

THE Elephant in the Room

by Dave Mann



**Missing links that are stopping our churches
achieving their mission.**

A path to new hope

Dave is a gift to New Zealand and this book is a 'now' word to Christian leaders and to the Church at large. I believe pastors and churches throughout the country will one day thank God for the day this book came into their hands. Read and reap!

— *Tony Collis | Pastor (Hope Centre, Levin) and evangelistic leader of 30 years*

I believe Dave Mann to be one of the clearest thinkers concerning evangelism in New Zealand today. He understands the times we live in, the reality of current church life, and the challenges facing pastors. His approach addresses all these issues in a way that is Biblical, articulate and achievable. Dave's books might well begin to undo the considerable damage fiery, guilt inducing, lone range "evangelists" have done in recent times. I wholeheartedly endorse "The Elephant in the Room" to everyone who cares about the church in New Zealand. Along with his other book, "Because We Care", you will not find better on the market.

— *Keith Harrington | Senior Pastor (Taupo Baptist Church) with 23 years in pastoral leadership*

Every Church Leader and Christian who has the courage to read this book will not only be challenged as to whether they have lost focus on the primary mission God has given them but they will also find herein some very significant insights on how to effectively reengage with that mission.

— *Lincoln Rout | Missions Elder Rutland St Church, Director International Teams NZ*

From where I sit, we face a crisis of confidence in the gospel in New Zealand — and most Western nations. The Christian community needs encouragement, and we need help. Dave Mann has provided a tool that can encourage and connect us to this help. As a former pastor and now a leader in evangelism in New Zealand, Dave understands our context and the challenges we all face. In a thoughtful and insightful way he addresses these challenges. The Good News IS for sharing. May this book help us and our members to do this better".

Alan Vink | Executive Director, Willow Creek Association

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By Dave Mann

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churches achieving their mission

The time for change has come

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Published by Big Book Publishing Ltd
PO Box 6078, Brookfield, Tauranga 3146

ISBN: 978-0-9941085-5-5

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS:

Thanks to my wife, Heather, with whom I take this entire journey
along with our children. I love you!

“We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up
against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought
to make it obedient to Christ.”

Paul the Apostle — 2 Corinthians 10:5.

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Introduction

Tim started a tour company for tourists called Luxury Travel International. His vision was a company offering luxury tours to luxury destinations — and he succeeded. In a short space of time he was General Manager of a global tour company, with offices in countries on all the continents.

In each country Tim's company had a manager. These managers would gather in their regions to share ideas, and motivate each other to pursue a high standard in their work. However, over time the focus of some of the managers began to shift. They saw other business opportunities connected to the tourist industry, and were interested in pursuing them.

It's not that there was any problem with their current area of business — it was highly profitable. It was more a matter of personal interest and preference. They began to look at ways to provide accommodation for tourists, setting up luxury guesthouses in close proximity to their offices. They expanded the sale of merchandise from their offices — sometimes increasing the size of their office space more than ten times as a result, and always in prime locations.

None would question that these are valid areas of trade in the tourist industry — however, for these managers it became their primary focus instead of providing luxury tours. Gradually, the portion of their operation given to tours decreased, while the portion dedicated to hospitality, and associated opportunities increased. Their staff teams also increased significantly in size due to all this activity — and especially in connection with the hospitality businesses. This was costly! While the sign across the door still said ‘Luxury Travel International’ — this activity was increasingly an historical association only. It was no longer their core business.

One day Tim, who was now an old man, discovered that companies in a number of countries were no longer even offering and selling luxury tours. He wasn’t happy! When he investigated, he discovered that the various other business activities they had become involved with had become the focus. Most concerning, these other business activities were not profitable! While some offices were sustaining themselves financially, others were closing down. So he sent some of his representatives to address the matter.

However, fixing things wasn’t as simple as might be expected. Firstly, there had now been many generations of managers in most of these offices. Many had never seen the original business model — although they had heard about it. While some offices did still arrange occasional travel tours for customers, their area of expertise had become luxury accommodation, along with its associated catering and merchandise opportunities. And they enjoyed these areas of business!

The second problem was that many and varied salespeople came to see these managers, trying to get them to sell their products, or to facilitate efforts in other parts of the tourist trade. Because there were so many of these sales people, the managers developed a habit of ignoring them. They already had more than enough to do. So, when Tim’s representatives arrived, sometimes they couldn’t even get an audience with the country manager!

How were the managers to work out who to listen to, and who to ignore? At the end of the day, their intuition defined the necessary boundaries. Their core business was luxury accommodation, along with its associated catering and merchandise opportunities. If the sales person wasn't bringing something that would strengthen these areas, they didn't have time for it! They were already highly busy — and were struggling financially too. 'Simplify' was increasingly their motto. The main thing had to be kept as the main thing! While Tim's representatives did have a point that the historic focus of their offices had been luxury tours, this was outdated and disconnected from their present realities.

What was Tim to do? Many of his company offices were running at a loss, and many no longer even offered the more profitable luxury tours, which the company had been built upon. In addition, his managers didn't seem to be able to recognise the voice of his representatives from amongst all the other voices that called for their attention. No priority was given to his requests as compared to any other request. It was both costly and hurtful!

Well — Tim was a gracious kind of man, so he decided to reach out to his managers again. After all, the mission statement of his company was clear, and the whole thing would fall apart if he didn't try to maintain at least some sort of a standard!

1.

The elephant in the room

In December 2011 our family returned from Singapore to New Zealand. We had intended to go further afield to serve God in mission, but this was interrupted. We felt a clear sense of call to come to our homeland of New Zealand to help the Church with its mission.

What is the New Zealand Church like? To what extent does it understand its mission? To what extent does it apply itself to its mission? These were the kinds of questions that were on our minds. I recalled a UK study of 1017 churches that revealed that only 36 of them had engaged in any evangelism equipping at all in the previous decade. Would the situation be so grim in New Zealand?

In my first year back, I met with a range of Church leaders who had national perspective and roles. This included a dozen denominational heads. The purpose was entirely to gain from their perspectives, because I needed to check if what was in our hearts and minds was on target. One question I asked was, ‘How strong would you say your denomination is with regard to evangelism?’ All except one gave the same reply. With no attempt to conceal it, they stated their denomination was weak — and some very weak. Some sat back in the seats, shaking their heads at the same time. They knew it was a significant problem, but did not know what to do about it.

This isn’t to say our nation’s church leaders don’t care. Quite the opposite; they care deeply. They could not see a clear way forward in this area.

A PATH OF DISCOVERY

One of our initiatives was a project that became known as the Hope Project. It was a national gospel project, seeking to initiate a conversation about faith through media, while partnering with churches throughout the nation so that members could be prepared to engage those conversations. We did this knowing that the gospel had not gone to every home for over thirty years, while there were no laws prohibiting it. We did this also knowing that any conversational equipping we could inspire to take place in churches in connection with this media project could have benefits that would far outlive it. To put it differently, a primary objective and long-range goal was the facilitating of a certain kind of ‘evangelism’ equipping throughout our nation. The other objective was to get the gospel to every home in New Zealand, because the majority of our nation had had no connection with the gospel in many years (our relational approaches, with diligence, could connect with only about 40% of the population).

The purpose of this book is not to write about that experience. However, it took three years to encourage enough partnership with the project to be able to achieve the first phase of it. Raising funds for a single church building project of the same amount with a congregation of 200 to 300 would have been easier to accomplish! We found many churches to be discouraged in their outreach — and discouragement is a sin!

1. DISCOURAGEMENT — THE LOSS OF COURAGE

Disappointment and discouragement are different. Disappointment is not a sin. Instead it is a fair response to a situation. We can feel disappointed for a reason, and can be justified in feeling sad in our emotions as a result. But discouragement is different. The Bible never gives us a list of things we can do to overcome discouragement. It simply says ‘Do not be discouraged!’ Check out Joshua chapter 1 as an example. This is because discouragement results from a lack of faith and vision. It comes about when we let our disappointments sink to our hearts and affect what we believe is possible. In the middle of the word ‘discouragement’ is the word ‘courage’. Discouragement represents a loss of courage — and courage is something God does not want us to lose, no matter what the circumstances!

I wonder if decades of disappointments in the outreach of our churches have resulted in us becoming more discouraged than we think we are. Very gradually there has been a loss of ability to see the potential in things, and enthusiasm to give things a go for the cause of outreach. Too many times we’ve run big events, and have lamented the limited attendance by non-Church people, and also how few of those who responded followed through on what appeared to us to be a sincere decision at the time. Too many of us have tried to share the gospel — only to be rebutted, or met with disinterest — and this didn’t happen just once. As a result we’ve lost the desire to try again. If someone tells us about an outreach opportunity — the spark in our hearts is

gone. Deep down, there is a widespread loss of the hope that things will get better. We don't even really have the energy to look for solutions to the challenges we face — like our continuing inability to mobilise the members of our churches as pro-active witnesses. We can see that our culture has changed. Our nation has rejected the idea of religious truth — and we feel that there is nothing we can do about it. Our best response is to stay faithful in doing what we have been doing — repeating the approaches of the past, because at least some results come from this sometimes!

