



**CENTER
CHURCH**

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Center Church

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Requests for information should be addressed to:

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Keller, Timothy J., 1950-

Center church : doing balanced, Gospel-centered ministry in your city / Timothy J. Keller.

p. cm.

ISBN 978-0-310-49418-8 (hardcover)

1. City missions. 2. City churches. 3. Church work. 4. Evangelistic work. I. Title.

BV2653.K45. 2012

253.09173'2 – dc23

2012012176

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Cover design: Kristin Spix Design

Cover photography: Last Refuge/Robert Harding

Interior design: Kristin Spix Design/Ben Fetterley/Matthew Van Zomeren

Printed in the United States of America

EQUIPPING PEOPLE FOR MISSIONAL LIVING

Until now, we've spent most of our time trying to understand the missional conversation, discerning some of its commonalities and strengths as well as its errors and pitfalls. One recurring theme is the importance of equipping and involving the laity in ministry. Under Christendom, people simply came to the church to receive the ministrations of the professional clergy. We can no longer assume that people will come. This should not be taken to imply that the ordained ministry is obsolete — by no means! It is the responsibility of the ordained leadership to build up the church and its members through the ministry of the Word and sacraments. However, one critical focus of that ministry must now be the discipling of the laity for ministry in the world. This is one of the most practical ways a church can appropriate the insights of the missional conversation, moving toward a centered, balanced approach to ministry.

We find an example of this idea in an interview conducted with Eddie Gibbs and Ryan Bolger of Fuller Seminary. When asked, "What are the marks of churches (people) that live missionally?" Bolger provides a helpful and practical answer: "They no longer see the church service as the primary connecting point with those outside the community. Connecting with those outside happens within the culture, by insiders to that culture who express the gospel through how they live."¹

The rest of this chapter will propose different ways and means for equipping and encouraging the laity to engage in ministry "within the culture." I give special emphasis to the lay ministry of the Word — the building up of believers and the evangelizing of nonbelievers through preaching and teaching — though in part 7, I will point to some other ways that Christians can do ministry in the world,

including the practice of justice and the integration of faith and work.

"INFORMAL MISSIONARIES"

There has always been a strong tendency, as John Stott says, for Christians to "withdraw into a kind of closed, evangelical, monastic community."² This is not, of course, how things were in the early church. The Greek word *euangelizō* means "to gospelize," to tell people the good news about what Jesus did for us, and in the book of Acts literally everyone in the early church does it. Not only the apostles (5:42) but every Christian (8:4) did evangelism — and they did so endlessly. Passages such as Romans 15:14; Colossians 3:16; 1 Thessalonians 1:6 – 10; Hebrews 3:13; and 1 John 2:20, 27 indicate that every Christian was expected to evangelize, follow up, nurture, and teach people the Word. This happened relationally — one person bringing the gospel to another within the context of a relationship.

In Michael Green's seminal *Evangelism in the Early Church*, he conveys the conclusion of historians that early Christianity's explosive growth "was in reality accomplished by means of informal missionaries."³ That is, Christian laypeople — not trained preachers and evangelists — carried on the mission of the church not through formal preaching but informal conversation — "in homes and wine shops, on walks, and around market stalls . . . they did it naturally, enthusiastically."⁴

Green quotes pagan writers such as Celsus, who complained with great sarcasm that "we see in private houses . . . the most illiterate and bucolic yokels, who would not dare to say anything at all in front of their elders and more intelligent masters. But they get hold of . . . any . . . who are as ignorant as themselves and say . . . 'We know how men ought

In *Evangelism in the Early Church*, Michael Green gives an extended account of how the future Saint Gregory was won to faith by Origen. When Gregory was eighteen, he and his brother were traveling to study law at Beirut, then one of the most famous schools in the world. But on their journey there they came to Caesarea in Palestine where they met the famous scholar Origen. He persuaded the brothers to remain for a while and let him tutor them in the history of philosophy. They stayed, and to their surprise Origen did not keep the traditional distance of professor and pupil but opened his life to them as a friend. Gregory stayed and received his full education under Origen for seven years and in the process was converted to Christianity.⁵

to live. If your children do as we say, you will be happy yourselves and make your home happy too.” Green writes, “In fact, of course, it pays the highest compliment to the zeal and dedication of the most ordinary Christians in the subapostolic age. Having found treasure, they meant to share it with others, to the limits of their ability.”⁶

Green is careful to point out that not all evangelism in the early church was informal. In his chapter titled “Evangelistic Methods,” he speaks of many forms of evangelism that required great training and expertise, including synagogue preaching and open-air preaching, as well as public teaching and “dialogical” evangelism. Early Christian teachers set up academies (schools for instruction in the faith) but also taught science, mathematics, philosophy, and the humanities from a Christian perspective. The great Catechetical School of Alexandria was one, and we know that Justin Martyr started one such school in Rome. Green shows that many non-Christians came to take classes, listen to lectures, and dialogue with teachers. The

original example of this form of evangelism may have been the apostle Paul’s lecturing in the public hall of Tyrannus in Ephesus. There he engaged in *dialogomenos* — interactive dialogue with all comers — about the Christian faith daily for two years (Acts 19:9–10). Green writes, “The intellectual content of his addresses must have been very stimulating. Here was a man who could hold his own, and presumably make converts, in the course of public debate.”⁷

But Green returns to the most important way that Christianity spread — through the extended household (*oikos*) evangelism done informally by Christians. A person’s strongest relationships were within the household — with blood relatives, servants, clients, and friends — so when a person became a Christian, it was in the household that he or she would get the most serious hearing.⁸ If the head of the household (Greek, *oikos*) became a believer, the entire home became a ministry center in which the gospel was taught to all the household’s members and neighbors. We see this in Acts 16:15, 32–34 (Lydia’s and the jailer’s homes in Philippi); Acts 17:5 (Jason’s home in Thessalonica); Acts 18:7 (Titius Justus’s home in Corinth); Acts 21:8 (Philip’s home in Caesarea); and 1 Corinthians 1:16; 16:15 (Stephanas’s home in Corinth).

