

THE Elephant in the Room

by Dave Mann




Missing links that are stopping our churches
achieving their mission.

A path to new hope

6.

Small group leadership tips *(Finding the fast-track to effectiveness)*



Note: If you are not involved in church or small group leadership you might want to skip this chapter.

The ‘church growth movement’ of the late 20th Century produced many thousands of books that claimed to be ‘the next great key’ to Church growth. For many people, Rick Warren in his book ‘Purpose Driven Church’, provided a timely summary to the movement. The summary is this: There is no ‘silver bullet’ to church growth. Put simply, healthy churches grow, as measured by a pursuit of health in our core purpose

areas. ‘Natural Church Development’ has provided a creative way to assess various health indicators, based out of similar understanding and perspective.

So it is clear in the context of this book about outreach: It is not evangelistic churches that grow. It is healthy churches. If you become evangelistically fruitful, but are unwelcoming as a church, unfriendly in your small groups, sing without passion, and have boring preaching — the people you see come to faith may well go elsewhere!

However, it is also true that healthy churches — as defined by Jesus — will have the mission of the Church as their mission in a very real and authentic way! Also, what’s the point of only growing through transfer growth? The world continues as it does for one reason (...that none should perish, but that all should come to repentance. 2 Peter 3:9)!

**Healthy small groups
will grow — not just
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groups.**

In this chapter we are again discussing church small groups. The above principle of health applies at a small group level as much as at a congregational level. While the suggestion here is that we need to restore the purpose of evangelism to our nation’s small groups, it remains that healthy small groups will grow — not just evangelistic small groups.

So, healthy small groups are needed, who also outreach. How could we get on a path toward seeing a few more of these?

I will offer just three points. Additional reading is recommended to fill in the details. (Note All Together Consulting via AllTogether.co.nz, and chapters 12 and 13 of ‘Because we Care’).

The three points are:

1. The importance of environment and culture to small group health
2. The importance of having multiplication as a group goal from the beginning
3. The usefulness of annual goals for member growth, and a united sense of purpose (a practical place to start the process).

1. THE IMPORTANCE OF ENVIRONMENT AND CULTURE TO SMALL GROUP HEALTH

If healthy groups grow, the question is how do I get a particular group to be healthy? I have watched as some groups bore great fruit, with members growing in faith and people coming to faith — while other groups were stagnant. Environment is the key factor — and it is the leader who sets the environment.

Groups that make members feel cared for will have high attendance. Also, it is as in the saying ‘Families that play together, stay together.’ As relationships deepen, trust develops, hearts become open to one another, fellowship becomes more authentic, and people grow!

In addition, groups that are going somewhere together, with a clear vision for their group, will have an even higher attendance — because it is part of our human nature that we are drawn to a worthy purpose. If everyone is able to contribute to the goal-setting process, and feels heard, they will have increased ownership in it.

While this sounds ridiculously simple, it is the groups who achieve the above who see success when they intentionally apply themselves to relaxed and relational outreach together.

The effect of broader leadership culture on small group leaders health

The environment of our small groups also rests considerably upon the broader leadership environment that we create as church leaders who may oversee a number of groups. This is because, if our leaders feel appreciated and encouraged in their roles, they will give themselves wholly to them. In contrast, if they feel trapped in their roles, they may do them as an obligation or duty, without their whole heart being engaged. This affects the DNA of the group.

To guard our values, here are three very simple values statements:

1. God before goals
2. People before projects
3. Team before task

The first statement emphasises that, while we are spiritual leaders, the 'spiritual' part has priority over the 'leadership' part. Our first dependence must be upon God. Prayer comes first. Encouraging our members' devotional lives comes first.

The second statement clarifies that people are never to be a means to an end in the Christian Church. Using people is not God's way. When people are used, they get hurt. Others then observe how leaders are treated, and this affects their willingness to become leaders when later invited. When people want to stand down from leadership roles, even if we really need them to stay in the role, it is important that we release them. A person cannot give you a true yes unless they can give you a true no. If we coerce them to stay, their heart will never be fully in it. This isn't to say we cannot challenge a person to fulfill a commitment — but it is saying that in these situations we err on the side of grace.

A releasing approach with leaders is sometimes costly to us as overseers,

because we will have the 'problem' of finding a suitable replacement leader if they stand down. However, it breeds a culture of trust. When leaders I oversee finish in their roles, my goal is to celebrate them, and praise them publicly for what they have given. This is part of creating a culture of affirmation. A person who is looking for more opportunity to serve God with their gifts will be attracted to this kind of environment.