I wonder if it would benefit us to recognise that we have become discouraged, so we could address it.

In conclusion of this point: Might we be more discouraged in our outreach than we think we are, due to past disappointments from our outreach efforts? It's worth a thought, because evangelism is widely recognised as being in the 'too hard basket' — and for some reason there is very little interest in discussing how we might realistically get it back out!

The mission of the Church is to make disciples of non-disciples!

2. CONFUSION REGARDING OUR MISSION

What is the mission of the Church? The mission of the Church is to make disciples of non-disciples! Whether or not this mission is truly the mission of most of our local churches in an authentic and recognisable way is a sobering question for reflection.

This mission is most clearly stated in Jesus' instructions in Matthew 28:18-20.

“All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them

to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I will be with you always, to the very end of the age." — The words of Jesus as found in Matthew 28:18-20.

We could break it down as follows:

1. 'Go' — We are called to get out of our comfort zones.
2. 'all nations' — This is the scope. The Greek word is a derivative of the word 'ethnos', from which we get the word ethnicities. We are to take the gospel to all people groups on earth.
3. 'make disciples' — This is the central instruction. As above, the Great Commission might be best summarized as an instruction 'To make disciples of non-disciples'. This summary includes the two key dynamics that are necessary: evangelism and basic discipleship, which are also the two points that Jesus' next words clarify.
4. 'baptising...' — This articulates the need to preach the gospel, and for a person to make their own response — at which point we baptise them.
5. 'teaching them to obey...' — This articulates the scope of our responsibility. Of note, we are not just called to teach the teachings of Jesus. We are called to teach them *to obey* the teachings of Jesus. There is a certain quality that Jesus looks for, which we will discuss later in this book also. It goes without saying that this is going to require a relational approach, journeying with the person while studying and discussing the teachings of the Scriptures.

Many Church leaders and members cannot clearly state what the mission of the Church is. To clarify this confusion: The above mandate from Jesus is the mission of the Church! This is not difficult to discern. It is also the mission of every Christian's life, of every Christian family, and

of every Church small group and ministry. While this next statement might sound harsh, the lack of clarity that exists surrounding this is shameful theologically, and is sad because it invariably contributes to a heightened level of failure in our mission — which affects the non-Churched far more than us! This is a very significant issue!

Where have we become confused? I believe the key area of confusion is in our understanding of the relationship between the *mission* of the Church and its broader ministry.

There are two great instructions in the Scriptures. The first great instruction is ‘to rule the earth’ found in Genesis 1:26-29. The New Testament parallel would be Jesus’ broader teaching about God’s Kingdom, which He came to re-establish on earth. Like a small seed, which becomes a large tree, this Kingdom would envelop the earth over time — through us, His Church. God’s plan for this planet has always been the same — a beautiful planet where good reigns, with humans placed in charge, and *everyone* happy (no sin, selfishness or sickness at all). It is a holistic picture including care for the poor and sick, social justice, integrity in government and care for our environment. To apply this to our current context (a ‘fallen’, sin-filled, planet), in all of our actions we are to show love for God, others (Matthew 22:37-40) and this planet!

The second great instruction is the Great Commission of Matthew 28. This is about the message of love, through which a person can be reconciled to God. This message is about Jesus, and the ‘free’ forgiveness of sin that He bought for us. It is about a restored relationship with God — *and communicating this message is the central tenet in the mission of the Church (discipling those who respond being the other)!*

William Booth gave a great analogy that helps us to understand the relationship between the actions of love, and the message of love. He said, “If you want to give a hungry man a tract, put it between two pieces

of bread." The actions of love and the message of love are inseparable. However, at all times we must remember that one of these is our mission.

What use is it if we feed a hungry person — but do not share the message of love when we could have? With eternity in view, might it be fair to say that such a pattern of behaviour might actually be *unloving*?

One expression of this confusion is found in the unbalanced commitment some have to community ministry. However, this statement needs quick explanation — because community ministries are very good things! I would suggest the imbalance is this: Community ministries have sometimes replaced outreach ministries, instead of existing to compliment them. This likely happened due to the perception a few decades ago that our churches were focusing a lot on preaching the gospel, while failing to meet the felt needs of our communities. These community efforts are also often motivated by a desire to help people discover God. As non-Church people became more sceptical of the truth claims of our churches, we realised we needed to go to them more — because they weren't coming to us. For this reason, many churches moved a large portion of their evangelism budget across to their community ministry budgets — because Christian outreach was their desire. These various efforts are good things too! I have participated in, and pioneered, various efforts like this. We care for people and want to help them. We also want to represent God well in our communities as churches — *but the danger is that we can lose sight of why we are here.* Could it be that the pendulum has swung too far in some of our churches, and the main thing has ceased to be the main thing?

**It is not a good thing
if we help people in
physical ways, while
neglecting the more
important matter of the
gospel!**

To make the point; it is not a good thing if we help people in physical ways, while neglecting the more important matter of the gospel! At its

worst, can you see how this might even be considered self-righteous, patting ourselves on our backs for good works that our communities appreciate and praise us for, while almost ignoring the mission we have been given? Could it be that in doing what is easy and acceptable within society we are seeking the applause of man, while neglecting the harder and less acceptable work of communicating the gospel — which is the command of Christ?

As important as our acts of love are, we must not forget that a person's greatest need is to be reconnected with God — and this can only happen if someone loves them enough to help them to understand what God has enabled through Christ. While the words of love and the actions of love must go together, it remains that communicating the words of love is our mission. The most loving thing we can do for a person is to help them consider who God is, and what he has done for them!

3. AN INHERITED PROBLEM

You may have seen the cup illustration before. A person needs to fit a collection of rocks, pebbles, sand and water into a cup. However, if they put the smaller things in first, everything won't fit. They need to put the biggest rocks in first — then the smaller pebbles will fit around them. Sand then fills the gaps, and water the rest.

Now, imagine we are about to plant a church. We're going to need a venue and a Sunday service with a worship team — so we put a couple of stones into the jar. We'll need small groups — so these are the pebbles. The women's ministry is a pink pebble. The men's ministry is a blue pebble. Then there are the members — illustrated by the sand we put in the jar. And finally we pour in the water, representing prayer and the Holy Spirit.

...but, wait a minute. That's right — we've forgotten something. Evangelism! So we turn to pick up the 'evangelism' rock, only to find it is the biggest of all the rocks by far, and that there is no way it will fit. The

sidelining of the Church's mission is a significant and systemic problem; often inherited from previous generations — and it will continue this way until we recognise it, and then consider how we could break this cycle!

This might be the most significant and wide-reaching problem the Western Church faces (the 'demotion' of its mission)!

In our desire to correct this we begin to try different ways of getting that rock into the jar. Of course, it means we're going to need to break the rock into smaller pieces, so we get out the hammer. We chip off a corner and call it 'Alpha'. We chip off another corner and call it 'The evangelism seminar.' You get the picture.

What happens is this; those running Alpha see people come to faith, but only 10% of the congregation is behind it. Pretty soon they are standing in a corner feeling frustrated at the rest of the congregation who don't support them. They are convinced their ministry is among the most important of the church — and they may be correct! However, evangelism isn't actually the mission of their church — this is the problem. It's been reduced to the status of a 'ministry' in the church, being run as a program of the church. Many churches are constantly stuck at this impasse.

Could it be that we are so involved in the current model that we have not stepped back to recognise that we are in a model, or that our model has deficiencies — and that we might therefore be in need of a different (new) model as a result?

In my first book on how we might better fulfill the mission of the Church in our culture, titled 'Because We Care', I articulated the cultural challenge we face in the West with regard to the sharing of the gospel — along with a nexus of solutions. Together these provided a single holistic (new) paradigm for evangelism mobilisation, based in timeless

principles, applied to our current cultural context. However, my experience since writing it has left me with a suspicion that the message of this book is rarely being understood. I now wonder if many cannot ‘see’ the solution that is proposed because they are unaware of the nature of the problem we are facing in our outreach. Could it be that we are so involved in the current model (our current way of doing things) that we have not stepped back to recognise that we are in a model, or that our model has deficiencies — and that we might therefore be in need of a different (new) model as a result?

To summarise where we are up to so far: Society has changed, and evangelism has fallen into the ‘too hard basket’. A culture of non-evangelism has developed in many churches as a result. Not only has main thing has ceased to be the main thing — we seem to be far too content to leave it like this. The disinterest that exists is in part supported by (1) a wall of discouragement coming from our many past disappointments in outreach. This wall hinders the courage and energy of many to seek and embrace new approaches. The disinterest is also sustained by (2) confusion regarding what our mission actually is, and (3) by attitudes and approaches to outreach that we inherited from those who led before us, and still practice. These inherited outreach approaches may be deficient in terms of their adaptation to our present cultural environment (and possibly also in their foundational values), leaving us considerably ineffective in outreach, and with good reason to feel unmotivated to do more of what we have already done.

