

Evangelism Where You Live

Engaging Your Community

Stephen Pate and Gene Wilkes



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Editor's Foreword

Inspiration and Wisdom for Twenty-First-Century Christian Leaders

You have chosen wisely in deciding to study and learn from a book published in **The Columbia Partnership Leadership Series** with Chalice Press. We publish for

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We welcome your comments on these books, and we welcome your suggestions for new subject areas and authors we ought to consider.

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A Tribute to Ron S. Lewis

Life in full-time ministry is a roller-coaster ride. When things are going right, there is nothing like it. But when the pressures, conflicts, broken relationships, and the frustrations of not living up to the expectations we place on ourselves squeeze us, ministry can take us down faster than we can imagine. To find an individual that is readily available to provide wise counsel as a mentor and friend in such times is a genuine gift from God.

Ron S. Lewis was that mentor and friend for both of us. I (Steve) first met Ron in the late 1970s while he was leading his own company, Church Growth Design, out of Nashville, Tennessee. He immediately had my attention. A passion to see people come into a personal relationship with Christ drove his emotions and actions. He flat out loved Jesus and wanted everyone to know Him. He lived a life demonstrating the fact that “all men and women everywhere need God. As Christians, our job is to make that search easy.” Both of us fondly remember our monthly lunches with Ron while he later served as senior pastor of the Heights Church in Richardson, Texas, before he returned again to serve churches through Church Growth Design.

Ron continued to read, study, observe, and provide direction to many pastors and churches across the U.S. until cancer took him from us far too early in 2006. We still marvel at the fact that Ron became a proponent of the small group movement and emergent missional churches before both were recognized as “cool.” Many of the twenty- and thirty-something pastors leading churches today would consider him engaged and aware of these movements. Our joy is that we can share some of his insights and passion with you in the never-before-published items we share in this book.

Introduction

Bruce is a Canadian who loves hockey but lives and works in Texas. He is also a Christ-follower and a member of the church leadership team at Legacy Church, where Gene is the senior pastor. Bruce began to coach a local hockey team as his son and daughter rose through the skill levels and developed increasing enthusiasm about the sport, but he soon discovered that more and more practices and games fell on Sunday mornings. One day Bruce came to the leadership team and asked that they begin to pray with him about how he should balance his church leadership with coaching the team and their families. He wanted to lead by example to those who were part of Legacy Church by being there when they gathered for worship and for LifeGroups, but he also felt called to coach this team.

One way we describe how we do church at Legacy is that we are “a mission outpost where every member is a missionary in his or her own mission field.” To follow Christ means living out your faith wherever God has planted you and wherever your passions and skills lead you to a network of people where you are a missionary of Christ’s love, where maybe no one else would tell the gospel. The leadership team unanimously agreed that Bruce did not need to worry about missing an occasional Sunday morning, but that as he led the hockey team he would model the mission of the church. We said that we would rather he model our mission than attend 100 percent of the worship services on Sunday mornings.

A few months into his coaching efforts, Bruce came back to the leadership team to ask that we begin to pray with him about starting a chapel time for the team before practices and games scheduled on Sunday mornings. He had never done anything like this before. He said the chapels would be voluntary in attendance, with a time of scripture study and prayer, and he hoped not only to provide spiritual instruction for those who knew Jesus but also to be a witness to those who did not. Bruce initially thought that he would provide hockey chapels to “those families that would normally find themselves in church.” To his amazement Bruce found more than half the families that attended the hockey chapels were unchurched. It appeared that the hockey chapel might be the closest thing to church some of these families would ever see. All but a few team members and their families accepted the concept, and Bruce continued to live out his calling as

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a Christ-follower in the rink of his passion. He would tell us about the chapels when we had times of prayer as a leadership team, and we celebrated what God was doing through him and for the families who participated in them.

Not everyone was as enthusiastic about the chapel as Bruce and the Christian families on the team. One family of another faith challenged him directly about offering chapel in the rink where the team practiced or played. The proximity of the meeting seemed like undue pressure on those who did not want to attend. After an open discussion with the family, they worked out a compromise to hold the chapels in either a restaurant or food court next to the rinks. The family was satisfied, and the chapels continued.

In the off-season of 2006, Bruce attended a hockey coaches' clinic in Canada. There he "happened" to meet another coach who was the director of a ministry that provided hockey chapels for professional and semi-professional leagues in North America. As they talked, his newfound friend mentioned he had heard about a youth hockey coach in Texas who had begun hockey chapels with his team. Bruce smiled and said, "That's me." Coincidence? We don't think so. The two coaches committed to remain networked to expand the chapel concept to other youth hockey teams and tournaments in the Dallas area.