In addition, our leaders end up staying longer in their roles. I've experienced people all-but queuing up to have a chance to join a leadership team in which they knew they would be loved, appreciated, cared for, and intentionally disciplined through their service.

The third statement reminds us that a healthy team can accomplish more in the long term. In the world, success is often measured by the task that is completed. In the Church, it is also measured by how we achieved it. People matter to God — and our relationships together matter also. Teams accomplish more than individuals — so we should want healthy teams and prioritise the developing of them! Also here, I generally see the growth of the leaders as a priority above their success in what they do — though there are exceptions and balances to be considered. We build with a long-term view, and we treat our team members the way we want to be treated.

If the above were reworded, I wonder if 'secure leadership' would describe the second two of the three points. Secure leaders accept responsibility for problems. Secure leaders invite feedback regularly (instead of avoiding it) — and are not threatened by comments that are critical of their efforts. Secure leaders are not threatened by other people's strengths, and release them readily. Secure leaders view conflict as an opportunity, because they are seeking what is true and right and best, not only to get their own way. This kind of leadership is not easy — but the environment it creates is highly conducive for growth. Team members will feel confident that they can be heard when needed. This fosters trust and loyalty! People will be attracted to serve in this kind of environment, which makes the raising up of new leaders a lot easier, and everything you do more fun!

Environment is very important for growth! Environment and culture exist either by design or default. The point is, the leadership of our small groups needs to be intentional. There are skills involved in leadership, and these skills can be learnt. We can create loving community in these groups. We can bring clear direction that engages the minds and hearts of the members — bringing their loyalty. With consistent focus we can achieve results.

While outreach is a goal of these groups, it is not the only goal.

A curriculum can be put together that teaches leaders these things.

It can work!

2. THE IMPORTANCE OF HAVING MULTIPLICATION AS A GROUP GOAL FROM THE BEGINNING

As stated, the goals of a Church small group could be viewed as a combination of encouraging healthy relationships with God, healthy relationships between members, and effective service to God in the world. While outreach is a goal of these groups, it is not the only goal.

As in the previous chapter, to word these goals differently, they are:

(1) A disciplined private life (loving God)

While small groups might express worship through song, prayers, sharing scriptures, testimonies, and the sharing of encouraging words God has put on our hearts (as compared to large groups — where sometimes only the worship leader initiates songs and prayers)... the primary objective of

More than anything, we want our members to be connected with God in their daily lives. This is a foundation.

the ‘loving God’ goal is the encouragement of our devotional lives. Group members can discuss their devotional lives, what they are learning — and what they are struggling with in life, because God is the source of our identity, security, purpose and hope. More than anything, we want our members to be connected with God in their daily lives. This is a foundation.

(2) An edifying corporate life (loving one-another)

We want our members to enjoy their small groups, and to be authentic in their relationships. We want them to feel they can be open about things. For this to happen there needs to be trust — which means there needs to be relationship. When members trust each other, and know that certain boundaries and confidentiality will be respected, they become more open. Also, because ‘the family that plays together stays together’, success in this area is greatly helped by a blend of meaningful discussions and the enjoyment of a few social activities.

(3) A God-glorifying public life (loving others)

The end goal of the small group is its multiplication — most ideally enabled because new people come to faith. No matter how long it takes, from day one this is a non-negotiable goal, and the group’s activities need to reflect this until it happens. Discussion about how to represent Christ well in the workplace and home is therefore intentionally a regular part of the group’s discussions.

To make a general point: If a group is not clear about why it exists, there will be tension resulting from the different expectations the members have of the group. Some might want a support group, while others want a Bible Study group, others a prayer group and others an opportunity for relaxed conversation and friendship with peers. If the direction is not clear, expectations will not be met. Some members may leave as a result. If no one works to establish a clear and united direction, it is likely to follow the personality of the key leader. Most often, groups

that continue to exist for many years like this have a particularly relational leader (while the others end after a season). They often continue as a ‘social club’ or sorts, and the members usually enjoy this.

To make a specific point: If the multiplication of our groups is not a specific goal, then the goal will not be achieved! More than any other goal in our small groups, this one will not happen if we do not aim for it. Also, our members will not be ready to make certain efforts if this has not been their expectation from the beginning. Multiplication thus needs to be a goal from the beginning — because you can’t change the rules of the game half way through.

Leading an existing group to include a more intentional outreaching focus will require you to change the accepted direction and purpose of your group (and for the leaders to learn new skill sets). This can produce confusion, disagreement and find resistance in the group. Patience, clarity and grace will be needed. The benefits of the new way will need to be larger in the members’ hearts and desires than the losses caused by letting go of a little of the old way.

