depths of detail and skill.

My hope is that the relatively short chapters that follow will give you an overview of the key ideas and insights into missional potency, but at the same time, will bait you to download the other books and resources in the series.

These resources are all available on www.commonresources.co.za - a website created for church leaders by Common Ground Church. Located in Cape Town, South Africa, Common Ground has grown from a motley crew of 50 people in the late 90's to a much bigger motley crew, now spread over 10 congregations and 15 services each Sunday across the city of Cape Town.

Finally, this book does not necessarily reflect the view of all leaders in Common Ground. It has been written by Terran Williams, who has served as a pastor, congregational leader, teaching team leader, and missional potency champion during his 20 years in the church.

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INTRODUCTION

God saved me by human instrumentality.

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

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

Stunned by the gospel, I was introduced 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 new-found relationship with Jesus, I was struck by a thought that grips me to this day.

What I have is too good to keep to myself.

I had witnessed first-hand how God uses people to reach other people. 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 had even read 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 had done 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 positively. 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 just a few months prior.

Frothing surfer that I was, the gospel did not take away my love for surfing, but it birthed in me a new passion. I wanted to do as much damage to the domain of darkness as I could, plundering it of its captives, seeing lost people found and blind eyes opened.

Over two decades later, this passion has not faded.

This series is my attempt to reflect on and share with others my best insights on becoming increasingly missionally potent. Not just as individuals, but as churches too.

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 counter-cultural 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 and series, I use it as another word for evangelism, for introducing people to Jesus.

What’s a missionally potent church anyway?

Good question!

A missionally potent church is 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.

How? 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 certain events in the life 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 shoulder to shoulder 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 and expecting that they can find Jesus there.

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

I can count on one 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 and through Sunday meetings.

They may have noticed that as they focus on these things, 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.

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

Most are hopeless at doing the one thing Jesus said we should give our highest attention to, the one thing Jesus himself was most determined to do: seeking and saving the lost (Matt 28:19, Luke 19:10).

I am not trying to beat up on us, I promise. 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 them in a difficult place. On the one hand, they know how important evangelism is, but on the other hand they don't seem to be able to do it effectively.

Instead of making or keeping evangelism as the do-or-die priority it should be, they reduce it to being just one of the important things that they occasionally get around to. For the most part however, it's easier to focus on other important things that the church seems able to do more effectively.

Aquarium swapping is overrated.

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 that account for church growth:

- 1) There's biological growth. This is growth through having and adopting kids.
- 2) There's transfer growth. This is when people who are already church-going Christians relocate to your church, for either noble or ignoble reasons.
- 3) There's conversion growth. This is when your church grows from unsaved people finding 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'm sure all growing churches grow from all 4 of these kinds of people being added, but a critical question to ask is, which is predominant?

A church that is growing primarily due to the second kind (transfer growth) might feel very exciting, but I'm less sure the angels in heaven are high-fiving each other as much as the leaders down on earth. Your local church may have grown, but the universal church has not. What's happened in your church growth is not that much different to fish swapping from one aquarium to another... there may be many fish swimming around, but you have not caught any new fish, the main thing Jesus calls us to do.

Indeed, it's the third kind of growth (conversion growth) that we must prioritise, whilst celebrating all the other kinds too.

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

To whom much is given, much is required.

Leader of the larger-than-average church, do you mind if I pick on you for a moment?

Years ago, I stumbled across a question that has haunted me ever since:

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

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

But if you have a church of 1,000 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 more than doubly missionally potent than the larger church. The irony is that it's therefore 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?'

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 should not be, '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 was 3.4 baptisms per 100 members, compared to new churches, which average 11.7 baptisms per year. In short, new churches are often most effective at reaching new people.)

Comparison is futile.

Admittedly, the question of the missional stewarding of lives involves another important factor:

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.'

Friends, some soil is harder than others.

The same amount of faithful 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.

Take heart that God factors all of these things together as he evaluates the degree to which we have stewarded the lives that we have been entrusted with. As we live before the audience of One, it's futile for the small church to compare itself with the bigger church, and it's futile, for example, for a church in Africa (where Christianity is on the rise) to compare itself with a church in Europe (where Christianity is on the decline).