In the summer of 2007, Bruce came to a church leadership team meeting on a Sunday afternoon. He said that his son and a few of his players from his team attended a Hockey Ministries International weeklong camp that his Canadian contact directed. He began to show emotion as he continued his story, "When I arrived at the end of the camp to pick up my son, the dad of one of my players came over and told me that his son rushed up to him as soon as he saw him and said, 'Dad, guess what. I trusted Jesus as my Savior.'" Bruce paused. He then said, "His father said, 'Bruce, I have you to thank for that.'" We were silent as Bruce tried to hold back his tears. He then said in broken phrases, "I thought I always had to be in church on Sunday mornings, but you guys encouraged me to join my passion for hockey with my love for Christ." He didn't finish his thought, but we knew one of his players was in the family of God because he had followed Jesus into the mission field of hockey in his hometown. We celebrated the fact that God used Bruce's passion and mission, combined, to rescue this young life from the dominion of darkness (Col. 1:13).

Bruce's story is the story of what this book is about. Community-Based Servant Evangelism (CBSE) is a way of doing ministry in which Christ-followers model, encourage, and equip others to be salt and

light servants where they live. It is not about church attendance and Bible study, or another program of evangelism. CBSE is about living out the Great Commandment and the Great Commission in our network of relationships in the marketplace and neighborhoods. It is the church on mission, not the church in maintenance. It is Christ-followers who live like salt and light servants to address the needs of their community in the name of Jesus.

We believe Christ is leading His church, or, *ekklesia*, outside the walls it has erected for itself, back into the marketplace and neighborhoods where it began and flourished. The *ekklesia* is at its best when it is on mission and its members are organically part of its cultural context, being salt and light servants to those with whom they share life. We find ourselves in what some are calling the “missional movement,” which is characterized by writers like Allan Roxburgh,¹ Eddie Gibbs, and Ryan Bolger.² Christ is calling again the “called-out ones,” who are the *ekklesia tou Christou*, Christ’s church. Christ wants them to become servants to their co-mission with Christ. As they go about their lives, they are to love and serve those around them, as Jesus did, so that their friends, business associates, and acquaintances too may call Him their Leader and Rescuer. We believe Christ’s call to His followers to live out the Great Commandment and Great Commission is how we are to be and do the work as the *ekklesia* in the world.

Chapter 1 lays the foundation for this philosophy of ministry. We will assess why our current methods of evangelism are ineffective and propose how CBSE is consistent with Christ’s commands to “love God and love others” and to “make disciples of all people.” In chapter 2 we will delineate the barriers that churches have built that keep them within the walls of their buildings and out of the mission field Christ has called them to enter.

Chapter 3 describes the concept of “Place” and its importance for grasping both the issue of volunteer hours available to the church’s mission and the locale for the work of the church in the lives of those far from God. In chapter 4 we describe the individual aspects of CBSE by explaining the key concepts of “community,” “based,” “servant,” and “evangelism.”

Chapter 5 describes those who do the work of CBSE, the salt and light servants. These Christ-followers are engaged in their communities as the end picture of what a local church seeks to develop by its equipping ministries. Salt and light servants are Matthew 5:13–16 disciples of Jesus who take up the towel of service to meet the needs of those around them in the name of Jesus. Chapter 6 describes the

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“connection points” through which salt and light servants share the love of Christ. These experiences have also been called “bridges of influence” in which the church gains a hearing among those served in the name of Jesus.

Chapters 7 and 8 provide the process through which you can lead your church to practice CBSE. This eleven-step process is the plan—from God’s prompting to mobilizing your church into the community as salt and light servants. Appendices with tools to aid in leading your church to live out the Great Commandment and Great Commission complete our resource for you.

We are as confident as ever that the church is God’s way of redeeming creation back to Himself. While there is much to be concerned about with the church in North America, we see glimpses of a new movement of Christ-followers returning to the place of their calling in the name of the one who called them. Our prayer is that this leadership resource can aid you as you follow Jesus into the community where He had placed you.

Steve Pate, D.Min.
C. Gene Wilkes, Ph.D.

Notes

¹Alan Roxburgh, *The Missionary Congregation* (Harrisburg, Pa.: Trinity Press International, 1997), and id., *The Missional Leader* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2006).

²Eddie Gibbs and Ryan Bolger, *Emerging Churches: Creating Christian Communities in Postmodern Cultures* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2005).

1

Foundations

Community-Based Servant Evangelism

Take a brief survey today as you move from task to task. Ask the person in the next office, the first person to stop and talk for a moment, the store clerk, your boss, the first five people who smile at you. No qualifications for this survey. Just ask ten people.

The questions?

Just one: What do you and people you associate with think about _____ (*name of your church*). Be sure people do not just put a nice spin on their answers. Get the real consensus about your church.

Using these answers, you see the work your church has to do among the people you associate with every day. Now you see the need for your church to want to be missional—that is, reach beyond itself to accomplish God’s mission where you live.

Now you are ready to read this book.

How can your church create a missional environment? How can your church re-engage its community through servant evangelism?

No great secrets here, just some tried and true foundational concepts. These pivot around basic definitions and issues: the functional meanings of *evangelism* and *mission*, the importance and understanding of *salvation*, a model for *outreach*, a unique salvation presentation. We want to help you understand some of the barriers that naturally keep your church within the walls of the buildings and captured by program maintenance. These include time (or lack

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thereof), a lack of appreciation for the passion and spiritual gifts of members, and your church structures.