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THE LIFE-CYCLE OF THE CHURCH SMALL GROUP

If multiplication is one of the end-goals of a church small group, our groups will have a recognisable life-cycle. What might the life-cycle of a small group look like from start to end, and how might the different stages affect how we lead?

STAGE 1: ORIENTATION

The group is new. Members are getting to know each other. Activities and opening questions in discussions can be intentionally focused to help members get to know each other.

At this stage it is important that people feel included, because they are new. It is important that a culture is established in which people can express their opinions respectfully, and be respected for it. It is important that decision-making is at least somewhat group-based, because no one enjoys being stuck under a dictatorship.

Members are working out whether they like the people in the group, and whether or not they feel they can trust them — and the group leaders. They are working out how the group's time together will be spent, and to what extent it will or will not meet their own felt needs.

STAGE 2: TRANSITION

As the group members get to know each other, various boundaries are being defined. Who decides what you get to talk about? Can people bring other topics up during discussion? When we make decisions, do the leaders really listen to the opinions of the members — or do they do their own thing? Whose group is this really?

This stage is sometimes also called the 'conflict' stage, because group members begin to discover the things about each other that they don't like. Masks are coming down, and personal faults are being discovered.

It is important that grace is given for faults, and that everyone's voice is heard. It is also time to clarify the group's purpose through discussion, with a goal of putting something that everyone agrees with on paper. This way the members can see where the group is heading, and feel ownership in the vision.

STAGE 3: COMMUNITY

The members grow to love their group. They enjoy their times together, and are learning how to truly show care for one another. They may be enjoying prayer and worship together, or engaging in meaningful learning from the Bible. This is the most dangerous stage, because the natural inclination will be to look inwards and enjoy these blessings — while Christ calls us to look outwards! This is the stage that most Church small groups get stuck at — and, once stuck, it is very difficult to bring change, because expectations quickly become set in concrete. Members grow to like their group as it is. But we are here on a mission! While their enjoyed fellowship is a beautiful thing — it is a tragic thing if it does not include an outreaching component!

STAGE 4: ACTION

This stage is the leader's necessary response to the community stage. The group needs reminding that Christ calls us to action — not only talk. We are called to give — not only receive. The group can look for ways it can serve and help others, and share Christ. However, leading the group is now a juggling act. On the one hand you need to maintain a strong sense of community so the members still feel their personal needs are being met while, on the other hand you want to move them as a team to love and serve others. It is also of note that new people will be attracted to come to groups that have a strong community life — so if we lead groups to be too active in service together, and their group life suffers, their evangelistic effectiveness as a group will also suffer.

It is a juggling act. Our community life and our outreach will always be in tension.

It is a juggling act. Our community life and our outreach will always be in tension. We are an 'organisation' whose mission is the benefit of those who do not yet belong to it!

STAGE 5: MULTIPLICATION

This is the end goal of the small group. If the group is successful in its goals members will feel encouraged, and will be actively outreaching together. Their social activities and discussions will have been attractive for new friends to join — and some will have journeyed to faith as a result of these connections. New members will have joined the group, and the group will have become too big.

How big is too big? Small group theory suggests that 8 is the optimum size for a small group if you want strong relationships. Once you have 12 people each person is trying to build a relationship of some kind with 11 others — which is a lot. If it expands to 16 people, maintaining open and connected relationships between everyone in the group is no longer realistic. However, life is rarely as ‘cut and dried’ as this. What if a third of the members are away each week? The momentum of the group will be affected, and you might let a group get as far as 18 or 20 members before multiplying. There are no hard and fast rules — only principles. We need to ‘feel’ our way through some of these things.

How do you multiply? (Note, the word ‘multiply’ sounds more positive than the word ‘split’). As the group grows, after a time of welcome, the group could hold prayer and discussion times in two smaller groups, before re-grouping for announcements (notices) and a closing prayer. New leaders could be groomed by giving them opportunity to lead these smaller discussion groups. Eventually the idea of multiplying needs discussing.

When it comes to announcing who will be in each of the two new groups, I have found that telling people which group they will be in does not work well! Instead, make a list of where you suggest members could be placed. Then immediately let them know that, if they would like to be in the other group, they can come and talk with you afterwards and nothing will be a problem. It is only natural that people will feel sad to learn that they are in one group, while some of their friends are in

the other. Usually, with this gracious approach, and provided that the leaders have carefully considered who would be in which group, there are no issues. If there are, let them change groups!