The home could be used for systematic teaching and instruction (Acts 5:42), planned presentations of the gospel to friends and neighbors (Acts 10:22), prayer meetings (Acts 12:12), impromptu evangelistic gatherings (Acts 16:32), follow-up sessions with the inquirers (Acts 18:26), evenings devoted to instruction and prayer (Acts 20:7), and fellowship (Acts 21:7).

If another member of the household became a Christian — the wife, children, or slaves and laborers — then the gospel would spread more indirectly. In his chapter titled “Evangelistic Methods,” Green sketches out the different ways the gospel moved through households, depending on who was the first convert.

We also know from the Bible and early historical records that simple friendship was one of the main carriers of the gospel. We see this in John 1 when

Philip passes his knowledge of Jesus on to his friend Nathanael. Green relates how Pantaenus led Clement of Alexandria to Christ, Justin led Tatian, and Octavius led Minucius Felix to Christ — all through friendship, which was taken very seriously by the ancients.⁹

THE LAY MINISTRY DYNAMIC

What does this “every-member gospel ministry” look like in today’s world? Here are several examples:

- Jerry is asked by his work colleague Bill how his weekend went. Jerry relates that he went on a men’s retreat that provided spiritual resources for forgiving people who have wronged us over the years. When Bill raises his eyebrows and says, “That’s interesting,” Jerry takes a small plunge and mentions that the thing that helped him most was the idea that even though he has not given God his due, God offers him forgiveness through Jesus.
- Dan and Jill help their two sons, ages five and seven, with Scripture memorization and teach them a simple catechism. They field the boys’ questions and help them understand the meaning of the texts they are studying.
- Sally gets to know a young woman named Clara at church. Clara confides that she and her husband are having marriage problems and he isn’t willing to go to a counselor. Sally and her husband, Jeff, invite Clara and Sam over for a meal. Sam hits it off with Jeff. Afterward, Clara convinces Sam to meet with Jeff and Sally to talk about their marriage issues. They meet together once a month for four months, studying Ephesians 5 and several other biblical texts on marriage.
- John comes to church with his wife, but he isn’t sure what he believes or where he stands on faith. The pastor introduces him to an elder named Tom, who begins meeting with John on occasion to read and discuss a book about basic Christianity. After two meetings, John agrees to study the gospel of Mark with Tom every two or three weeks.
- Jenny begins coming to a small group in the church. She was raised in the church but has so many doubts and questions that her group leader, Beth, begins meeting with her one-on-one. They study Bible passages and read books that address each of her questions, one after the other.
- Ted is a young single lawyer. He knows several other lawyers who go to church with him, though they don’t work for his firm. He decides to have a Super Bowl party for several of his non-Christian colleagues and invites two Christian lawyers from church and a couple of other believers as well. The men and women from his workplace hit it off with the lawyers from church. About three months later, one of them shows up in church with one of Ted’s friends.
- Jessica meets Teresa, a new believer, at church and invites her to work through a series of six Bible studies for new Christians (on issues such as prayer, Bible reading, the role of the church, understanding the gospel better, etc.).
- Fred has been attending a small group for months. At one point he realizes that he assesses the value of the group strictly on what he gets out of it. He then decides to begin preparing well (studying the passage) and praying for the group. When he comes, he looks for every opportunity to help the Bible study leader by making good contributions and for ways to speak the truth in love so others are encouraged and helped to grow.
- Catherine prays for her friend Megan for months. Megan responds well to two short books on Christian subjects that Catherine has given her. She then invites Megan to an evangelistic event in which Christian truth is presented. On the way home, she fields Megan’s questions.
- Joe has a longtime friend from college days named Pete, who is a musician. Pete’s performance anxiety is harming his career. Joe has been a sympathetic listener for some time, but finally he bluntly asks Pete to explore the

Christian faith with him. “I think maybe it’s the only thing that will help you overcome your problem.” Pete is taken aback, but after a while, he expresses interest, mainly out of desperation. Joe warns him, “If Christianity is going to be any help, it will only be if you come to the belief that it is not just helpful but *true*.” Pete doesn’t want to go to any Christian gatherings, so they start studying the Bible together and listening to sermons and lectures and discussing them.