However, there is a fourth possible reason for the disinterest and lack of ‘oomph’ that we have to stand and battle for effectiveness in our outreach. This one will sound a little hard-hitting at first, but please read on, because the idea is simple.

4. A LACK OF REVELATION AND LOVE

For what other reason might there be disinterest in talking about this problem? Despite all the previous mentioned hurdles, if we saw

as Christ sees, and loved as he loves, would we not be moved? We are talking about the very mission of our churches here. If our beliefs are true, the salvation of many thousands is quite literally what is at stake! It is in the light of this that the disinterest is most startling.

If we are in church leadership and there is a significant problem like this, does not the very nature of our responsibilities suggest that we should be not only interested, but extremely eager to diligently consider every possible option imaginable?

There is an elephant in the room; a massive issue that we are not addressing. The mission of the Church must be the mission of our local churches in an authentic way — and yet it is widely recognised that this isn't the case. Evangelism has often fallen into the 'too hard basket' — and we seem to have lost our 'fight' to get it back out. Why are we talking about so many other things? Why are we not lamenting over this? How do we continue to sing all our happy songs when so many of the people Jesus died for remain unreached *in our own nation*?

Where is our brokenness over this massive problem, with far-reaching implications? Where is the laying down of our lives to reach others for Christ? What is going on really?

Mobilising our members to effective witness within our culture is absolutely necessary to our mission. Failure in this area is not acceptable. Our outreach efforts (and mobilisation of members to outreach) require our best efforts and keenest intellect — and our first-focus if we are senior leaders.

Until we accept that there is a significant problem here, and that we are responsible to address it as current leaders in our nation's churches, very little will change!

Could it be that the biggest hurdle in addressing this problem is in our hearts? Until we accept that there is a significant problem here, and that we are responsible to address it as current leaders in our nation's churches, very little will change!

IN SUMMARY

There is an 'elephant in the room.' Can you see it? Will you recognise the gravity of this situation? Are you willing to take responsibility for it as a servant of God? Are you willing to give energy and diligence to discussing it, seeking solutions?

If your answer is yes, the journey in this book can now begin!

THE WAY FORWARD IS TO PUT THE BIGGEST ROCK BACK IN THE JAR!

But how? We will need to tip everything out of the jar to put that rock back in.

What might this mean in practical terms? Well, it doesn't mean we close the doors of our churches! *It's about values, and how they are applied in everything we do.* And this is what the rest of this book is about.

We need to reflect, re-envision and re-strategise how we could begin to stem the tide of apathy toward evangelism; identifying the core values and principles involved. We then need to put a realistic action plan in place that can bring change, and make ourselves accountable to follow it!

Change in this area is not as difficult as many think it is. It is principally about a new way of thinking — because actions follow beliefs. Ideas are about to be placed on the table. However, these ideas will not be valued until we realise just how necessary change in this area is.

Are you convinced that change is necessary? To what lengths are you willing to go to find greater effectiveness in your outreach?

The heart of this matter is a matter of the heart. (What is going on in your heart with regard to this matter?)

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

- Which of the above four hindrances might be affecting you?
- What is your response to this?

Now that the ‘elephant in the room’ has been identified, let’s start unpacking the kinds of changes that might be needed to bring about sustainable health and fruit in our missional efforts — because there is hope!

Where is the rest of this book heading?

The rest of this book seeks to explain various perspectives, laying foundations for what is at the conclusion of this book: The presenting of a strategy based in six principles that, if applied, could bring real and sustained change in the outreach of our churches.

The suggested applications are also deliberately achievable for the average pastor — who does not usually consider him or herself an evangelist. Applications are therefore deliberately focused on better utilising the opportunities we already have — and deliberately introduce no new programs at all!

However, if we were to embrace this new way of doing things without first understanding the values that stand behind it, it would probably fail to bring sustainable change. Beliefs lead to behaviour — so let’s start by looking at some foundational perspectives.

2.

The four pistons of evangelism mobilisation

There are some exciting insights in store for you in this chapter.

Before returning to New Zealand I set my mind to understand the cultural environment of our nation again. One book I had on my shelf was *Vision NZ, Volume I* (1993) for which Bruce Patrick was the editor.¹ The book articulated the challenge that postmodern thinking was bringing

¹ The 'Vision NZ' series is a series of books in which various Church leaders are invited to contribute their thoughts about how we could best accomplish the mission God has given us in this nation. This was the first of five books now published in this series.

to evangelism within our culture. I finished it feeling sad, because it seemed to me that nearly twenty years later the health and effectiveness of our outreach efforts hadn't really changed. The content of that book was brilliant — but I was not convinced that the implications of it for our churches were yet understood.

Upon further reflection I concluded that the problem was that there were some important links missing in our applications of this knowledge — and I pray that you will feel as excited as I do as we begin to unpack these. This book will address a dozen missing links. Imagine you are being given a ring of keys that can unlock doors in a range of places in your church, enabling positive change that was not possible before this. I believe this is exactly what is happening here — because what we do is the product of the way we think!

Let's start by discussing an outreach strategy that the Bible gives us, after which we will discuss the four pistons of evangelism mobilisation. These will lay foundations for what comes next.

A BIBLICAL STRATEGY FOR OUTREACH THAT MAY BE MORE IMPORTANT THAN WE YET REALISE

To achieve our mission, the best way is to mobilise the members. One hundred mobilised members can achieve far more in a week than one exceptionally gifted pastor!

In Ephesians 4:11-13 five leadership 'offices' in the Church are described.

“It was he [Christ] who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.”

While much could be said on this Scripture, the key point I want to highlight through it is that it is the responsibility of church leaders to prepare the members to (1) pioneer changes in the world around them (apostle), (2) to bring God's living Word to the lives of those they meet (prophet), (3) to share the message of Christ (evangelist), and then to (4) care for those in need of encouragement (pastor) and (5) help those around them who are interested to understand the Scriptures (teacher). This is a key to fruitfulness.

Do 10% of our church members have the gift of evangelism?

It is often suggested that about 10% of an average congregation might have the gift of evangelism. It was pointed out to me recently that this supposed gift of 'evangelism' isn't found in the various lists of 'members' gifts' in the Bible, like in 1 Corinthians 12 or Romans 12. It is found in only one such list: Ephesians 4. This passage describes a particular leadership gift, recognisable by its fruit. What fruit? There would be recognisable success in mobilising the members of churches to evangelistic action. A case is not hard to make, or defend, that says that there is no 'regular' gift of 'evangelism' such that we could list it next to various other gifts mentioned in the Bible. The point is that our terminology (coming from various spiritual gifts courses) may have been incorrect — but why is this important?

Every Christian is called to be a relational evangelist in the same way that every Christian is called to love and serve. Evangelism is supposed to be part of the 'bread and butter' of Christian life — not a gift that only some have! To distinguish a member as 'an evangelist' is to wrongly categorise something we correctly observe. It might be true that 10% of those in our churches have people-skills and personality types that enable them to talk confidently about spiritual things with people they do not know. But this

doesn't mean they are called to be evangelists in any way that would, by comparison, suggest that the rest of us are not! This is the danger of our current terminology. While we might have different relational styles, and different levels of revelation of God's heart, and also be at different levels in our people skills... the Bible simply says that we are all supposed to evangelise! The Great Commission of Matthew 28 makes this clear, as does Jesus' calling to His disciples — which carries a very similar calling and promise as Matthew 28:18-20: "Come follow me, and I will make you fishers of men" (Matthew 4:19).

The only way our churches will become effective in outreach as God intended, is if our focus at a leadership level is the equipping and empowering of the individual Christian to be a witness for Jesus in daily life.²

The point here regarding evangelism is worthy of reiteration, again and again, because it is not difficult to understand, and yet it is something that most of our churches are not doing well, if at all. Ephesians 4 has a lesson for us that we talk about too often and apply too little.

I'll say it again: We can motivate our people to tell others of Christ 'til the cows come home' — but many will still remain unmoved until we show them how! Good coaches don't just motivate. They develop skills! We must prepare the saints for the work of ministry that God has for them to do in the course of everyday life. The pulpit is for practical equipping (enabling application), not just Biblical teaching.

² In addition, the only way our churches will be more holistically healthy is if we seek to release all 5 of the 'gifts' mentioned in Ephesians 5.

THE FOUR PISTONS OF EVANGELISM MOBILISATION

Having accepted that we must mobilise our members as witnesses, how are we to do this? A very helpful perspective is that of the Four Pistons of Evangelism Mobilisation.

The four pistons are

1. The individual
2. The church small group
3. The congregation
4. Combined efforts — whether local, regional or national.

If only three pistons of a car work, the car will splutter down the road. If only two pistons work, the engine most-probably wouldn't even work. If only one piston worked — it would be time for a new engine.

In most churches, only one or two of the above 'pistons' are working.

PISTON 1. THE INDIVIDUAL

The need for equipping for personal evangelism has long been understood in many churches, however it is not often done. The above passage of Scripture (Ephesians 4) is relevant here.