Honesty is imperative.

Abraham's faith in God to provide a promised child 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.

Common Ground Church grew to 800 in its first 10 years, with a relatively small conversion growth in the mix.

We had to face this fact in prayer. We prayed, ‘God so far, the riverbed of salvations into our church has been a trickle. 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 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 want to 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 a good idea at the beginning of it, and there were some more good ideas along the way, but by and large, it was sheer sweat and tears that brought the change.

Inspiration is important, but it comes to nothing without perspiration.

This book (and subsequent series) aims to give you the best ideas, insights and principles I have to help you come into a greater conversion growth in your church.

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

As a dad, I have spent a lot of time pushing my kids on swings and spinning them 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.'

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 continued effort to apply. But my prayer is that the early work you put in with few results will eventually be eclipsed by comparably less work and greater results. That's the power of missional momentum.

Chapter 1: 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.

Why? Because it is an all-out war to see the captives freed.

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 believe 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 will all turn to him too.' What a shock to find people so disinterested and some, even hostile.

Evangelistically defeated after 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 and reach my friends 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 hordes of hell would try to frustrate and obscure the work of God in darkened minds and 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 do we 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.

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 personal and our collective mandate.

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.

My experience is that nothing moves God's people to action like a direct appeal 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 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 toward seeking and saving the lost, and he has commissioned us to join him.
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* – Jesus revealed that there's really 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 instructs us to go to where people are and preach the gospel to them.

Missionally potent church members, I suggest, should be very familiar with many of these, and perhaps other biblical angles on the evangelism priority, because they come up in our preaching often enough. I imagine that a person who has been in a 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 a major priority of the church.

Jesus is the great evangelistic intercessor. Every earthly church leader must take their lead from our 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 let me 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 farmer 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.¹

Church prayer – whether in Sunday meetings, leadership meetings or dedicated prayer meetings – should cover these same themes: God's heart for people far from him, 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).

¹ Source: http://www.thespurgeonfellowship.org/journal/hr_sp09.pdf

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

Indeed, 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 of 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 lavish them with praise and commendation. Like a tiny flame, it's as I nurture the sparks of life with the gentle breath of encouragement, they grow.

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

So how can we best celebrate salvation?

Retell the stories. In Common Ground, we create video renditions of salvation stories that we play during our biggest meetings of the year (on Christmas Day for example). These real-life samples of changed lives in our midst become the threads that together, over time, become the tapestry of our church's sense of self. As people watch story after story of a changed life, they 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?'

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, why not borrow video testimonies from other churches that clearly show how Juesus 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. 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 faith-sharing tool for our people.

Chapter 2: Get leaders to agree on evangelistic philosophy

In the many years I led 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 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 fail on any of these fronts, we will fail in our mission.

In our team, we really struggled to arrive at a place of 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 is, 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?

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 own numerical growth as a way of diminishing what the more organic missional churches were trying to do.

What I noticed is that this larger conversation worked its way into our leadership meetings. Influenced by what each of us had read as well as by our natural inclinations, we were not always in complete unison on whether discipling our people, attracting non-Christians into our meetings, and sending out 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 this time, I read 'Sticky Church' by Larry Osborn and found myself underlining these 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.'

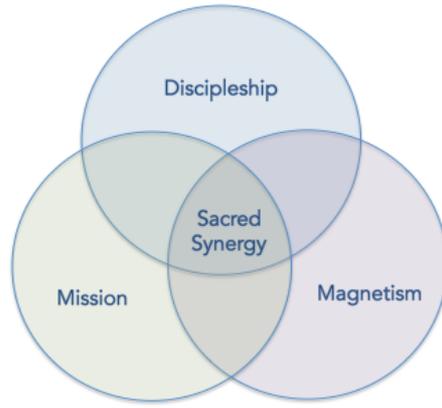
'As a farmer needs to clear the land before planting his crop, a pastor needs to clear out any conflict (of perspective) within the board, staff, or congregation in order to plant and reap a spiritual harvest.'

The author summarizes a unified leadership team as sharing:

- 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.