- Kerrie and two other Christian friends are moms who have young kids. They decide to start a daytime moms’ group and invite non-Christian friends. For about a year, the group grows to include a similar number of Christians and nonbelievers. The conversations are general and freewheeling — covering spiritual, social, marriage, parenting, and personal issues. As time goes on, several of the nonbelievers begin to go to church with the believers and cross over into faith. After three years, the group is a Christian Bible study but still open and inclusive toward a few nonbelievers who come regularly.
- Jim and Cynthia are both artists who are involved in a citywide Christian artists’ fellowship based in their local church. The fellowship typically includes a discussion of the relationship of faith to art that assumes a Christian belief, but the artists have four events a year that will be either a gallery showing or a book event in which a credible working artist talks to a general audience about how their faith relates to their art. Jim and Cynthia are diligent in bringing non-Christian artists or art appreciators to these events.
- Greg comes to faith in Christ through a skeptics/seeker group hosted by a church. When the date for his baptism is set, he invites a number of non-Christian friends to the service and then takes them out for lunch and discusses the whole event. One friend is very moved by the experience, and Greg invites him to come back. Eventually, the friend begins coming to his small group with him.¹⁰

We can make several observations about these examples. First, it should be clear that we are not just talking about evangelism in the traditional sense here. Some of these examples show instances of encouraging and building up new believers; some point to ways of spurring Christians on to greater growth in Christ; others depict situations of helping believers address particular problems in their lives. And yet the basic form of this every-member gospel ministry is the same:

- **Organic.** It happens spontaneously, outside of the church’s organized programs (even though it occasionally makes use of formal programs).
- **Relational.** It is done in the context of informal personal relationships.
- **Word deploying.** It prayerfully brings the Bible and gospel into connection with people’s lives.
- **Active, not passive.** Each person assumes personal responsibility for being a producer rather than just a consumer of ministry; for example, even though Fred continues to come to the small group as he always has, his mind-set has changed.

Traditional evangelism is only one piece of this every-member gospel ministry, and it is often not the largest piece. Still, as lay ministry grows in a congregation, so, too, will the amount of evangelism.

Second, notice we are talking about *lay ministry*, not necessarily *lay leadership*. Often ministers talk about lay ministers and lay leaders as if they are the same thing. But this may betray too much attractional church thinking. By lay leaders, I mean volunteers who lead and run church programs. Being a lay leader can be time-consuming and may even make lay ministry more difficult for a season. Lay leadership usually requires some level of leadership and organizational ability, while lay ministry does not. Lay leaders are extremely important to lay ministry — overworking lay leaders can kill lay ministry in a church — but they are not the same thing. Lay ministers are people who actively bring their Christian example and faith into the lives of their neighbors, friends, colleagues, and community.

My experience has been that when at least 20 to 25 percent of a church’s people are engaged in this

kind of organic, relational gospel ministry, it creates a powerful dynamism that infuses the whole church and greatly extends the church's ability to edify and evangelize. Lay ministers counsel, encourage, instruct, disciple, and witness with both Christian and non-Christian individuals. They involve themselves in the lives of others so

Lay ministers are people who actively bring their Christian example and faith into the lives of their neighbors, friends, colleagues, and community.

they might come to faith or grow in grace. Then a certain percentage of the people served by these lay ministers come into the lay ministry community as well, and the church grows in quality and quantity. Because they are being equipped and supported by the church's leaders, those involved in lay ministry tend to feel a healthy sense of ownership of the church. They think of it as "our church," not "their church" (referring to the ordained leaders and staff). They freely and generously give of their time, talent, and treasure.

This is the tide that lifts every boat in ministry. Without Christian education and counseling, without formal and informal diaconal work, without the preaching of the Word and administration of the sacraments, without support for family life, without the management and stewardship of resources, without church government and discipline, lay-people will not be built up into lay ministers. But if lay ministry is happening all through and around the church, it grows each of these other functions in quality and quantity. Where do the human resources and even the financial resources come from to do *all* of the work of the church? They come from every-member gospel ministry.

MISSIONAL EVANGELISM THROUGH MINI-DECISIONS

Notice another assumption behind the examples of lay ministry given here: many people process from

unbelief to faith through "mini-decisions."

We hold to the classic teaching about the nature of the gospel: to be a Christian is to be united with Christ by faith so that the merits of his saving work become ours and his Spirit enters us and begins to change us into Christ's likeness. You either are a Christian or you are not—you either are united to him by faith or you are not—because being a Christian is, first of all, a "standing" with God. However, we also acknowledge that coming to this point of uniting to Christ by faith often works as a process, not only as an event. It can occur through a series of small decisions or thoughts that bring a person closer and closer to the point of saving faith. In a post-Christendom setting, more often than not, this is the case. People simply do not have the necessary background knowledge to hear a gospel address and immediately understand who God is, what sin is, who Jesus is, and what repentance and faith are in a way that enables them to make an intelligent commitment. They often have far too many objections and beliefs for the gospel to be readily plausible to them.

Therefore, most people in the West need to be welcomed into community long enough for them to hear multiple expressions of the gospel—both formal and informal—from individuals and teachers. As this happens in community, nonbelievers come to understand the character of God, sin, and grace. Many of their objections are answered through this process. Because they are "on the inside" and involved in ongoing relationships with Christians, they can imagine themselves as Christians and see how the faith fleshes out in real life.

The process often looks something like this:

1. Awareness: "I see it." They begin to clear the ground of stereotypes and learn to distinguish the gospel from legalism or liberalism, the core from the peripheral. They make mini-decisions like these:

- "She's religious but surprisingly open-minded."
- "You *can* be a Christian and be intelligent!"
- "The Bible isn't so hard to understand after all."
- "A lot of things the Bible says really fit me."
- "I see the difference between Christianity and just being moral."