The effectiveness of much of our evangelism equipping has also been significantly thwarted by our relegating of it to the seminar room, instead of prioritising it in our pulpits. This is worthy of reflection. Seminars are for addressing things that do not apply to all. Marriage seminars are held as seminars because not everyone is married. Financial management

The effectiveness of much of our evangelism equipping has also been significantly thwarted by our relegating of it to the seminar room, instead of prioritising it in our pulpits.

seminars are held as seminars because they deal with issues that are not relevant to all, and in detail that is not relevant to all. However, all the content held in most evangelism seminars is relevant to all. I'd also suggest that most evangelism seminars do not even cover the basics that every Christian needs to know to become an effective witness. The time they have is too short. A pulpit-based approach can achieve a breadth of teaching and application that seminars never can. Discussion of the mission of the Church is a matter for the pulpit, not the seminar!

(In case of confusion I note that, if you have a guest speaker coming for a weekend to preach, and he or she is happy to offer additional seminars, there is of course nothing wrong with this. The point is that there is no point in having seminars to specialise in something if the basics have not yet been taught to the congregation. What are the basics? We will discuss this in the next chapter.)

PISTON 2. THE CHURCH SMALL GROUP

Small groups are the home-base of evangelism. This is because most people cannot sustain a focus on evangelistic action by themselves (Piston #1 — the individual). The congregation isn't home base either because, when we preach everyone can nod — but that doesn't mean they are listening or agreeing. It is only in the small group context that there is personal accountability, and personal encouragement. My experience tells me that no strategy to mobilise members to outreach will be sustainable if a relational, small group dynamic is not integral to it. We will be stuck with program-based models, and they are tiring! The moment we stop running programs, and motivating efforts from the front, we stop getting results. By comparison, when our small groups are healthy and have an intentional focus on outreach as a part of their activity, our teaching and encouragement is made 'stickier'. It has a greater chance of affecting the 'DNA' of our churches. Our efforts continue to produce fruit for a lot longer period of time — as if all by themselves.

PISTON 3. THE CONGREGATION

Every church ideally needs special events at which the gospel is clearly articulated, and where those present are given an opportunity to respond to Christ Jesus. Many members struggle to articulate the gospel themselves — but they still want their family and friends to hear the gospel! They need reliable church programs they can invite their friends along to, to hear the gospel. If pastors committed, for example, to preach a clear gospel message (with response opportunity) every Christmas and Easter, in time members would invite an increasing number of friends. They would see it as their opportunity — and it would yield fruit!

Many churches have other outreach programs like Alpha or Christianity Explored, at which the gospel is shared. Courses and programs at which the gospel is not shared serve as helpful ‘connection points’, connecting non-Church people with church people in a non-threatening environment. All these things have their place.

If we don’t know how to run programs and services that are comfortable for non-Church people, and which communicate the gospel clearly, I suggest that we learn from those who do it very well: the bigger churches for whom this piston is a natural and necessary strength.

In many larger churches, gospel preaching to their ‘large crowds’ is their primary outreach strategy, and they see consistent fruit from this. This is because they have ‘gravity’ due to their size. Due to their higher-quality services (in terms of technology, planning, processes, and often articulation) and their good reputations they attract a higher proportion of visitors than many of our smaller churches can. If a person is spiritually hungry, they will often visit one of the most well known churches in their city or town. This is to say, these churches enjoy a privilege that may not be the same for all of us, and are rightly recognised as experts in this piston because they have a lot of opportunity to practice it.

However, so it is noted, their strength can also become their weakness if they focus on ‘congregational’ outreach to the neglect of mobilising individual efforts (Piston 1), small group teamwork (Piston 2), and combined efforts (Piston 4). Despite their evangelistic fruit, if they are functioning on one piston, their effectiveness will be less than it could be. This is worth considering before imitating all their practices. We imitate strengths (1 Corinthians 11:1).

(It is to be noted that many of our larger churches in New Zealand are very gospel focused. They use their strengths to complement and help the wider work of the Church in this nation, and are very generous toward other churches in their sharing of vision, ideas and resources. This is to be applauded!)

Our members need gospel events and services they can invite people to (Piston 3). Gospel preaching at specific services and special events is an important part of the picture.

60% or more of the un-Churched will likely remain unreached by the gospel if we confine our outreach to the limits of our personal relationships.

PISTON 4. COMBINED EFFORTS — WHETHER LOCAL, REGIONAL OR NATIONAL

An Australian survey revealed that 6 out of 10 Australians did not have a Church-going friend³. If the same were the case here, this means that all of the above efforts through pistons # 1, 2 and 3 might connect the gospel with about 40% of our population at best! 60% or more of the un-Churched will likely remain unreached by the gospel if we confine our outreach to the limits of our personal relationships. (Note also that 40% is probably a very generous number, because most church members are not actively seeking to be witnesses to friends, family,

³ A 2002 Australian study by CLS titled “Why People Don’t Go to Church” revealed that 80% of Church-goers said they had friends who did not go to Church, and 60% of non-believers said they had no Church-going friends. As quoted in a booklet published by ‘Love your Neighbour’ and CViC NZ (Church Volunteers in Communities).

colleagues/classmates they have regular contact with). Are you hearing these figures? They are significant.

For the past 30 years our churches have sung the anthem, 'Our outreach must be relational.' It needs pointing out that this is both correct and incorrect.

It is correct in that we need to be more relational in Christian witness than in the past due to changes in our culture over the past 30 or more years. We now look to people we know as a source of truth more than authority figures.⁴ Also, in our media-saturated environment — in which it is suggested we see between 1000 and 3000 advertisements per day, we have learned how to ignore most messages we see and hear. We generally only notice things that relate to our personal desires, or that are connected to people we know and trust. This is why sports heroes were powerful tools in advertising — but even this is now beginning to change. 'Authenticity' continues to become an increasingly high value in our culture as compared to even just 10 and 20 years ago. Consider the way that some very 'average' looking, not-famous people are being used to front television ads for various products. Their authenticity is sometimes trusted more than that of a famous person because we are increasingly conscious that these famous faces are being paid highly to say what they say. Our culture has changed — and is still changing. As a result it has become a lot harder to say something 'from a distance' in a way that convinces a wide audience, while it is just as possible as ever to share something we believe with a trusted friend.

However, it remains that we need outreach efforts that take the gospel further afield to this other 60% — and that communication to wide audiences can still be done winsomely. Look at all the companies that still pay for television advertisements and magazine ads. It is not

4 In becoming 'postmodern' our society rejected belief in religious truth, and became generally sceptical of all who claim to have the truth — preferring to trust the views of friends rather than supposed 'experts' because we have seen the 'experts' let us down (politicians, medical scientists employed by the pharmaceutical industry, tele-evangelists who were actually corrupt, and experts in every field who were simply out to make a fast buck). "They all seem to be in it for themselves at one level or another." The result? "I don't want to be a critical person. They say something is true. It might be their truth — but it's not mine."

without reason that they do this, or that bundles of circulars still turn up in our letterboxes. While broad communication is harder than it used to be, it still works!

This has been an area of dreadful oversight in our churches during this difficult transition from the modern era to the postmodern era. It has been as if Romans 1:16 was re-written to say 'Relationships are the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes...' instead of its actual affirmation that it is "...the gospel..." that is "...the power of God for everyone who believes..."

It is time to recognise and address this oversight, because 6 out of 10 people is a huge proportion of our towns and cities to be missing out on hearing the gospel.

Evangelism through our existing relationships is not sufficient for the task! We must take the gospel to people we do not know.

Our big combined events will not reach all those other people either — because people typically come to an event because of an invitation from a friend. These events are therefore still reaching that same 4 out of 10.

Because there are so many entertainment options these days, very few people will come to a Christian event because of general advertising. Personal invitation is a key to the effectiveness of our events — which still leaves 6 out of 10 unreached!

It has been as if Romans 1:16 was re-written to say 'Relationships are the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes...'

Where invitation does not work

To share a strategic observation: invitational evangelism has limited effect, while a conversational approach to evangelism that includes invitation has a great effect. Feedback I heard from pastors on recent large-scale gospel event efforts in NZ consistently reflected this pattern. Where members were not already equipped and mobilised to discuss spiritual things with friends, but then did invite them to a gospel event due to their pastors excellent motivations, when the new friend responded they often didn't follow through with their decision. A key factor is because it was similarly awkward for the Christian to discuss spiritual things with their friend after the event as before. However, where the Christian was already enabled and mobilised to freely discuss spiritual things with their friends beforehand, and then invited their friend to the gospel event, when they responded it was only natural for them to continue to talk about spiritual things afterwards.

Conversations are part of the essence of discipleship, and these responders went on to integrate into their churches much more successfully.

So, do big events still work for outreach to the friends of our church members in Western culture? Yes — but only if we are first mobilising our members to conversational outreach. Too often we have expected our big events to be a miracle cure to our evangelistic woes. Its not the 1950s. Things have changed! Ongoing conversational efforts are now foundational to the effectiveness (sustained 'results') of these kinds of large-scale gospel events. If the conversational mobilisation isn't happening, save the money you'd have spent on your local gospel event and focus on getting it happening!