Ineffective Methods

Historically, evangelicals have recognized the importance of evangelism and evangelistic training. Lifeway Press, Next Gen (Cook Communications), Zondervan, Campus Crusade, NavPress, plus many individual churches have produced evangelism-training materials to motivate and equip members to share their faith. The majority of the training models encourage people to make a personal visit to a home in the hope that they may lead those in that place into a relationship with Christ. Despite the zeal with which many churches have approached evangelism, their effectiveness falls short of expectations. Why?

Today's church leadership must answer a critical question. Why, after training tens of thousands of our church members to share their faith, are evangelism results so low and continuing to decline? The training materials by and large have been good. Therefore, the production of "new and improved" training materials is not the answer, except for denominational agencies and publishers. Maybe the evangelism trainers could somehow teach the material better, therefore resulting in more Christ-followers sharing their faith. However, the improvement of the trainers most likely would only result in incremental changes. What the churches in the U.S. need are exponential changes!

Many Christians have read the Great Commission so often that they either zone out because they have heard it so often, or they think the challenge is so large their efforts would do little to reach "all nations." We believe the majority of church members want to see their friends and neighbors come to Christ, but most are frustrated when asked, "When was the last time you shared your faith with someone?"

On the other hand, when asked, "What is God up to in your life?" they can say much about God's presence in their lives. When the focus moves from one's duty and training as a church member to one's personal relationship with God, people have something to talk about.

Confrontational or direct evangelism was successful when many people had some biblical foundation for moral justice or eternal consequences. However, today most people have no biblical knowledge when the conversation begins, much less a biblical worldview that presupposes living under a moral code with eternal

consequences. We now must spend more time defending the reliability of the Bible and confessing the historical sins of the Church and organized religion than we do helping people deal with the spiritual guilt of their sins.

What the church has done can amount to what the Texas Rangers baseball team has done through the years: change the manager, build a state-of-the-art ballpark, and change the uniforms from red to blue and now back to red. I (Steve) am a die-hard St. Louis Cardinal fan. The Cardinals have won ten “world championships”; the Texas Rangers, zero. The problems the Rangers have are the leaders and the players. The culture is not conducive to winning.

Churches have tried changes like those of the Texas Rangers, and they have resulted in minimal improvement at best. Much of the solution, we believe, lies in realigning the culture, values, and methodology of the local church.

Societal mores and models for how we live together have changed. In suburban America, for example, some people live in gated communities, thus eliminating “cold calls” for evangelism. Most new homes do not have a front porch, nor is the front door anything more than a way to the mailbox or a place to hang doorknob advertisements. Instead, homes have electrically powered garage doors, which drivers activate from inside their cars. Neighbors may go days or weeks without speaking or even seeing one another. The time-honored approach of engaging a stranger or acquaintance at his or her home can no longer be the only approach to helping people trust Jesus.

George Barna, after surveying the unchurched, concluded:

The key revelation is that there must be multiple routes of entry available to unchurched people. The greatest influence would be for a friend to invite the unchurched person to accompany them [*sic*] to church: two-thirds of the unchurched said that would have a positive effect.¹

Friendship or web evangelism (back when “web” meant your network of relationships, not the Internet) has been around for some time, and Barna’s data supports this methodology for helping people trust Jesus. What about the local church as a whole? How do you engage your congregation to mobilize to engage the mission field in which it is planted? If we are to fulfill the Great Commission, people must go where people are and invite them to “the feast” (Lk. 14:23). Multiple connection points enable members to build authentic relationships with people far from God.

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The premise of this book is simple: the key for a local church is to create natural connection points for Christ-followers to intersect the lives of people far from God through service in the community as salt and light servants.

Why Aren't Our Efforts Producing Anything Other Than More Work?

The Denton Baptist Association, for which Steve is a consultant, decided to focus its resources and personnel on evangelism for a season. The results of that focus have been somewhat varied. The number of baptisms increased from 1896 in the year 1999 to 2100 in the year 2003. However, after careful examination, of those 2100 baptisms, 12 percent were denominational baptisms (Christ-followers who were not previously immersed); 54 percent were biological (children or grandchildren of members) and 34 percent were conversions (individuals with no prior connection to a church).²

Additionally, looking at the percentage of church members within the Denton County population, the Denton Association has seen a decline from 4.3 percent of the population in 1999 to 1.9% in 2003. This decline has taken place at the same time church membership has risen nearly 10,000 since 1999! The demographic information has also shown an increase in the ethnic population of Denton County.³ The numerical church growth does not indicate progress in reaching Denton County for Christ.

Ron S. Lewis, our mentor and longtime church consultant, observed, "Process precedes product. What you are doing, and how you are doing it, determines the results."⁴ Church outreach programs, age-grouped Bible studies, church-wide evangelistic emphases and events have produced the current results. If churches desire a different end result, the process must change!