2. Relevance: “I need it.” They begin to see the slavery of both religion and irreligion and are shown the transforming power of how the gospel works. Examples of mini-decisions here are as follows:

- “There must be some advantages to being a Christian.”
- “An awful lot of very normal people really like this church!”
- “It would really help if I could believe like she does.”
- “Jesus seems to be the key. I wonder who he was.”

3. Credibility: “I need it because it’s true.” This is a reversal of the modern view that states, “It’s true if I need it.” If people fail to see the reasonableness of the gospel, they will lack the endurance to persevere when their faith is challenged. Examples of mini-decisions include thoughts like these:

- “I see that the Bible is historically reliable.”
- “You really can’t use science to disprove the supernatural.”
- “There really were eyewitnesses to the resurrection.”
- “Jesus really *is* God.”
- “I see now why Jesus had to die – it is the only way.”

4. Trial: “I see what it would be like.” They are involved in some form of group life, in some type of service ministry, and are effectively trying Christianity on, often talking like a Christian – even defending the faith at times.

5. Commitment: “I take it.” This may be the point of genuine conversion, or sometimes a person will realize that conversion has already happened, and they just didn’t grasp it at the time. Examples of mini-decisions include these:

- “I am a sinner.”
- “I need a Savior.”
- “Though there are a lot of costs, I really must do what Jesus says.”
- “I will believe in Jesus and live for him.”

6. Reinforcement: “Now I get it.” Typically, this is the place where the penny drops and the gospel becomes even clearer and more real.

CREATING A LAY MINISTRY DYNAMIC

A spiritual dynamic cannot really be created or controlled, but just as we need air, heat, and fuel to have a fire, certain environmental factors must be present for this lay ministry dynamic to occur. At least three factors must be in place: believers with relational integrity, pastoral support, and safe venues.

We will have an impact for the gospel if we are *like* those around us yet profoundly *unlike* them at the same time, all the while remaining very visible and *engaged*.

BELIEVERS WITH RELATIONAL INTEGRITY

A message is contextualized if (1) it is adapted into a new language or culture so it is understandable and yet (2) it maintains its character and original meaning in its former language/culture. Here I’m proposing that Christians *themselves* must be contextualized “letters of the gospel” (see 2 Cor 3:1–13). In other words, we will have an impact for the gospel if we are *like* those around us yet profoundly different and *unlike* them at the same time, all the while remaining very visible and *engaged*.

So, first of all, Christians must be like their neighbors in the food they eat and clothes they wear, their dialect, general appearance, work life, recreational and cultural activities, and civic engagement. They participate fully in life with their neighbors. Christians should also be like their neighbors with regard to excellence. That is, Christians should be very good at what others want to be good at. They should be skillful, diligent, resourceful, and disciplined. In short, Christians in a particular community should – at first glance – look reassuringly *similar* to the other people in the neighborhood. This opens up nonbelievers to any discussion of faith, because they recognize the believers as people who live

in and understand their world. It also, eventually, gives them a glimpse of what they could look like if they became believers. It means it would be good if a nonbelieving young man on Wall Street could meet Christians in the financial world, not only those who are his age but also those who are older and more accomplished, or if an older female artist could meet Christian women who are artists of her own generation as well as others who are not.

Second, Christians must be also unlike their neighbors. In key ways, the early Christians were startlingly different from their neighbors; it should be no different for us today. Christians should be marked by *integrity*. Believers must be known for being scrupulously honest, transparent, and fair. Followers of Christ should also be marked by *generosity*. If employers, they should take less personal profit so customers and employees have more pay. As citizens, they should be philanthropic and generous with their time and with the money they donate for the needy. They should consider living below their potential lifestyle level. Believers should also be known for their *hospitality*, welcoming others into their homes, especially neighbors and people with needs. They should be marked by *sympathy* and avoid being known as self-serving or even ruthless in business or personal dealings. They should be marked by an unusual willingness to *forgive* and seek reconciliation, not by a vengeful or spiteful spirit.

In addition to these character qualities, Christians should be marked by clear countercultural values and practices. Believers should practice *chastity* and live consistently in light of the biblical sexual ethic. Those outside the church know this ethic — no sex outside of marriage — and any inconsistency in this area can destroy a believer's credibility as a Christian. Today, few people apart from those with strong Christian convictions live this way. Outsiders and non-Christians in the community will also notice how you respond to *adversity*. Being calm in the face of failure and disappointment is crucial to your Christian witness. Finally, they will notice if you are seeking *equity* — if you are committed to the common good of the community. Francis Schaeffer gives an example of what these countercultural values look like:

The Bible does clearly teach the right of property, but both the Old Testament and the New Testament put a tremendous stress on the compassionate use of that property. If at each place where the employer was a Bible-believing Christian the world could see that less profit was being taken so that the workers would have appreciably more than the "going rate" of pay, the gospel would have been better proclaimed throughout the whole world than if the profits were the same as the world took and then large endowments were given to Christian schools, missions, and other projects. This is not to minimize the centrality of preaching the gospel to the whole world, nor to minimize missions; it is to say that the other is also a way to proclaim the good news.¹¹

In addition to being *like* others and *unlike* others, Christians should also be *engaged* with others.¹² Mission for a contextualized believer is a matter of everyday life — of developing nonsuperficial relationships with their neighbors, colleagues, and others in the city.