We now need to 'Go to them' — like the Great Commission says, because they are not going to 'come to us'.

WHAT IS NEEDED?

We need efforts that connect with people beyond the limits of our current relationships. Many of these will only succeed if we are willing to work together — and we will only do this if we first understand why the fourth piston is so important.

I have become finely attuned to the challenges involved in getting this fourth piston working through my involvement with the Hope Project. I have heard some say they are not responsible for the sharing of the gospel with all the people of their community. They saw their community ministries as their outreach efforts, and felt that was all that they needed to do because ‘outreach has to be relational.’ Yet those efforts connected with but a small portion of those in their parts of their cities — and the gospel was often not a large part of the ‘community ministry’ efforts either! What about all those who are not hearing about Christ in our nation? Do we not have a responsibility to reach them too?

Charles Spurgeon said regarding a local pastor’s responsibilities in outreach, “One of the earliest things a minister should do when he leaves college and settles in a country town or village is to begin open-air speaking. No sort of defence is needed for preaching out of doors; but it would need very potent arguments to prove that a man had done his duty who has never preached beyond the walls of his meeting place.”

Most of us do not see street preaching as a necessary part of our work today — probably in view of its comparatively limited effectiveness today as compared to back then⁵. However, it is worth reflecting on what our responsibilities might be with regard to broader gospel communication in our town or city. To contextualise what Spurgeon was saying to our context, I suggest he was saying that it remains our responsibility as Christians to take the gospel to all of those in our own area who will not ‘darken the doors’ of our churches or come along to other Christian

⁵ Regarding ‘street evangelism’, success in engaging meaningful and respectful conversations is actually about people skills. There are perspectives for fresh consideration here because — contrary to the stereo-type that exists in many NZ churches, street ‘conversations’ can actually be received well by people, and serve to help them take positive steps toward faith in Jesus. It’s all about the approach!

events. Communicating the gospel to the entire population in our geographic area is our responsibility — and it would need a very potent argument to prove that a church leader had done their duty who had not given every effort to taking the gospel to their entire community.

I am convinced it is time for a ‘broadening’ of our perspectives. Piston #1 is very important — but piston #4 is also needed, as also are pistons # 2 and 3. Let’s understand the four pistons!

To reiterate the importance of each piston by stating its inverse:

INDIVIDUAL: If we fail to equip and mobilise individuals, our effectiveness will be very limited indeed. Consider what Ephesians 4 is trying to tell us. The efforts of one active pastor are no match for those of one hundred active members — so make mobilising them an intentional focus!

SMALL GROUP: If we fail to connect our mobilisation efforts to our small groups, creating a culture of teamwork in evangelism within them, our mobilising efforts will not be as effective or sustained.

CONGREGATION: If we do not run congregational programs and weekend services that are dedicated to the communication of the gospel, many who struggle to articulate the gospel will have no platform for sharing it with those they love.

COMBINED: If we do not recognise the need for combined local, regional and national efforts that seek to take the gospel beyond the limits of our relationships, and support them, most people in our nation will remain unreached.

It would need a very potent argument to prove that a church leader had done their duty who had not given every effort to taking the gospel to their entire community.

To truly mobilise our churches we need all four pistons!

Having defined the necessary scope of our outreach efforts, how could we have these pistons all in motion?

We will look at this next.

3.

The missing links of 1993

I believe there have been numerous ‘missing links’ in the evangelistic mobilisation efforts of our churches. Piston #4 in the previous chapter would be an example. In this chapter we will look at two of the most significant missing links.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, ‘Vision New Zealand, Volume I’ (published in 1993) provided our nation’s churches with an outstanding articulation of current (and continuing) cultural challenges with regard to evangelism. However, while the problems were well defined, I believe that some missing links have remained in our nation’s corporate Church knowledge. I believe these have kept us from a holistic application of

our mission in our new cultural context. We seem to have understood that a more relational approach to outreach is more winsome in our culture, and that through community ministry we can potentially build bridges to our communities. However, it sometimes seems like this is all that we learnt!

Some lessons take time to be discovered and articulated. Over the past 20 years I have identified two significant links missing in our efforts, resulting in a disconnect between our understanding of our culture and our ability to connect the gospel meaningfully with people in it. These are summarised in this chapter. They are exciting things to discover — because they are like keys that can unlock doors we have been otherwise ‘stuck’ behind!

1. A strategic missing link for members: An updated and clearly defined *content* for evangelism training for our current cultural environment.

In particular we are talking here about a content that the average church member would vote ‘yes’ to with their feet and mouth, after hearing it.

Most church people are scared of evangelism training seminars. The stereo-type of those who run the seminars has been that they place guilt trips on us for all that we are not doing, while expecting us to change personality to become something we are not. The end goal is believed to be that we then go out on the street and ‘confront’ people with the gospel. While not all evangelism equippers are like this, there is a sad truth to it — which is why we avoid those seminars like we do!

We have been left with a prejudice against this thing called ‘evangelism’.

Of note, if you run an evangelism seminar in an average NZ church, it’s not only the members who are scared of going along, it’s the pastors!

A significant ‘disconnect’ exists between our mission and what it looks like when practically applied.

Soon after we arrived back in New Zealand I heard of an evangelism seminar run in a rural New Zealand town. A reputable evangelism-equipper had been invited, and promotions were distributed to at least ten, if not thirty churches in the region. How many attended? Five people! If even just the pastors of the local town had gone along the attendance would have doubled. What was going on? Had the New Zealand Church lost its heart for the gospel?

I knew this church well, and had the privilege of having lunch with a number of their members a month or so later. They are my friends. I asked various ones if they had gone along, and asked why not if they hadn’t. Their responses helped me to articulate something I’d not put in words before. They loved all those they knew who are without Christ, and were totally convinced of the need for evangelism. However, they’d been to a seminar like this 20 years ago — and it ‘hadn’t worked’! They had shared the gospel with their friends and family members, and they had responded, “Good for you, I’m glad you’ve found what works for you.” And the conversation had ended there.

It wasn’t that these Christians lacked love for the ‘lost’. Instead, their lack of immediate enthusiasm to attend the evangelism training was their cultural intuition telling them that learning — yet again — how to share the gospel wasn’t going to fix the problem they faced. We could probably still get them to attend the traditional evangelism seminar if we motivated them well with the many good reasons there are to still attend — but

The primary challenge the average Western Christian faces isn’t in knowing how to articulate the gospel. It’s how to get an open (non-threatening and non-awkward), two-way conversation started with a person about spiritual things!

what about the fact that their intuition might have something to teach us too?

While it is true that the gospel is the power of God for the salvation of all who will believe (Romans 1:16) it can also be true that the 'god of this age blinds the minds of unbelievers so they cannot see the light of the gospel' (2 Corinthians 4:4). Sometimes cultural viewpoints blind people from understanding things immediately — so their journey takes longer.

The primary challenge the average Western Christian faces isn't in knowing how to articulate the gospel. It's how to get an open (non-threatening and non-awkward), two-way conversation started with a person about spiritual things!

Additionally, for most people, their greatest concern isn't how to share the gospel with someone they don't know on a street. It's how to share the gospel with those they see every week. It's how to win friends, family and colleagues over to faith in Christ Jesus!

The lessons are simple: We need to meet Western Christians at their point of need. Beneficially, if we do, they will be interested to learn more, because they will begin to see possibilities instead of impossibilities.

It is ironic that most New Zealanders consider themselves to be spiritual people, while we in the churches sometimes feel people are disinterested in spiritual things. There is a cultural disconnect between our churches and our society. It can be overcome if we are willing to learn how!

Conversational skills are a first key area to add to our curriculum. Once learnt, our members will find that their friends really do have spiritual thoughts and questions. Not long after, they will find themselves presented with easy opportunities to share about their own faith. If they get stuck for words they will be ready to learn how to share the gospel! As their friends begin to explain the very good reasons why they don't

consider Christian faith (for example, with all the evil and suffering we see it really is more logical to believe that God is morally indifferent — or alternatively limited in his power or foresight) the Christian will be more interested to understand why they believe what they believe.

THE CONCLUDING SCOPE OF OUR EQUIPPING CURRICULUM

My experiences in discipling others have led me to conclude upon four key areas in which we will need to equip our church members if we are to see them become sustainably mobilised as witnesses to those they know and meet. These are knowledge, perspectives and skills related to

- (1) The gospel
- (2) Conversational skills
- (3) Prayer and the work of the Holy Spirit
- (4) Teamwork.

There are certainly other areas that could be added. However, in my view, these four areas are the foundational ones. Conversational skills are the first area to teach — because the experiences of many Christians have already proven to them that a direct approach doesn't work.