Another important dynamic to this is that the vision of why they are multiplying must be greater in their minds than their attachment to the warmth and enjoyment of their group as it currently is. A primary responsibility of any leader is to lead in vision. The leader needs to truly believe that outreaching — and therefore eventually multiplying the group, is the best and right thing for the group to do. If they only believe this because their pastor does, momentum will be lost. If members truly believe in the purpose, they will not mind paying the price.

How long should a group take to reach the multiplication stage? There are some churches that are very rigid in their views on this (e.g. every 18 months) — but it is my view that this kind of approach doesn't work for many churches. We can't expect to copy the pattern and success of a church who is successful in this area, because you can't put new wine in an old wineskin (and we are often in the 'old wineskin')! We need to get a 'feel' for our own churches, through journeying with our groups, and discussing the desired results and transitions with our group leaders and members. However, research and experience does confirm that, the longer the group stays at the community stage, the less likely it is that they will *ever* attract new non-churched members, and multiply. Keeping the vision of growth alive, and the groups evangelistically active, is key to success in growing groups.

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3. THE USEFULNESS OF ANNUAL GOALS FOR MEMBER GROWTH, AND A UNITED SENSE OF PURPOSE

I have found annual goal setting to be a most useful tool for bringing directions to church small groups. The best way to establish group goals is through discussion with their members, so the conclusions are owned by them.

Firstly, groups can facilitate reflection and discussion about their own *personal* goals. (A discussion guide for what is being discussed in this point, with handouts, is among the small group leadership resources at AllTogether.co.nz). If leaders take notes, they can help encourage members to continue to pursue their goals throughout the year. Helping members to grow is one of the group's objectives!

However, discussion can also be had about the *group's* goals for the year. You could give the three goals in the first part of this chapter as the overarching goals for the group — but then let them fill in the gaps. To help them grow as a group they may plan some social activities — and would therefore discuss what they might all enjoy doing. To grow in faith they might identify a few areas in which a number of the members felt they were weak. This could bring direction to their discretionary study and discussion content for the year. To outreach they would then list those they wanted to pray for, and reach out to. As mentioned earlier, hindrances to faith can be listed for prayer and conversation, while interests are noted as possible bridges for relationship. The group can then plan some activities based on what their groups' members' friends might enjoy. Etc.

Intentionality is thus brought to (1) the encouragement of love for God, (2) the relationships of those in the group, and (3) their outreach activities together. If everyone has inputted, and if the plan is realistic the members could be quite excited about it. This being the case, you might see a higher level of commitment to the group, and momentum growing quickly in what they do together. It is then the job of the

leaders to ensure the plan is followed in a meaningful way, involving the members in the process.

CONCLUSION: GROW SMALLER TO GROW BIGGER!

As our youth and young adult ministries grew, it ceased to be possible for those involved to know each other's names. In many smaller churches everyone knows nearly everyone, and we all enjoy coffee together after the service. However, by 100 people, the relationships are getting pretty thin, and the more you grow beyond this, the more this is the case. We grew to about 300 youth and young adults. It was at the 250 point that I gave up knowing everyone's names as the Pastor. From then on caring for members was *entirely* dependent upon the small group structures. The same principle was true of the adult congregations.

Jesus said, "By this will all men know that you are my disciples, if you love one another" (John 13:35). Without small groups of some kind, people cannot be known and loved (obeying the 'one anothers' of the New Testament). If outreach is not a component of our small groups, the love we have for one another is not able to be seen by others.

Jesus chose twelve disciples for a reason.

The early church met both in the synagogue and from house to house for a reason.

It is an emphasis that we must recover if we have lost it; both for the health of our churches, as well as the health and sustainability of our outreach.

7.

The top 12 missing links

— *When we think differently
things will change!*

In this chapter we consider and review links that are generally missing in our perspectives and outreach efforts.

#1

CLARITY REGARDING EXACTLY WHAT THE MISSION OF THE CHURCH IS

This goes hand-in-hand with a clear understanding of what the gospel is. Some think that by talking about Jesus they are preaching the

gospel. Some think that their messages about social justice and care for the poor are communications of the gospel. There is no question that these things are part of the wider application, but the gospel is a specific message about salvation through Christ (Creation — Fall — Redemption — Restoration), and the mission of the Church is to communicate that message, and then to journey relationally with those who respond to help them learn to obey Jesus' radical teachings in their daily lives (Matthew 28). Our mission is to make disciples of non-disciples, and this is different to (a sub-set of) the broader 'Kingdom' mandate. The message of love and the actions of love are inseparable — but make no mistake; our mission is the former. An appropriate loving hug is important because it can help a person feel understood — but the message of the gospel can restore their relationship with their Creator!