Here are some practical, simple ways to do this:

Engaging neighbors

- Take regular walks in your neighborhood to meet others who are out and about. Keep a regular schedule. Go to the same places at the same time for groceries, haircuts, coffee, shopping. This is one of the main ways you get to know those who live geographically near.
- Find ways to get to know others in your building or neighborhood — through a common laundry area, at resident meetings, and in numerous other ways.
- Find an avocation or hobby you can do with others in the city. For example, don't form a Christian backpacking club; join an existing one.
- Look for ways to play organized amateur sports in the city.
- Volunteer alongside other neighborhood residents at nonprofits and with other programs.
- If you have children, be involved at the school and get to know other parents.
- Participate in city events — fund-raisers, festivals, cleanups, summer shows, concerts, etc.

- Serve in your neighborhood. Visit the community board meeting. Pick up litter regularly. Get involved in neighborhood associations. Find individual neighbors (especially elderly ones) and find ways of serving them.
- Be hospitable to neighbors — when and where appropriate, invite them over for a meal or a movie, etc.

Engaging colleagues, coworkers, and friends

- Do recreational activities with them — watch sports (live or on TV at home or in a nightspot); go to a theater show, museum exhibit, art gallery exhibit, etc.
- Invite them to join a sports league with you.
- Invite them to work out with you at a gym.
- Put together a movie night.
- Go out of your way to eat with them as often as possible. Invite people over for a meal in your apartment or home or just invite them out to try a new restaurant.
- Plan trips or outings — a trip to a beach, a historical site, etc.
- If the person has a skill or interest, ask them (sincerely!) to educate you.
- Organize a discussion group on something — politics, books, etc., inviting mainly non-Christians.

Part of being engaged is to be willing to identify as a believer. Engaging relationally without doing so could be called “the blend-in approach.” Many Christians live in a social world of non-Christians but don’t think much about their friends’ spiritual needs, nor do they identify themselves as believers to their friends. Their basic drive is to be accepted, to avoid being perceived as different — but this approach fails to integrate a person’s faith with his or her relationships in the world.

The opposite can be true as well. It is certainly possible for a person to identify as a believer without engaging relationally outside the church. These are Christians who are aware of people’s lostness and may get involved in conversations about faith, but their relationships with non-Christians are largely

superficial. We could call this “the Christian bubble approach.” In this case, believers fill all of their significant relationships outside of work with other Christians and their time with Christian activities. They have not sought opportunities to learn from nonbelievers, appreciate them, affirm them, and serve them — so regardless of what these Christians believe, those outside the church do not know they care about them.

Forty years ago, most of us knew gay people, but we didn’t *know* we did because everybody was carefully quiet about it. As a result, it was possible to believe stereotypes about them. Today most young people know someone who is gay, and so it is harder to believe stereotypes or generalizations about them. I suspect most urban skeptics I talk to today do have Christian friends, but they don’t know it, because we are more afraid these days of being publicly identified as believers. In this sense, many Christians today are like gay people were forty years ago — so it is quite natural for people to believe caricatures and stereotypes of Christians because the believers they actually know are not identifying themselves. Skeptics need more than an argument in order to believe; they need to observe intelligent, admirable fellow human beings and see that a big part of what makes them this way is their faith. Having a Christian friend you admire makes the faith far more credible.

These three factors — *like*, *unlike*, and *engaged* — make up the foundation of what I call Christian relational integrity. Christians have relational integrity when they are integrated into the relational life of the city and when their faith is integrated into all parts of their lives. Why is Christian relational integrity important for evangelism and mission? Many churches think of evangelism almost strictly in terms of information transmission. But this is a mistake. Christian Smith’s book on young adult religion in the United States looks at the important minority of young adults who become much more religious during their twenties. The factors associated with such conversions are primarily significant personal relationships.¹³

Alan Kreider observes that early Christianity

grew explosively — 40 percent per decade for nearly three centuries — in a very hostile environment:

The early Christians did not engage in public preaching; it was too dangerous. There are practically no evangelists or missionaries whose names we know . . . The early Christians had no mission boards. They did not write treatises about evangelism . . . After Nero's persecution in the mid-first century, the churches in the Roman Empire closed their worship services to visitors. Deacons stood at the churches' doors, serving as bouncers, checking to see that no unbaptized person, no "lying informer," could come in . . .

And yet the church was growing. Officially it was a superstitio. Prominent people scorned it. Neighbors discriminated against the Christians in countless petty ways. Periodically the church was subjected to pogroms . . . It was hard to be a Christian . . . And still the church grew. Why?²⁴

This striking way of laying out the early church's social situation forces us to realize that the church must have grown because it was *attractive*. Kreider writes, "People were fascinated by it, drawn to it as to a magnet." He goes on to make a strong historical case that Christians' *lives* — their concern for the weak and the poor, their integrity in the face of persecution, their economic sharing, their sacrificial love even for their enemies, and the high quality of their common life together — attracted nonbelievers to the gospel. Once nonbelievers were attracted to the community by the lives of Christians, they became open to talking about the gospel truths that were the source of this kind of life.