Some churches plateau or decline simply because they have become comfortable. They like things the way they are. They have forgotten that the Christian church is not simply to be a safe house for members, where we are to withdraw, keeping any possibility of evil and danger away at all cost. As William Shedd, the nineteenth-century theologian, noted, "A ship in harbor is safe, but that is not what ships are built for." A study of Paul's ministry illustrates a life on mission is anything other than channel surfing from a recliner.⁵ Ron Martoia quipped, "If the church isn't living on the edge, it's taking up way too much space."⁶

Your answers to these questions may help: How close to the edge is your church? If you are comfortable, what intentional steps

can you take to position your church back where it belongs, back on the edge?

Another reason evangelism fails is that churches ask people to fill positions in existing ministries regardless of their passions or spiritual gifts. We too often forget the organic picture of the church is a body, not an organization chart. The Holy Spirit has already equipped each member of that body with at least one gift to serve the common good of the whole (1 Cor. 12:7, 12). The Holy Spirit gives spiritual gifts to Christ-followers to build up the body (Eph. 4:11). Most evangelism training courses overlook the giftedness of members and offer a “one-size-fits-all” presentation that each disciple must master and then recite to others. Spiritual gifts indicate “what” you will do when you serve.⁷ We have seen those with the spiritual gift of evangelism be most effective in reaching those far from God.

Passion answers the “where” question of ministry. We believe God has written on the heart of every Christ-follower a passionate desire to serve Him. When a person finds that passion, that person begins to serve out of that “sweet spot” and find the greatest joy in his or her lives. Passion is the nuclear reactor that generates an energy that never burns out. Service is how one begins to discover one’s passion. Bill Hybels wrote, “Use whatever understanding you have of your passions, areas of interest, and gifts to guide you in a general serving direction. Look at the needs in your church and community. Then jump in with a willing heart and an open mind. Drape a servant’s towel over your arm, and get busy.”⁸ Churches should ask the important question: “Aside from your work, what is it you really like to do?”⁹ By asking such a question to volunteers, you will discover the Holy Spirit can move people into action much better than can a staff member who must fill an open slot.

Questions you may answer are: “What new things does God want to do in us and through us?”¹⁰ What have we done in the past and are doing now that produces the current results? If you want to change your results, you must not only answer the questions but also implement changes to realize new outcomes.

Here is one way to get started. The Old Testament prophecy of Micah (Mic. 6:8) outlines three areas you can address to embrace change in your church for the cause of Christ. God “requires” of you to “walk humbly with God (personal salvation, spiritual disciplines, and worship), love mercy (acts of kindness, meeting basic human needs) and act justly (addresses causes that create systems).”¹¹ To walk humbly with God means to trust His Son and Rescuer and Leader and follow the ways of God as the pattern for living. To love people

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into a relationship with Jesus is the basis for biblical evangelism. Acts of intentional (not random) kindness and meeting basic human needs lead the *ekklesia* into the community to serve people in the name of Jesus. To act justly means to actively engage “the rulers...the authorities...the powers of this dark world and...the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms” (Eph. 6:12, NIV) in the name of Jesus wherever injustice occurs. This is more than registering voters for the next presidential election. It means engaging the systems that cause poverty, inequality, and prejudice among people. Each of these areas forms the beginning of CBSE. What would happen if you led your church into the community to live out the “requirements” God has given His people? Robert Lewis, pastor of Fellowship Bible Church, Little Rock, Arkansas, led his church to ask and answer several key questions:

Can you imagine the community in which you live being genuinely thankful for your Church? Can you imagine city leaders valuing your church’s friendship and participation in the community—even asking for it? Can you imagine a large number of your church members actively engaged in, and passionate about, community service, using their gifts and abilities in ways and at levels, they never thought possible? Can you imagine the spiritual harvest that would naturally follow if all of this were true?¹²

Churches can deploy their members according to their passions and gifts to be an irresistible influence among the people of their community. Church members can find in the body of Christ the place they were created to belong and function. Volunteers serving in hospitals, U.S. Customs offices, nursing homes, community shelters, homes for unwed mothers, and community recreation programs can create a church that the entire community not only appreciates, but, more importantly, a church that actually fulfills the Great Commission—and in spontaneous and natural ways.

Great Commandment or Great Commission?