#2

AN UNYIELDING COMMITMENT AMONG CHURCH LEADERS TO ENSURE THAT THE MISSION OF THE CHURCH IS AUTHENTICALLY THE MISSION OF OUR LOCAL CHURCHES

Noting that most pastors are sincere in their efforts, and that evangelism is often in the 'too hard basket' at the same time, I have suggested that some other primary causes of our widespread failure to mobilise our members as witnesses (Ephesians 4) are

- (1) Deep-rooted discouragement in the hearts of our leaders
- (2) Our unconscious perpetuation of the inherited culture of our churches
- (3) A lack of brokenness in our hearts. If we saw as Jesus sees, we would be moved by compassion to action. Could there be a lack of revelation of Jesus' heart and vision, making way for a lack-lustre expression of *true* love?

Our struggles with evangelism need addressing with clarity and decisiveness. This is a simple matter. A decision is needed.

#3

A CLEARLY DEFINED CONTENT FOR EVANGELISM TRAINING THAT THE AVERAGE CHRISTIAN WOULD CONSIDER TO BE REALISTIC FOR USE IN OUR CURRENT CULTURAL ENVIRONMENT.

Expertise in most areas comes about as the result of mastery of the basics. When I taught my sons to ride bicycles, they needed to learn how to pedal, brake, balance and turn. Once they had these mastered I did not need to teach them how to do 180-degree skids, or to go over jumps. If we can correctly define the basic lessons needed to release a person into free-flowing two-way conversations about spiritual things with those around them, they will learn the rest by themselves.

Expertise in anything we do only comes after we have first mastered the basics.

With this in view, it has been suggested that the key areas for our equipping curriculum are (1) Gospel knowledge and skills, (2) Conversational perspectives and skills (missing link #4 — for which ‘apologetic knowledge’ is a subset), (3) Understanding the place of prayer and the work of the Holy Spirit, and (4) Team work perspectives and skills (missing link #7).

To test our conclusions, we must assess our proposed training content against the measure of success that it achieves. If members are still not able to ‘balance and turn’ in their evangelistic efforts, our basic training content may not yet be covering the necessary basics. Regarding the above four points, they are suggested with good reason. There are other things we could teach — but these are like teaching my sons how to do skids on their bicycles before they know how to pedal, balance, brake and turn. Expertise in anything we do only comes after

we have first mastered the basics. Fuller explanation of each of these four equipping points is given in ‘Because we Care.’

#4

AN UNDERSTANDING OF THE NEED FOR A CONVERSATIONAL APPROACH

Western culture has changed dramatically in the past few decades. In the area of religion, our society no longer believes that a real ‘truth’ exists. Trust in authority figures as a credible source of truth has plummeted. We are now primarily influenced in our determining of ‘truth’ by the people we know and trust.

Our resulting understanding of the need for a more relational approach to evangelism (as compared to 50 years ago) has led to an unhealthy pendulum swing. Firstly, some have mistakenly thought that when they are building trusting relationships they are evangelising. Secondly, many have come to believe that we need to build relationships for an extended period of time before we can share the gospel. The point of the ‘relationship evangelism’ movement was not really that extended relationship is needed before we can share faith. The point was that TRUST is needed in the relationship, because things move at the speed of trust. With good people skills a level of trust can sometimes be established in a few minutes. The result is an open door for a relaxed two-way conversation about spiritual things in which the gospel is easily shared. Many have misunderstood, with serious implications for the ‘unsaved’.

Until we get our members talking freely with people about spiritual perspectives and beliefs, very little will change!

The real learning need is therefore not general relational skills, as much as it is conversational skills! While our increasing recognition

of the increased importance of relationship in personal witness was a correct conclusion based upon observed cultural changes, the resulting equipping we gave our members was often misdirected — as is easily evidenced by looking at the lack of results it has led to. Not only are very few coming to faith. Very few of our members are sharing the faith. Yet Westerners still consider themselves to be spiritual people — even if they don't want to be preached at. While they have rejected the idea of religious truth, they are still interested. This is a conversation we can engage if our approach correctly reflects current cultural values and norms. Until we get our members talking freely with people about spiritual perspectives and beliefs, very little will change!

#5

A COMMITMENT TO PULPIT-BASED EQUIPPING

How did evangelism equipping ever get relegated to the seminar room? It is time to recognise and change this error. The pulpit is the first and primary place from which there should be talk of our mission, including the motivating and equipping of our members for it. This is not something to equip just a few in. It is the mission of the Church — so all must be equipped. Any other perspective is deficient. When the basics are being adequately covered through the pulpit, and reinforced through the small group — then we could run some seminars that specialise in different areas for those wanting to go further (like mastering street conversations and door-to-door conversations).