Urban people today do not face the same kind of life-threatening dangers that they did in the Greco-Roman world — plagues, social chaos, and violence. In that environment, being in a loving community could literally mean the difference between life and death. But urban residents today still face many things that Christianity can address. They lack the hope in future progress and prosperity that past generations of secular people have had. They face a lonelier and more competitive environment than other generations have faced. The quality of our lives — marked by evident hope, love, poise, and integrity — has always been the necessary precondition

for evangelism. But this has never been more necessary than it is today.¹⁵

Why is there so little relational integrity among believers? The answer is largely — though not wholly — motivational. People who are in the blend-in mode often lack courage. They are (rightly) concerned about losing influence, being persecuted in behind-the-scenes ways, or being penalized professionally. On the other hand, those who are in the bubble mode are unwilling to make the emotional, social, or even financial and physical investment in

Once nonbelievers were attracted to the community by the lives of Christians, they became open to talking about the gospel truths that were the source of this kind of life.

the people around them. Surprisingly, the Internet contributes to much of this. Technology now makes it possible for a person to move to a city and remain in touch with their Christian friends and family in other places, while unintentionally making it easier to ignore the people who are physically living around us. This can contribute to our reluctance to invest emotionally in people.

But this lack of motivation is not the only reason we fail to see laypeople doing evangelistic outreach. Many are highly motivated but still feel handcuffed by a lack of skill and know-how. They find that the questions their non-Christian friends ask about the faith very quickly stump them or even shake their own faith. They feel they can't talk about the Christian faith with any kind of attractive force. This lack of skill and knowledge accentuates their lack of courage (they are afraid of being stumped) and even affects their compassion for others (they feel as though they won't be of any real help). This leads us to consider the second necessary factor for effective lay ministry.

PASTORAL SUPPORT

There is a way to pastor that promotes this every-member gospel ministry, just as there is a way to pastor that kills it. Whatever else they do, pastors

and other church leaders must be aware of the importance of lay ministry and intentional about preparing people for it. They must be personally involved in the lives of lay ministers. The reasons so many Christians lack relational integrity — lack of motivation, lack of compassion, or lack of ability and knowledge — are often overcome through a strong pastoral connection with the lay ministers.

This connection does not come primarily through formal, content-heavy training sessions on “how to share your faith” (though this is vital and can be very helpful; at Redeemer, we are producing such materials to fit an urban environment). Instead, it is formed through informal teaching and support and ongoing advice from pastors and ministry leaders. Pastors must constantly remember to encourage and push laypeople to use their relationships for the ministry of the Word.¹⁶

It is important for a pastor to model how to both *talk* to people about faith issues and *pray* for them. In my earlier years at Redeemer, I did this in two ways: through the sermons I preached and in the Q&A sessions I held after every morning service. I modeled how to pray for people through regular prayer meetings with leaders in which we prayed for our nonbelieving friends. This modeling instills a sense of courage, compassion, and responsibility in people and encourages them to reach out to their friends.

A pastor and his team must be models of Christian relational integrity for the rest of the congregation. David Stroud, a London church planter, shares how his wife, Philippa, became deeply involved in the local public school while he started a neighborhood watch program on their street. These endeavors got them immersed into the life of the city and brought them into many relationships with their neighbors.¹⁷

In addition to modeling, it is also important that pastors maintain a practical and simple vision for a relational ministry of the gospel. It should be clear that reaching out to friends and colleagues does not necessarily involve sharing a complete gospel presentation in a single encounter. Despite the fact that this was the stated goal of several evangelism training programs a generation ago, only a small number of laypeople (or even clergy!) can do this

well. Reaching out to a friend is much more **natural**. These organic ways of reaching out must be constantly lifted up for people.

I summarize below some ways to do this, listed in order of intensity. Pastors should equip the people in their church to do all of these, pointing out that most of these behaviors require little more than some honesty and courage. Many of these are drawn from the case studies I gave earlier in this chapter.

1. One-on-one — informal

- Let others know of your Christian faith by simply mentioning church attendance or Christian beliefs in casual conversation.
- Ask questions about other people’s beliefs and experiences with faith and church and simply listen appreciatively and sympathetically.
- Listen sympathetically to someone’s challenges and mention that you will pray regularly for them.
- Share a difficult personal issue that you have and be sure to mention that your faith helps you by giving you strength and granting you forgiveness, etc.
- Share your spiritual narrative — a brief testimony of your Christian experience.

2. One-on-one — planned/intentional

- Offer someone a book or audio recording about Christian issues and invite them to discuss their reactions.
- Initiate a discussion about a friend’s biggest problems with or objections to Christianity. Listen respectfully and give them some things to read and discuss.
- Regularly read a part of the Bible together — preferably one of the Gospels — to discuss the character of Jesus.

3. Provide an experience of Christian community

- Invite friends to situations or activities where they meet believers but where there is no direct Christian event or communication.
- Invite friends to venues where they hear the

gospel communicated and discussed — one-time event, such as an open forum; fellowship group; worship service; group meeting for inquirers, such as book club, seeker group, etc.

4. Share your faith

- Share the basics of the Christian faith with your friend, laying out how to become a Christian and inviting them to make a commitment.