Reflecting on this unity of philosophy, I have written a short book called 'The False Trichotomy'. My goal? To overcome our tendencies to a false trichotomy, and to find the sacred synergy that really does exist between discipleship, mission and magnetism. Specifically aimed at helping other church leaders to find unity within their leadership teams, you are welcome to download it at www.commonresources.co.za.



Chapter 3: 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 very disparate fast-growing churches that 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 their magnetism.

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?

No matter how evangelistic potent your Sunday meetings are, unchurched people will not be getting saved in them if the Christians you have are not: 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, every believer must do the work of having lots of skillful, well-timed spiritual conversations.

We cannot leave all the communication of the gospel to a Sunday preacher. Everyone must become a missionary.

Besides, 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 the gospel 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 must do mission.

That said, I still think 'each one reach one' is aiming a little low. A few weeks ago, I preached in one of our congregations and got everyone to write down the names of 10 unchurched people that they have some kinds of 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 as a symbol of lifting up their friends and family members in prayer. I looked out at a sea of fingers held out by people whose faces were lit up with love for their lost loved ones and friends.

Right then, it dawned on me that the primary mission field of our church was those 1000s of people far from God represented in those fingers. Each of them, only one degree removed from the gospel.

When we equip our people to reach out, we must equip them to reach these people. When we create meetings that are great for unchurched people to come to, we are creating environments that will host these people. When we invest money into evangelism, and hire staff, we are sowing towards the salvation of these people.

If you lead a church, can you imagine each person in your church representing 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 firstly know their mission field, and then to sow into it.

Live out a missional lifestyle

I believe 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 in 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.

The problem is that us church leaders and preachers are often neck-deep in the life of the church. 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 catalyse their people toward prayerfulness. In the same way, leaders who connect with people far from God are far more able to inspire their people to do the same.

Training people in relational mission

Here are some practical ways to inspire people to reach their ten:

- *Preach it.* Do a preaching series on evangelism every two or three years. In addition, I'd suggest doing a self-standing message on evangelism at least once or twice a year. This talk may fit into another series. For example, 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 and train to practically equip them for a lifestyle of mission and relational outreach.
- *List them.* 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. Hand out a piece of paper with the outline of two hands on it. 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.

- *Pray for them.* 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 4: Make every Sunday meeting magnetic

The three most missionally strategic turning points in our church were:

- 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 neighborhoods.
- 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 I have 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 non-Christians.

Common Ground's journey toward 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.'

What a great starting theology for the church. Rigby stated our church's vision in a way that held discipleship and evangelism side by side.

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

We were on fire for God, but a few years in, we wondered, 'Our church is growing, but these new people 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 – 'to invite your unchurched 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 to create 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. Firstly, 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. Secondly, 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 non-Christians 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 texts nor shortening our times of corporate worship.

This all changed when I came across an article written by Tim Keller called 'Evangelistic Worship'⁵. In it, he argued that the presence of non-Christians 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 altogether.

Based on Keller's prediction that if we preach in a way that engages both believers and not-yets, believers would eventually find themselves wishing that they had invited their friends and finally do so, we began overhauling the way we preached.

We preached as if non-Christians were there, and eventually, they really did start to arrive! Wonderfully, many of them made professions of faith after several weeks or months of coming. We were elated.

Once we were committed to this new way of preaching (we call it Double Impact Preaching), we quickly realized that the message was only one part of the meeting.

We began to ask 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 so glad we did.

In the past, we had committed to try and 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 so much more effective at doing so!

How to win people to 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 encourage 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 description below each chapter.

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

PART 1: Magnetic Meeting Principles

Reaching non-Christians 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. 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, be sure to ask God for the gift of more evangelistic grace on your community and meetings. 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'.

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 has 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 be upfront leading 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. 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 create a culture where everyone who calls this church their home makes new people feel at home too.

Chapter 5: 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 also targets the age group who are 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 (relatively small) 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 no non-Christians there. It's not rocket science: we need to invite them!

Chapter 9: Create high-attraction Sundays and series.

Over time, we noticed that on any given year, over two thirds of our guests arrived in less than one third of our Sundays. We then began to plan and leverage these big days in advance.

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 carefully.

In Common Ground, when we let this slip, we notice a reduced impact upon non-Christians.

Chapter 12: Aim at musical excellence.