My own perspectives in this were shaped by my experiences. Having learnt how to share the gospel through a seminar I naturally ran evangelism seminars. When I became a pastor I did the same — but by the second year was frustrated at the disinterest of our members in attending these. What was wrong with them? Then I questioned whether that was the right question to ask. Then I clicked that, because I was the pastor, I controlled a pulpit — and our outreach equipping happened through the pulpit from that point on. Is the pulpit not correctly the first

place that talk of our mission should come from? When this principle was applied to the equipping attached to the Hope Project in New Zealand, it yielded great results. More than 50,000 church people were equipped by their pastors at least twice prior to the first media efforts as the result of providing sermon outlines supported by small group studies and concise equipping videos. The logic is simple. It has been a missing link in many places.

#6

THE IMPORTANCE OF REPETITION (SPIRAL CURRICULUM)

Many church leaders try to avoid repetition in their pulpits. However, effective learning comes about as a result of consistent, strategic repetition. It is a perspective in our churches that we would do well to change in certain areas (like outreach equipping), so we can become more effective.

#7

A HEALTHY RECOGNITION OF THE ESSENTIAL PLACE OF SMALL GROUPS IN THE LIFE AND OUTREACH OF THE LOCAL CHURCH

I have called this the ‘missing wall’, due to the scope of the implications of this weakness in the Western Church. Some churches do have an understanding of the importance of small groups, and value them highly — in which case we could only call this the ‘missing cladding’ or ‘jib-board’, because sound evangelistic strategy is most often still absent. There are more than 50 ‘one another’ instructions in the Scriptures that a Christian is unable to apply if they are not in committed relationships with other Christians for the purposes of fellowship. Small group fellowship is a very important part of a local church. Regarding our outreach efforts, I suggest that the Christian

**With this dynamic,
disciples produce
disciples!**

small group (which could be at church, but could also be a group of people meeting in the workplace to pray for their colleagues) is the home base for our evangelistic efforts. Without this focus in our small groups most people's outreach efforts will not be sustained. The Great Commission defines not only the mission of our churches, but also of our Christian small groups, of every individual, and of every Christian family. This needs real-time application in the way we live and lead. The successful reinsertion of the mission of the small group to the small group is the most fruitful thing I've seen in evangelism not only in terms of its potential for numeric growth, but also in terms of the quality of the growth. With this dynamic, disciples produce disciples!

#8

A RECOGNITION OF THE CONTINUING NEED FOR 'PROCLAMATION' MINISTRIES

By 'proclamation ministries' I refer to attempts to communicate the Christian message to people who exist beyond the limits of our relationships. An Australian study revealed that 60% of non-Church people were not aware of having a Christian friend. This means that, even if we did mobilise all our members to actively reach out to their friends and family, 60% of the population would still remain unreached. This error may have arisen from our unbalanced application of the need for a relational approach in our outreach — in response to identified cultural changes in the 1980s and 1990s. We made something that was a truth into the whole truth. For us at the Shining Lights Trust, the Hope Project is one of our efforts to address this significant missing link. The gospel went to nearly every home in our nation of New Zealand three times in a period of three years — modeling a media-based paradigm that has only recently become possible. It was an unparalleled gospel opportunity. However, there are ways other than media by which we can connect with this other 60% of the population. Our community ministries hold the potential to achieve the same, connecting us with people we do not know. However, an important question is how we might

communicate the gospel through these efforts, noting their limitations. (I note the work of loveyourneighbour.co.nz — which is a collaborative effort focused on enabling sustained and purposeful community efforts.) Street conversations, and door-to-door conversations around our communities are other ways we can connect the gospel to the many people we do not know.

#9

THE ARTICULATION OF A LEADERSHIP STRATEGY THAT WOULD BE REALISTIC FOR THE AVERAGE PASTOR (WHO DOES NOT CONSIDER HIMSELF/HERSELF AN ‘EVANGELIST’) TO APPLY, TO CREATE A SUSTAINED CULTURE OF CULTURALLY-APPROPRIATE WITNESSING ACTIVITY IN THEIR LOCAL CHURCH.

This is significant. The absence of a clear articulation in this area has led to widespread missional failure in our churches. It takes at least 5 years to work out how to lead a church — and the average pastor only lasts about 5 years. If we are to see a widespread increased effect in our outreach, it is necessary that all would-be pastors are thoroughly equipped in these perspectives *before they start*, and empowered with a strategy and resources for their application. Until such a time, the prevailing ‘non-missional’ culture of our churches will continue to self-replicate, and we will continue to bemoan the same problems. Ideally, we need denominational leaders, and Bible College Principals, to take the lead. If the issues addressed here were taken seriously at a top level, this could stem the tide of our failure very quickly by all comparisons. At the same time a growing body of churches at the grass-roots taking on these principles like those being discussed in this book will produce results that others will see and imitate.