Many churches across America struggle for their identities and to understand God’s vision for their churches. They struggle with methods, programs, and strategies implemented to fulfill their visions. They struggle with their organizational structures, budgets, the percentage of the church budgets devoted to church staff, and members giving tithes and offerings. However, could we not all agree that the area in which the local church struggles most is its attempt

to fulfill *both* the Great Commission and the Great Commandment? Here they are as recorded in Scripture:

“Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.” (Mt 28:19–20)

“‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ This is the great and foremost commandment. The second is like it, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’” (Mt 22:37–40)

We are confident that many of the issues churches struggle with would be alleviated if churches made the Great Commission and the Great Commandment the foci of their efforts. These Christ-commands are the heart of our mission as Christ-followers. They are the foundations of spiritual formation that should be the core processes upon which our churches function. Dallas Willard states, “Spiritual formation in Christ is the process leading to that ideal end, and its result is love of God with all of the heart, soul, mind, and strength, and of the neighbor as oneself.”¹³

In the process of continued ministry and research for this book, we have adjusted our theology, philosophy, and methodology of ministry. For years if you were to ask us to list the Great Commission and Great Commandment in order of priority, we would have both said the Great Commission had priority over the Great Commandment as it relates to the mission of the church. Had we missed the obvious? When asked what the most important commandment was, Jesus responded with an affirmation of God’s direction to Israel (Deut. 6:4; Mk. 12:30). He had the chance to spin the vision for the Great Commission to be primary in the lives of His followers, but He chose loving God and loving others as the most important.

You can argue that Jesus affirmed the *Shema prior* to his resurrection and commissioned his disciples to go into all the world *after* it, and that we cannot lean on that order because one belongs to His fulfillment of the Old Covenant and the other involves the establishment of a New Covenant. However, Jesus said He came to “fulfill” the first Covenant and not to abolish it (Mt. 5:17). Jesus had commissioned His disciples already to go and tell others about the kingdom of Heaven (Mt. 10), but when asked the supreme law for all people, He answered with the greatest commandment: love God, love others.

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John reminds us, “We love, because [God] first loved us,” and adds, “The one who loves God should love his brother also” (1 Jn. 4:19, 21). The love of God is our motivation as Christ-followers to love our “brothers” and to complete the Great Commission. If we do not love God with all our heart, soul, strength, and mind, and love people with the love of God in us, why should we care about people heading toward a Christ-less eternity? The Great Commandment *motivates* us to do whatever we can to see those we have relationships with begin a personal walk with Christ. Paul reminds us that if Christlike love is not the inspiration for our evangelization, we are nothing but a “noisy gong or a clanging cymbal” (1 Cor. 13:1b). The love of Christ, which transforms our hearts to love others, motivates us to action. Acts of random kindness or meeting physical needs without God’s serving love will not result in kingdom growth. Christ made it clear that His followers were to love God and to love others while going about life helping people trust Jesus.

Erwin McManus says it like this:

When Jesus was asked what was the greatest of all the commandments, he was essentially being asked what is the most important thing to God. His answer could be summarized in one word: relationships. Essentially all the church is, is relationships. Without relationships, the church ceases to exist. Relationship to God and relationship to others are what the church is all about.¹⁴

Another way to emphasize this is that our job as church leaders is to assist people to live at the intersection of the vertical and horizontal wooden beams of the cross; the vertical represents our personal relationship with Christ, and the horizontal represents our community relationships with people. The Great Commandment creates that intersection where CBSE can become a strategy to complete the Great Commission.

Salt and Light Evangelism

We remember when, as church-going children, evangelists and pastors challenged us to find a Bible verse or passage that gave us a pass on sharing our faith. We knew by the way they asked the question the search would be futile, so, we went back to passing notes to our friends. As maturing followers of Jesus, we know a Christ-follower must share the gospel message. The apostle Paul asked, “How then will they call on Him in whom they have not believed? How will

they believe in Him whom they have not heard? And how will they hear without a preacher?" (Rom. 10:14). Steve Ayers observed, "We'll never see people become a part of the bride of Christ until we ask them to."¹⁵

So, what is the best way to help people trust Jesus when we are called to love others and invite them to become part of the bride of Christ? In what we call the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus asked His followers to live in such a way that others may see what they did and give credit to His Father in Heaven. He said:

"You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt has become tasteless, how can it be made salty again? It will no longer be good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled under foot by men. You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden... Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven." (Mt. 5: 13–14, 16)

"Christians have not been placed here to curse the darkness, but to be salt and light. We cannot expect the world to reflect our values unless we have first reached them with the love and message of Christ,"¹⁶ comment two prominent preachers. Is this how Jesus taught His disciples to do evangelism? We think so, and call His strategy "Salt and Light Evangelism."

What do the metaphors of "salt" and "light" mean? Salt does several things. It makes people thirsty. This image suggests Christ-followers are to live lives that demonstrate a sense of purpose, peace, and joy. By living this type of spiritual life, a thirst for spiritual things would develop among the people who were far from God, and be served by those who followed Jesus. He said in another context, "He who loves his life loses it, and he who hates his life in this world shall keep it to life eternal. If anyone serves Me, he must follow Me; and where I am, there My servant will be also; if anyone serves Me, the Father will honor him" (Jn. 12:25–26).

Salt can also enhance food's flavor as a spice. Jesus' followers add flavor to the lives of people who were far from Him. How? By living a lives that are authentic and bold in their faith. Christ's disciples add spices of celebration and consistency during tough circumstances. They find hope when others have given up.