Shoddy music and singing does us no favours. Unchurched people are not as willing 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 engagement 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 that they are in the right place?

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

Without pulling back on the giving moment, make it clear to guests that there is no pressure for them 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.

This is a message for Christians which doubles up as a message to unsaved people. Although this takes effort and practice to learn how to do, nothing holds the possibility of winning non-Christians for Christ more than the sermon itself.

Chapter 18: Throw out the net skilfully.

Part of the gospel message is a summons to turn to Christ. Evangelistically potent preachers do more than engage non-Christians throughout their whole message, at the end, they call them to trust in Christ. There are many different ways to help people to cross the line of faith – in this chapter, I unpack some of them.

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, but also as a chance to press unbelievers to trust in Christ so they too can join the feast.

You can download the full eBook from www.commonresources.co.za.

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 quickly 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...

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

Chapter 5: Preach for double impact.

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

As important as it is for the unbeliever to sense something of God's presence and transcendence in the 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 has always been through anointed preaching. '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)

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 to 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. 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 non-Christians simultaneously over all the years of our preaching, then we have unwittingly developed a kind of preaching that tends to resonate with Christians but not non-Christians.

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.

Double impact preaching.

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 - and in my own experience - one of the most difficult to learn. But it’s vital for a greater harvest.

Here are some of the most important skills of double impact preaching:

- First acknowledge that, like most of us, you have a default setting to preach Christian messages to Christian people. So after you’ve prepared the first draft of your message, think of one or two non-Christian people you have socially connected with lately. Imagine these people sitting in the front row. Now overhaul your message so that not only do you edify and equip Christians, but that you compellingly engage and evangelize these specific people.
- 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. People would rather believe a lie told well than the truth told poorly. As important as good content is, you must learn to communicate it 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 your message, so that they know that this message is for them too.
- Engage culture, because this is the water that we are all 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 can make in their actual lives.

- Take out all church and theology jargon. If you opt to keep it in, immediately define these terms so that unchurched people don't feel excluded.
- 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 challenge their (wrong) perception that you are 'holier than thou'. In a culture where authenticity is king, don't let anyone think you're aloof or perfect.
- 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 non-Christians are likely to have about major things in your message. Instead of denouncing their concerns, articulate them better than they could, affirm them and then winsomely say something to dismantle them or at least suggest why they are not deal breakers to believing the gospel.
- 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 good people.
- 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 a while) 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 that surely that kind of topic should be pushed out of the Sunday meeting. 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.

You see, double impact preaching is not only evangelistic preaching. It is also preaching to Christians about Christian things *while non-Christians listen in, seeking to win them in the process.*

When I recently 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. And by God's grace, 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 non-Christians in the same audience regardless of the topic.

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

- 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 neighbors, 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.’
- 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 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 telling 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 you every day, this day, tomorrow and forever. When you discover something that good, it’s hard to keep it to yourself.’

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'.
- 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 6: 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 disciplined, 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 United States 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 ditch him. 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. I suspect that it's not just America, but most post-Christian cultures that are seeing the same thing happen. So what is happening?

The chief answer is that most don't know how, so they outsource the evangelism and discipleship of their 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 Generation ministries are important supplements to our parent-disciplining of our kids, but they are weak substitutes for it.

If you are a church leader, it is imperative you prioritize equipping the parents in your church to reach and disciple their kids.

I have written a short book for all Christian parents to equip them to disciple their kids. Here is the outline:

InReach: Inspiration and Skills for the Christian Parent's Most Important Job

PART 1. SEVEN REASONS TO DISCIPLE OUR KIDS

1. The Great Commission necessitates it.
2. The home provides an unmatched environment for it.
3. Scripture is clear about it.
4. The book of Proverbs stresses it.
5. The Bible offers no guarantees.
6. Satan is intent on counter-disciplining our kids.
7. Jesus teaches powerfully on it.

PART 2. 10 WAYS TO DISCIPLE OUR KIDS

1. Get to know God as Father.

As we better understand God's parenting of us, we begin to better reflect it in our own parenting of our kids.

2. Pray for them.

Arguably nothing impacts our children more than our prayers for them.