It is important for pastors or elders to be readily available to field questions about issues that church members encounter in discussions with their friends. When a non-Christian asks a question such as, “Why does God allow such evil and suffering?” your people need quick turnaround with help on how to respond. A pastor can also provide free or low-cost materials that Christians can share with their friends. For example, if a Christian is sharing how Christianity helped them face a problem, they could give their friend a book or an audio or video selection that conveys the truth they found helpful. Every believer should have access to half a dozen compelling pieces of content on different subjects that they can give to someone after talking about an issue. This, of course, includes the offer to read and study the Bible together. Along the way, a pastor should try to meet regularly with lay ministers to talk about what is happening in their relationships. This has two purposes. On the one hand, it is a time to celebrate and encourage one another; on the other hand, it is a time to hold one another accountable to think about these relationships with a ministry mind-set that commits to reaching out and opening up to people.¹⁸

Perhaps most important, a pastor must work in a variety of ways to lay a theological motivational groundwork for lay evangelism using the gospel itself. This must be done in all kinds of venues — teaching, preaching, and personal pastoral support. What does this gospel groundwork look like? It means teaching people that the gospel gives you *humility*. As people come to understand the radical gospel analysis — that both “good” and “bad” people are equally lost and can only be saved by grace — it becomes impossible to be proud and condescending toward others without denying the gospel

itself. Moralistic Christians do evangelism with the attitude, “I’m right; they’re wrong — and I enjoy telling people about it.” Nothing could be less attractive or more oblivious to the spirit of the message itself. The gospel, by contrast, leads us to look at non-Christians and know that they may very well be better people than we are. I can look at my Hindu neighbor and realize he may be a much better father to his children than I have ever been. The gospel gives us the foundation of a humble appreciation of others on which winsome relationships can be built.

The pastor can also show people how the gospel gives us hope for non-Christians. It is easy to look at some people and say, “They will never become Christians.” But when we grasp the gospel, we know that there is no such thing as a typical Christian. No person is more promising material for Christianity than another. Salvation is an undeserved gift. So there is hope for anyone, no matter how far from God they may seem to be. The attitude of your heart should instead be this: “Me, a Christian? Who would have ever thought that someone like me would be a Christian and a child of God? But that is what I am! It’s a wonder and a miracle.” This attitude leads us to have expectant hope as we think of anyone else.

Finally, we must explain how the gospel gives us courage for evangelism. One of the reasons we shy away from talking about Jesus and the gospel is that we are afraid. We get our sense of value from what people think of us. We want to appear cool or sophisticated or progressive, or we want to look respectable, so we are careful to mind our own business. Sadly, when we think this way, how God regards us is not important enough to us. But the gospel keeps us from being tied to our reputation. When we know that salvation is by grace alone, we know that people come to faith only if God opens their hearts. No amount of brilliance or overpowering reason will serve to bring someone to faith. Therefore, we don’t have to worry about our lack of knowledge. It is God’s grace that opens hearts, not our eloquence.

If your lay ministers are ineffective in reaching out to others because they are turned off by certain kinds of people or because they lack the hope or courage to talk to others about Jesus, they may not need

another book or a course on evangelism. You may just need to help them get back to the foundation — the gospel — and allow the message of God’s gracious, undeserved, merciful love for sinners to work itself into their hearts in new ways. I believe the single most important way for pastors or church leaders to turn passive laypeople into courageous and gracious lay ministers is through their own evident godliness.

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A pastor should be marked by humility, love, joy, and wisdom that is visible and attracts people to trust and learn from them. As a pastor, you may not be the best preacher, but if you are filled with God’s love, joy, and wisdom, you won’t be boring! You may not be the most skillful organizer or charismatic leader, but if your holiness is evident, people will follow you. This means, at the very least, that a dynamic, disciplined, and rich prayer life is not only important in the abstract and personal sense; it may be the most practical thing you can do for your ministry.

SAFE VENUES

It is certainly possible to have an evangelistic dynamic built strictly on relational, informal outreach by laypeople. Nevertheless, laypeople are often encouraged and instructed in their ministry if a church provides a varied set of events, gatherings, and meetings in which nonbelievers are exposed more directly to both Christians and to the gospel. Such settings must avoid two common dangers: *confusing* the newcomer (assuming a particular theological or ecclesiastical background) or *offending* the newcomer (putting unnecessary stumbling blocks in front of them). I daresay that most well-intentioned “outreach” events I witnessed over the years have fallen into one or both of these errors. Use your in-

genuity to imagine a variety of meetings and places where people without faith can, through a winsome approach, be stimulated to consider the claims of the Christian gospel. Here are some examples.¹⁹

- A one-off event, such as an open forum. At Redeemer, these have typically been artistic forums (such as “Excerpts from *Porgy and Bess*,” “Coltrane Night,” or a Bach Wedding Cantata), followed by a lecture that offers a Christian perspective on the art, with a time for questions and answers.
- A gathering in a small public venue with a brief talk and Q&A on a single topic that addresses problems people have with Christian faith. At Redeemer, we call these “Christianity Uncorked” events.
- A small group that is just beginning to form. When groups are relatively new and the dynamics are still “wet cement,” they can better embrace and draw in people who are exploring Christianity.
- A worship service that — through its preaching, music, and liturgy — is comprehensible to non-Christians.
- A group of Christians that meets for four weeks; each week, each member asks one non-Christian friend a question about their religious beliefs for the purpose of listening to (not debating) other religious beliefs and objections to Christianity.
- A group mainly for non-Christians that meets regularly. *Less intense*: a book club focused on reading fiction books by C. S. Lewis, Flannery O’Connor, J. R. R. Tolkien, G. K. Chesterton, Fyodor Dostoyevsky, etc., that get at Christian themes, or even reading books by non-Christians and talking about the faith perspectives and worldviews they represent. *More intense*: Eight-week “seeker groups” that meet to study a book. Some people may respond well to frank discussions about common “defeaters” of Christianity,²⁰ while others may prefer to explore the life of Jesus through reading one of the Gospels or using a book such as *King’s Cross*.²¹

- Onetime “salons” in which Christians bring non-Christian friends to hear an informal presentation by a Christian speaker on a topic, followed by a discussion.
- Worship “after meetings.” Examples include a Q&A session after the church service with the preacher of the day, where any questions are allowed, though usually the topic of the message is covered; an apologetics class (five to seven weeks) that makes a case for the truth of Christianity; or a seven-week class covering basic Christian beliefs and Christian living, oriented to new believers but open to attendance by seekers.
- Affinity-based outreach. Campus ministries, vocational (industry-based) ministries, and men’s or women’s gatherings can have an evangelistic/apologetics aspect in their regular meetings and may hold outreach events at neutral venues, similar to the ones described above.