It is necessary that all would-be pastors are thoroughly equipped in these perspectives before they start.

#10**A COMMITMENT TO CLEAR GOSPEL PREACHING FROM OUR PULPITS**

Because many church leaders cannot clearly articulate what the gospel is, they are not able to preach it clearly. Some gospel messages come across in a way that seems unclear and confused. Some fail to draw a clear 'line in the sand'; giving those present an opportunity to make a personal response to the message. Some are so 'creative' that you cannot easily discern what is actually being said. Gospel preaching is like a foundation stone in the Church. If the gospel is not clearly in the pulpit, what hope do we have? The art of gospel preaching has been neglected. Our Bible Colleges are not training our pastors in this. However, this can be changed!

If pastors would make a commitment to preach a clear gospel message, with response opportunity, at least twice a year (Christmas and Easter) then our members would have something local to invite their friends to, to hear the gospel message. This habit could become a trigger-point for a number of things.

#11**A SUPPLY OF TRUSTED EQUIPPING EVANGELISTS**

Because our churches only fund pastors, it is probable that many of our best Ephesians 4 equipping evangelists are serving as pastors, or are in business. The view that they should live by faith — often stated by pastors who are receiving salaries, is not a fair statement. The problem has likely been further exacerbated by the 'fundamentalist' bent of many who are considered to be 'evangelists'. They have a pet method of sharing the gospel — and set views on various other things

We need 'balanced' Ephesians 4 evangelists to bring leadership to our mobilising of our members to their mission.

also. They rub pastors up the wrong way, and leave us feeling a strange combination of embarrassment by their actions and guilt because of the apparent absence of our own actions. This stereo-type is a factor. However, it remains that we need ‘balanced’ Ephesians 4 evangelists to bring leadership to our mobilising of our members to their mission.

These evangelists are a missing link — and a difficult one to remedy. It is my view that this might not be remedied until a growing number of church leaders take responsibility to mobilise their members at the most basic level, as articulated in this book, ‘Because we Care’, and at All Together Consulting. As the principles are applied with consistency a broader change could begin. There might then be a demand for some Ephesians 4 evangelists who hold ‘conversational’ values and who, as experts in their specialty area of church leadership, could support churches in their endeavors. With a possible 5,000 or more ex-pastors in the membership of our churches — and as many as about 3000 pastors currently leading churches, there are a lot of people who know something about how to run a church, who could be suited to specialise in this specific area of church leadership (the holistic mobilising of members to outreach). If churches would pay these people a fair fee for their services, a scenario could be created in which this model becomes sustainable.

What are we to do with the crazy evangelisers on our streets?

While Ephesians 4 talks about equipping evangelists (discussed above), there are also others who have a particular passion for evangelism, and who have a boldness and inclination to speak to people they don’t know. However, some of these are also a thorn in the side of their pastors because of the passion, personality types, and black and white views. What are we to do with these passionate evangelisers? How could we harness their strengths?

What about the idea of restoring evangelism groups in our churches — with some clear definitions?

If 10% do have a special heart for sharing the gospel with people they don't know, they are a strength to harness! To achieve this we'd need to bridge any divide that may have come to exist between certain evangelisers and their churches or pastors, and also to guide these groups so that they go on to evangelise in a way we consider healthy.

It is for this purpose that we (the Shining Lights Trust) have put together a concise video teaching series titled 'How to reach people you don't know'. This has been done in partnership with Train to Proclaim (Australia). Stu Millar, of Train to Proclaim, is the presenter. The goal is to help evangelism groups get started in churches in a way that is (a) healthy for their church, and (b) healthy and helpful for the general public (as assessed by leaders in churches who are sometimes concerned about the manner of these evangelisers' engagements with the public).

A boundary definition that can help:

Firstly, it is the responsibility of church leaders to equip and mobilise their members to reach out to those they know as a starting place. This is what this book is about.

It can then (secondly) be the responsibility of those in evangelism teams to specialise in gospel conversations with people they don't know, with a view to making themselves available to speak with people on streets, at fairs and shows, and from house to house. (Regarding the door to door component, this could involve them visiting non-attending church members affiliated with our churches, or going door to door on streets that are geographically near to our churches to survey the community and to extend friendly invitations). By clearly distinguishing the different roles and responsibilities of church leaders as compared to those of our more enthusiastic evangelisers, necessary boundaries can be recognised and respected.