A notable value behind this new and clearly defined equipping curriculum is a redefining of our goal in personal witness. Rather than aiming only to share the gospel with people, our principle goal is to help people every day and in every way to take steps toward Jesus (these words are borrowed from Dr David Geisler). This approach takes into account that most of us are talking with people we see every day or week. While it is great if we can share the gospel with them, we can

Rather than aiming only to share the gospel with people, our principle goal is to help people every day and in every way to take steps toward Jesus.

only do that once. What our friends need is half a dozen or more free and open conversations. It is in conversations like these that we will be able to identify and discuss the very real thoughts and feelings that are behind their rejection of our beliefs (which to them may seem exclusive and arrogant, believing that there is only one path to God — and that this God is a good and knowable even though the world around us includes evil and suffering that a good and powerful God logically could and would stop).

When members hear this stuff articulated, and are shown the kinds of conversational perspectives and skills that can help them open ‘normal’ conversations about spiritual things with Westerners, they begin to see their mission as ‘mission possible’ again. They begin to vote with their feet in a positive way. They begin to see how they could connect their belief with their culture. One by one, they try conversational ideas out. The number of stories coming back to you about these conversations begins to increase. In time, as more and more people are encouraged to take steps toward Jesus, more people choose to follow Jesus.

The clear defining of a content for evangelism training that can produce results in our current culture is a significant and powerful missing link!

FURTHER RESOURCES TO HELP YOU PUT IT INTO PRACTISE:

- **‘Because we care’** by Dave Mann (BigBookPublishing.co.nz) articulates the possible scope of our equipping content and the reasons for this.
- The **‘Because we care’** concise video teaching series (free online via the ‘resources’ page at AllTogether.co.nz) simplifies this for members. Each of the brief 14 teachings also comes with a concise study. Key application points are taught which can empower a person to start a new approach.
- **‘Conversational Evangelism’** by Norman and David Geisler is a book that was influential in my thinking on this topic. Some of my own content draws on (and summarises) this book, with the permission of its authors.

2. A strategic missing link for pastors: 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 from their local church.

While the first missing link is a realistic *content* for members to apply, the second is a realistic *leadership strategy* for pastors to apply. In both cases, these are about finding solutions that suit (a) our current multi-religious cultural environment, and (b) our evangelistically discouraged church environment.

When I returned to New Zealand from Asia, I felt particularly saddened that so many had become acclimatised to a culture of non-

evangelism in our churches. In my view, we have become very accepting of things that we should not be accepting of.

I am convinced there is a need for a new paradigm (a nexus of perspectives and ideas that make up a singular approach) — so I'm going to show you one. It is ridiculously simple — and works!

SIX PRINCIPLES AND HABITS FOR THE LEADERSHIP OF OUR MISSION

To successfully lead church members to embrace their God-given mission the leaders will need to

- | | |
|--------------|-----------------------------|
| 1. Motivate | 2. Equip |
| 3. Reinforce | 4. Remind |
| 5. Model | 6. Do this with consistency |

The logic of this is very simple.

1. Motivate — The key stated reason why many people do not tell others about Christ is because of a fear of rejection. Yet love can overcome fear! The solution to the problem is to get a revelation of God's love (to grow in love). We need to see as Jesus sees — and it is our role as preachers of God's Word to help people see as Jesus sees! Let it be said again, the key hindrance to the spread of the gospel is a lack of love in our hearts. With gentleness and truth — and God's help, this can be addressed.

2. Equip — Many times I have met devout Christians who sincerely want to be witnesses for Jesus, but who simply do not know how to get conversations about spiritual things happening. I understand this point very well, because for most of my life I saw such a person every time I looked in the mirror. Then I learnt some things, and this changed for me. Many times since I have had the joy of also seeing this change for others as a result of showing them how to engage those they know in non-

threatening two-way conversations. There are cultural perspectives, people skills, gospel communication skills, and more that we can teach — and it produces results! Otherwise ‘immobilised’ people will begin to talk with those around them in natural ways about spiritual things. The key content that needs teaching can be summarised and reduced to a reasonably short list of points and applications. A good grounding in the basics is all that many people need to become effective. Unless we show them how, most people will not naturally work it out for themselves!

3. Reinforce — It is important that we include the small group dynamic in this picture (piston #2). People are said to remember 10% of what they hear, but 40% of what they say (and 60-70% of what they do, depending which study you look at). If we can get people talking together about the outreach equipping we give through our pulpit, and practicing the applications on one another, our chances of leading a change in this area are greatly increased.

4. Remind — Educational theory says that repetition is necessary for learning. While many churches pride themselves in having a ‘fresh’ pulpit in which there is no noticeable repetition, I suggest we have got this wrong! The spiral curriculum is a well-proven educational theory. It suggests that the most effective learning will take place when we intentionally remind people of previous knowledge, and then build upon it with new knowledge. For our members to remember and apply a particular skill we teach in our churches we might need to remind them of it a week later, two weeks later, a month later, three months later, six months later, and then a couple of times a year from that point in time onwards. If we do this, it could become a part of our church’s corporate knowledge and culture, and will be more likely to be applied!

5. Model — We must not only tell people how, but show them how.

This can be done in person by taking others with us when we go to engage people in spiritual conversations — but also by sharing stories about how we came to faith, and have sought to share faith with

others. Stories are powerful! Additionally, if pastors will preach the gospel message clearly and concisely occasionally, this gives the members wording that they could copy and use later on in their own conversations.

6. Consistency — A pastor told me recently how he had just announced, at the start of the New Year, that they were going to continue the focus on outreach activity and equipping that they had last year. He said that it was as if something changed (for the better) in the environment of his church when he did this.

When we keep running new programs, and using different resources with different applications, we are sometimes unknowingly training our members to NOT listen to us.

When we keep running new programs, and using different resources with different applications, we are sometimes unknowingly training our members to NOT listen to us.

To illustrate: when starting in a new pastoral role with 35 members, the average number of new friends who attended an outreach event or service was 2 to 4. We set to work on the quality of the outreaches, and in the second year were disappointed to have only a slight increase. What was happening? Do better quality programs not work? Does the invitational evangelism approach have no place? Of course it does — so we persevered. From the third year onwards we regularly had 40 to 60 new friends at an outreach, and had times when we had more new friends than we had members (and we had grown in number by then also). What was happening? When we led a new way for the first year, they saw a valiant effort in the programs, but didn't yet trust that we

would be consistent in what we were doing. With time they saw that we were going to be consistent — so they trusted our programs and invited their friends.

Too often we become discouraged in our outreach efforts, and stop just short of where the result would begin. Our efforts at outreach equipping are exactly like this. Teaching something for a year will have little effect. Teaching the same thing for five years will change the culture!

HOW THE SIX HABITS CAN BE EXPRESSED

1. MOTIVATE

Why not motivate through the pulpit? This way all your members are encouraged.

2. EQUIP

Why not equip through the pulpit? Remember, seminars are for topics that apply only to some people — for example, marriage seminars, singles seminars, financial management seminars, and the like. Sermons are for things that apply to everyone — like how to share your faith with a multi-religious Westerner. The best place to discuss the mission of the Church is the pulpit!

3. REINFORCE

Why not reinforce through your small groups? Members can state things for themselves (making your teaching 4 times more memorable), and might even practice certain skills on each other (making your teaching 6 to 7 times more memorable).

4. REMIND

Why not remind by creating a habit of having testimonies in your weekend church services that are specifically about how people came to faith, or how they engaged people they know in conversations about spiritual things to encourage faith in Jesus? In leadership we get what we promote! Testimonies are success stories, and they can provide you with a platform to stand up afterwards, thanking the person who shared, and then reiterating relevant application points that you are trying to establish in the culture of your congregation.

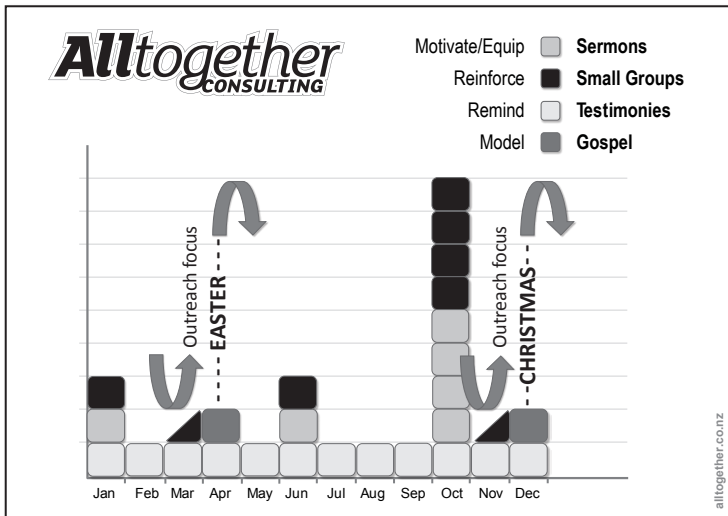
5. MODEL

Why not model through both the sharing of testimony (including your own experiences) and through clear gospel preaching at least twice a year? Christmas and Easter are the most obvious times for this — though anytime can be fine. Also, if you tell your members you are going to commit to a habit of this, you will provide them with an opportunity to invite those they love to come along on those occasions. As mentioned earlier, many timid people still have a gospel passion. They are waiting for suitable services and events to which they could invite friends, so they can hear and understand the Christian hope.