Evangelism should be natural, not dictated by a set of bullet points and agenda items that we enter into a conversation hoping to cover. Friends share their hearts with each other and do what’s best for each other. Evangelism will come organically in friendship if we don’t let our pride, fears, and pessimism cause us to hide our faith and heart. We must help our people naturally talk to their friends about how they see reality. The more these gospel dynamics are present in their lives, the more they will draw in new people like a magnet (Acts 2:47) and help them find faith in the most credible, natural, and fruitful way.

In general, simply bringing nonbelievers into the Christian community at any point is safe if the whole community is very warm and accepting toward those without faith, if the community is not culturally alien, if the community is shepherded by pastors who make lay ministry a priority, and if the church is doing balanced and integrative ministry. It is to this last subject that we turn our attention in part 7.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION AND REFLECTION

1. Read through the various examples of every-member gospel ministry. Which of these situations sound similar to something you have done personally? Which of them spark creative ideas for sharing your faith, as well as for leading others to do so? What could your team do to become more intentional in this type of gospel ministry? Can you add to the list other examples you have seen in your community?
2. What do you think of the idea that people may need to be “welcomed into community long enough for them to hear multiple expressions of the gospel — both formal and informal — from individuals and teachers” before coming to faith? What might keep a nonbeliever from being involved in your community? What are you doing to welcome nonbelievers into your community of faith?
3. This chapter presents the idea of believers having “Christian relational integrity.” This means they have an impact for the gospel on the people around them if they are *like* those around them, yet profoundly different and *unlike* them, all the while remaining very visible and *engaged*. What do you think it means to be *like*, *unlike*, and *engaged with* your community? How do you think your team members are doing in each of these areas? How would you rate your church in the area of relational integrity?
4. Which of the various ideas for providing safe venues do you currently practice in your ministry? How “safe” would an unbeliever rate the venues you provide? What single safe venue would you like to prototype?

CHAPTER 21 – EQUIPPING PEOPLE FOR MISSIONAL LIVING (pages 277–89)

1. Ryan Bolger, "Marks of a Missional Church," http://thebolgblog.typepad.com/thebolgblog/2006/01/marks_of_a_miss.html (accessed February 17, 2012).
2. John Stott, *Motives and Methods in Evangelism* (Leicester, UK: Inter-Varsity, 1962), 14.
3. Michael Green, *Evangelism in the Early Church*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 243, quoting Adolph Harnack.
4. *Ibid.*
5. *Ibid.*, 342–46.
6. *Ibid.*, 244.
7. *Ibid.*, 315.
8. *Ibid.*, 318–38.
9. *Ibid.*, 339.
10. Many of these examples are adapted from the ones found in Colin Marshall and Tony Payne, *The Trellis and the Vine* (Kingsford, Australia: Matthias Media, 2009), 54–56. I've added some new examples and contextualized the ones found in the book.
11. Francis Schaeffer, *2 Contents, 2 Realities* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1975), 31–32.
12. For several good ideas on engagement, see Tim Chester and Steve Timmis, *Everyday Church: Mission by Being Good Neighbours* (Nottingham, UK: Inter-Varsity, 2011), ch. 4 ("Everyday Mission").
13. See Christian Smith, *Souls in Transition: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of Emerging Adults* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 209.
14. Alan Kreider, "'They Alone Know the Right Way to Live': The Early Church and Evangelism," in *Ancient Faith for the Church's Future*, ed. Mark Husbands and Jeffrey P. Greenman (Downers Grove, Ill.: Inter-Varsity, 2008), 169–70.
15. Two other must-read books about the early Christians and their witness through lay ministry are Green, *Evangelism in the Early Church*, and Rodney Stark, *The Rise of Christianity* (New York: HarperCollins, 1990).
16. For excellent, easily remembered outlines to give to laypeople for informal pastoral care and evangelism, see Chester and Timmis, *Everyday Church*, ch. 3 ("Everyday Pastoral Care") and ch. 5 ("Everyday Evangelism").
17. See David Stroud, *Planting Churches, Changing Communities* (Milton Keynes, UK: Authentic Media, 2009), 172.
18. For practical suggestions on how to do this, see Marshall and Payne, *The Trellis and the Vine*, ch. 9 ("Multiplying Gospel Growth through Training Coworkers").
19. For a comprehensive treatment and list of evangelistic venues, see Michael Green, *Evangelism through the Local Church* (Nashville: Nelson, 1992). Though dated, it is the most complete guide to the subject of its title.
20. See Timothy Keller, *The Reason for God Study Guide and DVD: Conversations on Faith and Life* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010).
21. See Timothy Keller, *King's Cross* (New York: Dutton, 2011).