(For those of us involved in church leadership, this would be made much easier if we were equipping and mobilising our members for outreach with excellence first — as encouraged in this book. Our failure in this has contributed to the problem, because our failure to equip and mobilise evangelism is what many of these passionate evangelisers have been reacting against. It has contributed to their excesses).

Having restored the relationship of passionate evangelisers with their churches (goal one), the above video series can then help to 'modify' the way that these evangelisers evangelise, if modification is needed. As mentioned earlier in the book, contrary to common perspectives held by many in our churches, it is not true that street evangelism is an outdated method. It actually still works well. It's all about how it is done. It's about people skills suited to our times! Ensuring that our passionate evangelisers' interactions with the public are positive is the second goal of the series. After viewing the 10 tutorials, other resources like my own 'Because we care' video series could then provide simple discussion content for these groups when they meet to learn and grow in their skills. It is assumed that these groups would meet to (1) encourage one another (2) learn together and (3) outreach together (in contrast to doing number three only, from a recognition that the health of their teamwork will be directly connected to the longevity of most of the group members in their outreach efforts).

Summary

If 10% do have a special passion for sharing the gospel with people they don't know, it is in our interests to harness their passion, vision and energy. If we can get them to work in teams in our churches, with appropriate boundaries and roles understood, they can learn and grow together in their groups, and become fruitful in their outreach!

You will find various video series via the resources page at:
www.AllTogether.co.nz

#12**AN APPROACH TO DISCIPLESHIP THAT SUITS OUR FAST-PACED
MULTI-MEDIA AGE**

Many Christians have felt discouraged as a result of seeing many people responding in altar calls, but near to none in the local church a week later (let alone a year later). The follow-up of new believers is a long-recognised challenge. An approach that will work for our younger generations, who are tech-savvy and paper-averse, is a missing link. In addition, follow up has often been small-group based. This works for some, but not for others. Some who have been interested in the faith have not been ready to meet a whole lot of new people in a church lounge — however they would be more than happy to meet a Christian friend for a coffee (i.e. both group and individual approaches have their place). 10DayChallenge.co.nz was created with these kinds of dynamics in mind. It is an online discipleship tool, most suited to you and a friend having a discussion over coffee with a laptop, tablet or smartphone in front of you. A simple tutorial about the Christian faith is followed by some intriguing conversation starters, with a closing video and prayer as optional extras. To train our members to use this resource does not require a two-hour seminar with a thick training manual. No — a 3.5 minute training tutorial covers what is needed, and they are ready to go! It's a pioneering resource. It's accessible from anywhere via the weblink, intuitive to use, and conversational in approach.

Then, when the 10 days are completed, more than 50 additional teaching videos become available (first developed in 2015 and 2016). These are purposed to help new believers become well-grounded in a range of basic Christian teachings. However, they are also of use to Christian youth, and some older believers also, who want to revise and reestablish certain foundations in their faith. And it's all free.

These are twelve of the missing links that I see in our Great Commission efforts.

I pray that these perspectives will help us to bear more fruit!

'The Elephant in the Room' is a book for church leaders. It seeks to address an area of neglect that many seem disinterested in discussing: Evangelism is often in the 'too hard basket' in our churches, yet is integral to our mission. It's the elephant in the room! However, this book is only written because Dave believes there is hope. There is a way forward! Specifically, there are now solutions on the table that could remedy the current situation. They are profound — yet simple. The question is, are we ready to read, consider and apply them?

I believe pastors and churches throughout the country will one day thank God for the day this book came into their hands.

— Tony Collis | Pastor (Hope Centre, Levin)

I believe Dave Mann to be one of the clearest thinkers concerning evangelism in New Zealand today.

— Keith Harrington | Senior Pastor (Taupo Baptist Church)

"...we face a crisis of confidence in the gospel in New Zealand... Dave understands our context, and in a thoughtful and insightful way he addresses these challenges."

— Alan Vink | Executive Director, Willow Creek Association

Our behaviour comes from our thinking. To get different results might we need to think differently?



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dave is a gifted communicator and strategist, with a passion for the gospel. With more than 20 years experience behind him in outreach and pastoral ministry, he has felt led to focus on helping churches become more effective in their outreach, with a special focus on helping them mobilise their members as witnesses. In 2014, with his wife Heather, he initiated the 'Hope Project' — a national gospel project in New Zealand, which saw the gospel communicated with nearly every home in that nation and many churches encouraged. They have four young boys and reside in Tauranga, New Zealand.



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