6. CONSISTENCY

Why not find some others who are on the same journey as you to help enable consistency in your leadership? This could include discussing this with your church leadership team, so you can keep yourselves accountable to apply whatever plans you put in place to fulfill the above five principles. 'All Together Consulting', explained below, exists to help you bring these changes through a consistent application of these leadership habits.

EXAMPLE, ONE VISUAL APPLICATION OF THE HABITS.



A resource to help at AllTogether.co.nz

'All Together Consulting' exists to help pastors get results in the area of outreach and outreach mobilisation. Online there is explanation of a strategic approach to bringing change. A basic supply of resources to help you do this is available. If desired, through monthly subscription there is additionally the option of monthly encouragements to help maintain focus, along with awareness and access to a growing pool of resources including additional sermon outlines with studies, videos and free attendance at leaders' gatherings connected to this. Beyond this, a church could also engage with one of our consultants for personal encouragement, input on strategy, help with rallying leaders to share the vision, and to serve as a guest speaker to add strength to the changes you are implementing.

See AllTogether.co.nz for more information.

I believe that two highly significant keys have been offered to you. The question is, what will you do with them?

If we keep doing what we've already done, we will get more of what we already have. Most churches recognise that a change in their outreach culture is needed.

With the approach described above you could succeed in bringing that change!

However, there is another possible hindrance to acceptance of these simple solutions that deserves mention. Some people have an aversion to strategy because they are convinced that the Church will only grow by God's power. Let's discuss this next.



If we keep doing what we've already done, we will get more of what we already have.



4.

The importance of strategy

This chapter briefly discusses two general perspectives that might be connected to our ability or desire to consider a new leadership approach to outreach like the one that has been proposed.

(1) THE SPIRITUALITY OF INTENTIONAL LEADERSHIP

Some people have a problem with strategy. The question could be asked, how much of our ministry effort is about what we do — as compared to what God does? Is church leadership 50% about us, and 50% about the Holy Spirit? Or is it 10% about us, and 90% about the Holy Spirit? The truth is, it is ALL about the Holy Spirit — for, as Jesus

said, ‘Without me you can do nothing!’ However, it is also all about us. Its 100% of both!

As St Augustine put it, “Without God we cannot. Without us God will not.” As various others have put it, “Pray as if everything depended upon God. Work as if everything depended upon you.” Some, in their great desire for fruit, have focused so exclusively on the truth that only God can convict the heart, that they have neglected to bring leadership to their outreach efforts. The opposite has also happened, with some likewise depending too much on leadership wisdom. However, there is no balance to find here. Instead, there is a perspective to change. Namely, it is a misnomer that leadership skills are unspiritual while prayer is spiritual. When we think this way we have fallen for a Greek ‘dualistic’ way of seeing things — rather than a Christian way of seeing them! Through Christ all things are redeemed. God gave us our talents, skills and abilities because He wants us to use them. They are in no way unspiritual — unless our dependence is in them. We must work with all our hearts and minds in everything we do for the Lord — while praying continually, with our hope and faith in all that God can do through us.

I recall once being accused of trying to fix things with structures. As a person who is gifted in strategy, it was highly frustrating. I came up with an illustration:

Imagine if you want to get water into a new house you have built. You could get someone to bring a truck and dump 1000 litres of water at your property if you like — but you’ll not manage to contain it all, and it will soon run out. This is why we put pipes from the street up to our houses, and through our houses to all the taps. This effort is not about having pipes. Its entirely about having water — but the pipes are necessary. Leadership skills, and strategy in our leadership, are nothing but pipes — but they are necessary pipes.

**Leadership skills,
and strategy in our
leadership, are nothing
but pipes — but they
are necessary pipes.**

The illustration often given of John Wesley and George Whitfield is useful. Both were anointed preachers, gathering large crowds, and seeing many come to faith in Jesus. However, Wesley understood the power of organisation and structure, and the way it could support the work of the Spirit. Whitfield's converts disappeared from view — we assume into churches. Wesley's converts met in small groups, with travelling preachers supporting them, and reading programs to train the leaders. These intentionally led groups grew in strength with time. Thirty years after Wesley's death they were still going strong — so much so that they then decided to do something that Wesley never wanted. They left the Church of England to become the Methodist Church that we know of today — named 'methodism' because they were the people who followed the method!

God has not only given us the right of initiation on earth on His behalf; He has given us the responsibility of initiation!

God has not only given us the right of initiation on earth on His behalf; He has given us the responsibility of initiation! The keys of the Kingdom have been given to humans — just as we were given dominion on earth at the time of the Creation. What we bind on earth will be bound in heaven! However, God's Kingdom is not going to be increasingly established on earth through us if we merely sit in the prayer closet! No! God has called us to the kind of prayer that gets out onto the streets and engages with people and their needs. It is a faith that works — not only a faith that talks!

In as much as our hearts are submitted to God, and our every effort for God, our effort is a spiritual one!

Yes — it starts with the heart. Unless the gospel is in the pastor it will not truly be in the pulpit, or then the people, and then the program. (You cannot put the gospel into a community program — but you can put the

gospel into your people!) Through following intentional plans pastors equip their people. It is then with similar strategy and intent that members engage those they know or meet in conversations. We need clearly-defined culturally-attuned strategies for the mobilisation of our members to personal outreach. Without them, most often, very little will happen, and very little will change.

To get different results we need to act differently. We will not truly act differently until we think differently.

(2) THE CHALLENGE OF CHANGE IN A FAST-CHANGING WORLD

We all think in boxes. In the formative years in a leadership role, we assess many things and come to conclusions. A person's first 5 years in pastoral ministry would be an example. At some point we have to conclude on certain foundational perspectives so we can build upon them. It is only right that we reach a point from which we assume certain things — so we don't deliberate on these things endlessly. Based on the best of our knowledge and experiences we establish our paradigm for leadership in a church, and then start to build upwards!

By the time we've led a church for five years we will have reached conclusions about how to best help Christians grow, how to best outreach and mobilise outreach, how to best engage with our community, and many more things. We also will have established a priority order for all of these things. A training program I put together for our senior leaders when in pastoral ministry included a list of about 80 questions, all related to how we would lead the congregation. It is a long list — yet as pastors, whether we know it or not, we have all formed a nexus of conclusions that cover all of these areas. This is our 'paradigm' — a network of perspectives and ideas that create a reasonably complete picture on how we run our church, and why.

But what if the culture of our community is changing around us, bringing a disconnect with our outreach approaches? What if the

culture of the church we inherited also has blind spots, or imbalances? What if we have blind spots?

While I have led through change with good results (as have most leaders), I have also had some painful failures along the way. These illustrate well the challenge we face as leaders. I have banged my head against walls I could not see until a few years afterwards, and it hurt my head considerably!

One striking example comes to mind: I was involved in some reasonably intense discussions about a leadership matter, with perspectives clashing sharply (well, so it seemed to me) for about two years. To me, the status quo was deficient, because it was inhibiting growth while also affecting members' lives in a negative way. I was proposing a new approach because of its merits, but the others did not seem to even see what I was trying to describe. They could see the program applications — but did not seem to be able to see what would happen as a result of the integration of all the different components when put together as one whole (the paradigm). It was very frustrating, because I was doing my best to explain it.

Then, one day (on no particular day, a day that was like any other) a key leader was suddenly able to 'see' what was being proposed. He was excited. He became very strong in his views, and began to state the opposite to what he had maintained and defended the previous two years. He could see the paradigm! He saw the values, how they applied themselves in the structure and program, how the many different things discussed were actually about one overarching thing, and what the results of this would be if this were implemented. He then suggested that a significant area of the church's programs be closed down so that, after a six-month break, it could be resurrected with these new values and practices at its core. It was a dramatic and surprising moment. He could finally see it.

By the way, this change didn't eventuate — because now there were only two people in a group who saw the vision. But it was a good lesson. It can be very difficult to get a new approach even understood — let alone applied.

Envisioning the possible results of an individual program is much easier than seeing the broad implications of a change in values. It is a different type of thinking. But I suggest it is a kind of thinking we need to develop in today's world — because it is a fast-changing world. If we can think in principles rather than programs, and lead our leaders to think the same way, navigating change will not be so difficult!

This book is about a new paradigm for our outreach and outreach mobilisation. It has the equipping of the saints (Ephesians 4) and the Great Commission as its foundational values. Our current approaches are not succeeding in mobilising our members, and I'd suggest that the current paradigm does not really have these same values at its foundation (even though we may understand these values, and sometimes talk about them). Please reflect upon this previous statement. A new way of thinking is needed to bring results.

IN SUMMARY

We are more resistant to change than we think we are. This is something to be aware of — because it may stop us from seeing why a particular change might be for the better.

Because we live in the 21st Century, in an age of significant and quick cultural and technological change, it is more necessary now than ever that we are flexible in our thinking; discerning and defending the principles and values by which we lead more than their current (or past) program applications. In a fast-changing society we must learn to adapt.

5.