3. Read God's Word with them.

Depending on their age, we should be reading various forms of Scripture to our kids most days of their young life. I share the different bibles and plans we have used at different stages of our kids' lives.

4. Teach them select memory verses.

Teaching our kids to memorize Scripture is one of the best ways to get God's word 'into' them. 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 have and cast a vision for our kids that go beyond them merely becoming well-behaved church attenders.

7. Teach them to pray.

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

8. Using gospel resources, major on the heart.

Good deeds without a vibrant relationship with God are not what we're after.

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, spotting the unexpected teachable moments along the way.

10. Disciple differently in adolescence.

Many teens decide to abandon their faith but only act out on this decision later, when they leave home. As parents, we have got to create a safe space where we talk about the numerous questions and doubts they may have with the church and their faith.

You can download the full eBook from www.commonresources.co.za

Chapter 7:

Have a plan to disciple and integrate new believers.

In the few decades 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 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 we 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 on how to integrate new believers.*

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 (Acts 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 are new to the faith 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. 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, she does not seem to be taking to church. I have asked her, 'Do you mind if I keep on your case until you find your way into spiritual community?' She agreed, so every few weeks, I check in on her.

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 aim to 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 regularly.*
- 4) *The importance of baptism.*
- 5) *An understanding of the importance of being part of church – both Sunday meetings and smaller groups.*

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 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 world-class 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. In my experience, the two groups will sabotage the Alpha experience for each other if mixed.

If people do a new believers course, make sure that they then integrate into an existing or new group. Do not leave them 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 a list of possible next steps. It's important to almost memorize whatever words you use so that it doesn't take too much time. Here's what I usually say:

- '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 foyer.*
 - 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.*

We don't do this last step yet but hope to in the future. If you decide to run with it, 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.

This way, you'll then have their number and be able to send them encouraging next steps, invites to new believers courses/events, ask them if they have any prayer requests and even send them a mobi version of your new believers devotional. As an appendix at the end of this eBook, I have suggested a possible list of messages and practical strategies you could adapt to your context to better welcome new believers.

Chapter 8: 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 our family, we invited 5 unchurched couples to a single dinner. I remember how I invited some of my friends...

'What are 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. Have 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! If people hit it off like we hope they do, and if they like what they see, we'll meet again the following week for dinner and the next video. But either way, the night's gonna be a blast. Would you like to come?'

Getting people to that first night was the biggest win. Of the 8 couples we invited, 5 of them came. Of those 5 couples, 4 couples agreed to come the second week. And to our surprise, a brand new couple joined in on the second week (invited by one of the other unchurched couples) 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 thereafter.

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, and the dominoes fell from there.'

I am not saying that Alpha is the best evangelism tool there is, but you'd be hard pressed to find one that the Holy Spirit seems to prefer to use. I think it is so effective because it's 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'. If you can't beat them, join them. So we went back to Alpha. Since they've created better, even more compelling videos, it has become even more effective.

Earlier I said that I came to prefer Alpha to Sunday meetings as a first invitation for 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.

There is 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 is to become a permanent small group afterwards, which will lend more time to help disciple new believers 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 becomes a permanent small group after the course is finished.

Here are my 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' 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.
- 5) The opening night has an extra drawcard, like a well-known musician who will play during the meal or a local 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 own invitees.
- 7) There are at least two Alpha courses per year 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 attendees 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 can 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.

Whatever you choose to do to become more missionally potent as a church, 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. For the sake of the mission, we should always be ready to make changes in the way we do things.

Is change scary? Will you face opposition and resistance? You bet. But our courage to change comes from our love for those who are far from God. When we get God's heart for them, we will be ready to do just about anything for them. 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 leaders to agree on evangelistic philosophy.*
3. *Mobilize and equip each one to reach ten.*
4. *Make every Sunday meeting magnetic*
5. *Preach for double impact.*
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 adventure into greater missional potency. All of heaven is cheering you on.

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APPENDIX: NEW BELIEVERS SUGGESTED COMMUNICATION STRATEGY

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 new believers encouraging messages. In the block below, I've written 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 to come back to church on Sunday.

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 that 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 fish. 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 new believers by doing a day of Ignite (our version of a new believers devotional) every day, 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.

Then, 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.

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