Salt can also preserve. When Christ-followers live the type of life that demonstrates God's love for the world, they can affect the moral fiber of the culture. God can use His followers to stem the downward

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moral slide of culture. Christ-followers should be a positive influence for God in their communities as they live a life reflective of “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, [and] self-control” (Gal. 5:22b–23a).

Why is the salt metaphor important to a discussion about evangelism? Mark Mittelberg and Bill Hybels observe:

First, in order for salt to have the greatest possible impact, it must be potent enough to have an effect. And second, for any impact to take place, salt has to get close to whatever it is supposed to affect. So Jesus may have chosen the salt metaphor because salt requires both potency and proximity to do its thing.¹⁷

Jesus gave His followers the salt metaphor for application among the non-kingdom people, not for those inside.

Likewise, Christ-followers must apply the light metaphor as influencing those outside the church, among people who are facing a Christ-less eternity. “A city set on a hill cannot be hidden” (Mt. 5:14b). A church filled with the light of God’s love and love for others cannot be hidden behind stain-glassed walls. “Nor,” Jesus added, “does anyone light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house” (5:15). Light benefits both those who are outside the city and those “in the house.” What are we to do as light? Jesus concluded, “Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven” (5:16). God will get the credit for our good works when we reflect His nature in our “good works.”

The deployment of people in the world is exactly what Jesus had in mind as he gave them these pictures for their lives. Jesus was passionate about seeing His followers out in the world as salt and light. Shortly before He was arrested and crucified, Jesus prayed these words for them:

“I do not ask You to take them out of the world, but to keep them from the evil one. They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth. As You sent Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world.” (Jn. 17:15–18)

Jesus wanted His followers to rub shoulders with real people, both the poor and the rich. His strategy was not to force anyone to trust Him, but He patiently engaged anyone who came to Him.

Michael Simpson describes Jesus' encounter with the rich young ruler this way:

Christ was evangelizing, but it sure doesn't look like the way most people do it today. Even though it says Jesus loved him, he stood there and let the man walk away. Why did Christ not follow him when he walked away? Why didn't He try harder when this man seemed so eager? Why didn't Jesus "get him saved" before addressing this difficult area of his life? Christ's approach was first to weed out the willing seekers and then go deeper with them. He promised hope over pain. He condemned sin, not the sinner. He never attacked; he invited. Love is a choice, so it can never be forced and genuine at the same time. Salvation is choosing the ultimate expression of love and adheres to the same rules. Christ's approach is based on His equal desire for love and His respect for the gift of free will. When looking for a spouse, one woos. Threats are never the basis for a healthy relationship.¹⁸

Mittelberg and Hybels conclude, "Jesus was accused by His enemies of being a friend of tax collectors and 'sinners' (Luke 7:34). Though this was meant to be a derogatory term, Jesus never denied it. Instead, He took it as a compliment and actively embodied it."¹⁹ Jesus did not mind being addressed as a friend of sinners.

The local church must purposefully deploy people into the community, becoming friends of sinners, if Christ-followers are to live out this verse and the Great Commission. Ron Lewis stated, "We need to develop our love for our neighbors and friends to the point we cannot stand the thought of them being separated from God for eternity. That will motivate us to do everything possible to see them come into a saving relationship with Christ."²⁰ Our love for God (loving God with all our heart, mind, soul, and strength) should compel us to love our neighbor.

Salt and light have their greatest impact outside the local church:

Christ didn't just hang out with sinners; He initiated contact, enjoyed their presence, accepted their gifts, and publicly defended them. He let them know that He sympathized with the plight of the impact from their sins, but never condoned those sins, participated in them, or hid His concern. Christ went to great lengths to let the lost know He understood them, honored them, and had their best interests in mind even to the point of death.²¹

The Pharisees and scribes did not like the type of people Jesus chose to be with. Religious law separated the “insiders” from the “outsiders.” One reason the religious leaders nailed Jesus to the tree was because He loved to hang with people whose reputations were subpar, whose professions were “filthy,” whose bodies were diseased, and whose lives did not fit the mold of the religiously correct.

The local church must understand the eternal implications of continuing business as is. The church must re-engage the people in their community and ministry fields. According to Bill Easum, “The focus is how the church can be leaven and salt in the community around it and throughout the world. The church is no longer the place where religious things happen, but the launch pad from which cross-cultural witnesses are sent out into the world.”²²

Beyond Salt and Light

Let’s examine another biblical illustration of community-based evangelism. In 2 Kings 6–7, the Bible describes a siege and resulting famine that affected the entire city of Jerusalem. The situation was so dire that a woman proposed to another woman that they eat the other woman’s son on that day, and then eat her son tomorrow. God’s plan, however, was to utilize four lepers to break the famine.

Now, the Law prohibited lepers from living among healthy members of the tribe. The diseased people were to live away from others so they would not infect others with their disease (Num. 5:1–3).

The four lepers considered every possibility to save themselves. If they stayed where they were, they would surely die. If they returned to the city, they would also die. They chose to go to the enemy camp and beg for food. In a worst-case scenario their enemies would turn them away or kill them.

The Bible says when they arrived at the enemy camp, it was empty. The enemy had abandoned everything and fled. The four lepers went from tent to tent hoarding their newly found bounty. The Bible says that after a while, the lepers came to their senses and remembered those in the city who were starving to death. “We are not doing right. This day is a day of good news, but we are keeping silent; if we wait until morning light, punishment will overtake us. Now therefore come, let us go and tell the king’s household” (2 Kings 7:9).

Although the lepers had more than enough for themselves and could have argued how unjustly everyone back home had treated them and did not deserve their treasure trove, they decided to go

tell others about what they had found. Isn't evangelism mostly lepers who have been outcast sharing the bounty they have stumbled upon with friends and family?

Ron Lewis said many times, "People will spend eternity somewhere."²³ Just the thought of the eternal punishment that acquaintances, friends, and family face should motivate all Christians to share the Good News with those starving for God's love. Christ-followers hoarding or hiding the Good News is exactly what Christ cautioned His followers about when He said, "Nor does anyone light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house" (Mt. 5:15).

Consider also the story of a paralytic and his friends (Lk. 5:17–26). The paralytic's friends loved him so much they carried him on a mat to Jesus with the hope the man might physically be healed. When they arrived, Luke tells us, they found the crowd so large there that it would be difficult to complete the vision they had for their paraplegic friend. The paralytic's friends determined that the only way to accomplish their goal was to enter the house through the roof. The men climbed on the roof, removed a section of the ceiling, and lowered their friend on his mat in front of Jesus. Luke records, "Seeing their faith, He said, 'Friend, your sins are forgiven you'" (Lk. 5:20). The Pharisees who heard Jesus' pronouncement talked among themselves, saying that Jesus was blaspheming God, because only God can forgive sins.

Jesus replied:

"Why are you reasoning in your hearts? Which is easier, to say, 'Your sins have been forgiven you,' or to say, 'Get up and walk'? But, so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins,"—He said to the paralytic—"I say to you, get up, and pick up your stretcher and go home." Immediately he got up before them, and picked up what he had been lying on, and went home, glorifying God. (Lk. 5:22b–25)

This story contains two aspects of CBSE: (1) develop authentic relationships with people far from God; and (2) seize an opportunity to meet a need, thereby helping to bring them to Jesus. Christ-followers connect people to Jesus as they meet needs in the midst of developing authentic relationships.

What is the goal of our evangelism? How do we distinguish what we talk about from other forms of community service and servant evangelism? When can we declare our efforts effective and by what measure?

The Goal and Content of Community-Based Servant Evangelism

Evangelism is simply to “tell the Good News” to others. We suggest churches “tell” the story of Jesus through meeting needs in their communities in the name of Jesus. We do not offer a presentation to be memorized but a lifestyle of service that engages tangible needs wherever they may occur and seizes every opportunity in that interaction to introduce the person/people served to our Rescuer and Leader, Jesus. The outcome of our mission is the miraculous transformation of a person’s life through a relationship with Jesus Christ. We echo David Bosch’s prophetic words, “Mission therefore means being involved in the ongoing dialogue between God, who offers his salvation, and the world, which—enmeshed in all kinds of evil—craves that salvation.”²⁴

Today, many people believe if they do more good than bad, that alone will gain them entrance into heaven. However, if God’s nature were not both holy and loving, the fall of man would have spelled the end of the short story of humankind. Gilbert Bilezikian has concluded, “Having been held in contempt by his creatures, God had every right to abandon them to the destructive power of Satan. He could have turned his back on the human situation and let it rot into fine dust.”²⁵ We need to be reminded from time to time that God created humans out of His love and that God saves them because of His love. The apostle Paul declared, “But God demonstrates His love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us” (Rom. 5:8). The love of God is a love *demonstrated* in relationship, and those who love as does God, revealed in Christ Jesus, *demonstrate* that same love to others.

CBSE relates directly to the teaching of Jesus when He commanded His followers to go and make disciples of all people, informing people how much they matter to the Father (Mt. 28:18–20). That should become a focus of our lives as we love God and love others (Mt. 22:37–39). The major responsibilities for all Christ-followers are contained in both of these passages. “In short, we must return to simple delight in the Lord and respectful sorrow for the lost. When we are amazed again at the work of God in our own lives, we cease to suppress the Holy Spirit. When the Holy Spirit is free and evident in our lives, God draws people to us. Then, and only then, will we be effective in evangelism.”²⁶

Christ said, “And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength” (Mk. 12:30). In addition to such singularly focused love for

God, Christ-followers are to love others because Jesus said that the world would know if someone was a follower of His by their love for one another (Jn. 13:35). “On these two commandments depend the whole law and the Prophets” (Mt. 22:40). The “love God” and “love others” command is the action necessary to fulfill Christ’s Great Commission. The result of following the command of loving God and loving people motivates Christ-followers to share the gospel message with family members, friends, and neighbors.

The Essence of the Good News

As we have said, the goal of CBSE is changed lives through an ongoing relationship with Jesus. That relationship is founded on the biblical realities of who God is, who people are, the resulting separation by sinful acts, and God’s gracious gift of reconciliation through His Son, Jesus. Without this message in the demonstration of Christlike love, our acts of service no longer find themselves in the mission of the church. So, what is that kernel of the Good News, the *kerygma* of our actions?

The gospel message is first about God. God is love (1 Jn. 4:16). God is holy and absolutely pure (1 Pet. 1:16). God is also just; He is a good and perfect judge (2 Thess. 1:6). On the other hand, the Bible says that man is sinful (Rom. 3:23). On their own, people are spiritually helpless to do anything about the issue sin creates (Isa. 64:6). The result of the sinful condition is that man deserves death, both a physical and spiritual death (Rom. 6:23).

Christ did something for people they could never do for themselves. First, Christ became God *incarnate*, in flesh (Jn. 1:1, 14). The Bible teaches Jesus is God’s only Son, who came to earth so man might spend eternity with God in Heaven (Jn. 3:16). Jesus also died as a substitute sacrifice on the behalf of all people (1 Pet. 2:24). He offers forgiveness as a free gift (Eph. 2:8–9).

Nevertheless, it is not enough to know all of this. The Bible says, “You believe that God is one. You do well; the demons also believe, and shudder” (Jam. 2:19). God asks us to respond. “But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name” (Jn. 1:12). People must also ask Christ to be their Forgiver and Leader (1 Jn. 1:9). The result for people is a spiritual transformation. “Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come” (2 Cor. 5:17).²⁷ Jesus looked eyes with people who were “distressed and dispirited” like sheep without a shepherd (Mt. 9:36).

CBSE is motivated by God's rescuing love toward people and contains the life-changing message of Jesus Christ. The love of God in response to His love for us in Christ Jesus motivates us to go in the name of Jesus to all people to serve them as He served us.

QUESTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION

1. Take a look at your last one hundred new church members. How many came as already "convinced"? As children of members? How many came as the result of members inviting a person far from God and the person becoming a Christ-follower?
2. In what tangible ways is your church today living on the edge?
3. How many of your church members currently serving in church programs, ministries, and events are mismatched with their passion and spiritual gifting?
4. Is the Great Commandment your foundational Scripture for all your church's evangelistic efforts? Do your members clearly understand that to love God fully they must love "others," and that if they authentically love "others" they must love God? What steps must be taken to help your church operate by the Great Commandment?
5. Are you (*church leader*) modeling a "Salt and Light" life? If not, what are your next steps?
6. Can your members clearly articulate the essence of the gospel message?
7. Are your members so personally engaged with the Father that they have current examples of what God is doing in their lives?

Notes

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²Annual report of churches of the Denton Baptist Association.

³Percept, Ministry Area Profile 2003 Compass Report, Study Area Definition: Denton County Texas: ID # 29095:63591.

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⁵C. Gene Wilkes, *Paul on Leadership: Servant Leadership in a Ministry of Transition* (Nashville: LifeWay, 2004), 80–101.

⁶Ron Martoia, *Morph!* (Loveland: Group Publishing, 2003), 159.

⁷Bruce Bugbee, Don Cousins, and Bill Hybels, *Network: Leader's Guide* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 46.

⁸Bill Hybels, *Volunteers* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004), 71.

⁹Bill Hybels, The Leadership Summit 2004, *The Leader's Edge*, Session 2, CD.

¹⁰Martoia, *Morph!*, 124.

¹¹Rick Rusaw and Eric Swanson, *The Externally Focused Church* (Loveland: Group Publishing, 2004), 137.

¹²Robert Lewis and Rob Wilkins, *The Church of Irresistible Influence* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001) 13–14.

¹³Dallas Willard, *Renovation of the Heart* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2002), 114.

¹⁴Erwin Raphael McManus, *An Unstoppable Force* (Loveland: Group Publishing, 2001), 158.

¹⁵Steve Ayers, *Igniting Passion in Your Church* (Loveland: Group Publishing, 2003), 42.

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¹⁷Mark Mittelberg and Bill Hybels, *Becoming a Contagious Christian* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 42.

¹⁸Michael L. Simpson, *Permission Evangelism* (Colorado Springs: Cook Communication Ministries, 2003), 51.

¹⁹Mittelberg and Hybels, *Becoming a Contagious Christian*, 101.

²⁰Ron S. Lewis, used by permission.

²¹Simpson, *Permission Evangelism*, 128.

²²Bill Easum, *Leadership on the Other Side* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2000), 122.

²³Ron S. Lewis, used by permission.

²⁴Donald J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission* (New York: Orbis Books, 1991), 400.

²⁵Gilbert Bilezikian, *Christianity 101* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1993), 143.

²⁶Simpson, *Permission Evangelism*, 77.

²⁷See Mark Mittelberg, *Becoming a Contagious Christian, Participants Guide* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), 60–63.