Small group ministry — a missing wall

In previous chapters we have identified some missing links which need ‘reinserting’ if we are to see people effectively and sustainably mobilised to outreach. In the next two chapters we will discuss a missing wall — an entire area of church leadership that seems to be weak in the New Zealand Church, and probably in Western churches in general.

While many churches have small groups, the ‘missing wall’ referred to here relates to what these groups exist for, and how that is accomplished.

So that it is noted, our church small groups have many different names — whether small groups, cell groups, life groups, study groups, discipleship groups, home groups, fellowship groups or something else. For simplicity we will call them ‘small groups’.

Certainly, in some churches, the framing of this wall exists. They have small groups! In other churches, some of the jibbing and exterior cladding is in place also — meaning they not only have small groups; their small group ministry is strong and effective (as measured by their goals for it). However, I maintain that there is still often a big hole in the wall. Why? It is because the mission of the Church is very rarely recognisably the mission of our small groups! Instead, the culture of these groups is focused around the members' own needs, learning and encouragement. They are, in this sense, inward looking.

Should outreach be a key focus for a church small group? Consider that the early church primarily met in small groups. The mission of the Church is the mission of its small groups also.

If we could pause to perceive the scope of the implications of this, we might realise this to be a very significant missing link! I am convinced that this lack of outreach focus in our small groups is not how God planned for things to be. I believe God's intent was that we have a relational and team-based approach to outreach, which will happen naturally if our church small groups are recognised as the 'home base' of our outreach efforts.

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So, what is success in a small group ministry? Some might define success in their small groups by the absence of relational problems in them. Others would define it by the development of a strong sense of community within them. But what about the idea that these groups should grow in number through outreach, and multiply?

Many churches have small groups that have existed for 10 or more years. I have visited groups like this, and almost envied the depth of friendship that existed within them. But then I saw what resulted from their joyous existence, and I now grieve over them and pray for change. Life passes people by, while they enjoy their weekly ‘friendship fix’ — and their non-church friends remain unreached. One decade becomes two, which soon becomes four — and the most important opportunities of our lifetimes have passed us by. What are we really here for?

Ecclesiastes 7:18 says, “It is good to grasp one and not let go of the other.” Many areas of health, whether in life or leadership, are about holding two things in tension. The purpose of ‘fellowship’ is best fulfilled in the small group — because this is where open and trusting relationships can be best established and maintained. However, this doesn’t negate the fact that our small groups will also serve other purposes, like the purpose of ‘worship’ — especially by encouraging devotional lives; or of learning (discipleship) — through studying what the Bible says and applying it to our lives. In fact, there is no equal in the local church for these things. Only in the small group can devotional lives be personally encouraged and supported. Only in a connected small group environment can the issues of our lives be openly discussed, the truths of the Scriptures considered, and each member personally encouraged to choose God’s way over the way of the world and the flesh.

However, while healthy relationships and ‘community’ and healthy devotional lives can all come about through our small groups, they are not the end-goal of our church small groups. This is where I suggest one of the walls is open to the wind. What is the end goal? What is the often missing end goal? Specifically, multiplication is! Let’s discuss this.

Where is this chapter going?

The next two chapters are written to lay foundations regarding the value of small group ministry, and of our mission being a part of their focus. Because small group ministry is often admitted as an area of weakness among our churches, these two chapters are highly practical.

For this reason — if you are not involved in church or small group leadership, I suggest you might want to skip chapter six. Hopefully the rest of this chapter will be interesting, and its perspectives useful.

1. WHY ARE THE SMALL GROUPS IN OUR LOCAL CHURCHES SO IMPORTANT?

From the time of Constantine onwards the Western Church underwent some dramatic and tragic changes. A way of 'doing' Church resulted in many practices that we still replicate today. Culture has a way of duplicating itself. The missing wall (or cladding) continues from generation to generation in our churches.

The early church met in both large groups and small groups (Acts 2:40-41, 5:14-15, 6:1). Of note, the 'house to house' gatherings were the foundational ones. In the New Testament I suspect God has not only given us principles and 'general' instructions for our community (church) life together. He has also given us the necessary structure to achieve it. They met in both large and small groups.

For example, there are more than 50 'one-another' instructions in the New Testament, such as love one another (John 13:34-35); Be devoted to one another... in brotherly love and giving honour to... (Romans 12:10); and more⁶.

⁶ Accept one another (Romans 15:7). Consider also, living harmoniously with one another (Romans 15:14); Admonishing one another (1 Corinthians 11:33); Demonstrating equal care for one another (1 Cor 12:25); Serving one another (Galatians

All of these instructions are about the way we relate to others — which doesn't happen when we are sitting 'facelessly' in the 'crowd' at a Sunday morning service. It also very rarely happens over coffee after the service, because the environment is conducive for basic conversation only. Without the church small group platform we cannot obey these Biblical instructions!

Without church small groups most church members will hardly 'fellowship' at all — as defined by the above Scriptures. These groups are not an extra. They are core business.

THE HISTORY BEHIND THE 'SIDELINING' OF SMALL GROUP FELLOWSHIP

As mentioned, from Constantine onwards (Roman Emperor from 306 to 337 AD) there were dramatic changes in the way the Christian church functioned. In short, the Church became institutionalised, and was made into a state-religion. This isn't to say that Constantine and others who followed who were also influenced by the Christian faith didn't do good things also. As Constantine embraced Christian values he began to provide feeding programs for the poor. This is in contrast to all before him who would only provide feeding programs for those who were earmarked to later serve in the army. He funded churches to support the poor, widows and orphans. Regarding cruelty, Constantine forbade gladiatorial shows, and abolished the legal penalties that required criminals to become gladiators. "Many permanent legal reforms were set in motion by Emperors Constantine (280?-337) and Justinian (483-565) that can be laid to the influence of Christianity. Licentious and cruel sports were checked; new legislation was ordered to protect the slave, the prisoner, the mutilated man, the outcast woman. Children were granted important legal rights. Infant exposure [exposing

5:13); Bearing burdens of each other (Galatians 6:2); Giving comfort to one another; building up each other (1 Thessalonians 5:11); Maintaining peace with each other (1 Thessalonians 5:13); Doing good to one another (1 Thessalonians 5:15); Lovingly forbearing one another (Ephesians 4:2); Be kind & compassionate to ..., forgiving each other (Ephesians 4:31-32); Submit to one another (Ephesians 5:21); Forgiving one another (Colossians 3:13); Confessing to and praying for each other (James 5:16); Live in harmony with one another (1 Peter 3:8); Exhibiting hospitality to each other (1 Peter 4:9); Encourage one another daily (Hebrews 3:13); Spur one another on toward love and good deeds (Hebrews 10:24); Fellowship with one another (1 John 1:7); to state the gist of almost half of them.

unwanted babies to the elements so they died] was abolished. Women were raised from a status of degradation to that of legal protection. Hospitals and orphanages were created to take care of foundlings. Personal feuds and private wars were put under restraint...Branding of slaves was halted.”⁷ These comments give a glimpse of the vast positive changes that came to an Empire through broad acceptance of Christian beliefs as state religion.

However, there were two sides to the coin because at the same time there were detrimental changes in the true church — made up of all those who sincerely love and follow Christ. From meeting primarily in small groups, Christians began to meet primarily in large gatherings. Where they once met in homes, they now met in dedicated buildings. Where Christians once needed to build one another up, they now went to see the pastor if they had a problem. Where they once learnt from each other, looking at the Bible, they now learnt in a ‘classroom’ from the clergy — who soon became the only ones allowed to have Bibles (which opened the door to corruption). Where members were once responsible to minister to one-another, their responsibilities were now narrowed to tithing and supporting the church’s programs. Significant to this book’s topic, the instruction to ‘Go and make disciples’, became ‘Come and grow with us’. A very passive Christian life was enabled — and, while there was restoration in some of these areas in the reformation of the 15th and 16th Centuries (for example, we now have Bibles we are allowed to read, and in our own languages, and the foundational Biblical belief that we are ‘saved by grace through faith’ is restored), others areas are not as widely considered.

Patterns can continue in churches from generation to generation. While there have been movements in which small group outreach was a significant factor (like John Wesley’s ‘methodical’ small groups, or the Cell Church movements of Asia and South America) this value hasn’t

7 Wirt, *The Social Conscience of the Evangelical*, p31, as cited in DJames Kennedy, *What if Jesus had Never Been Born?* p13.

yet caught on here. One struggle has been finding an application that is realistic and sustainable in our cultural context.

There are many benefits to be gained through developing a strong ‘fellowship base’ in your local church through an intentionally-led small group ministry. Talk to a pastor near you who has a strong small group ministry to learn a few tips!

However, once we have these groups functioning with a level of health — the question must be asked regarding why they exist. Certainly ‘fellowship’ is a primary purpose that they fulfill — but what is the purpose of our fellowship? In the early church the small groups were the church. The mission of the Church is to make disciples of non-disciples. If we were to summarise the end goal of our small groups in a single word — with our mission in view, I believe the word has to be multiplication!

In the early church the small groups were the church. The mission of the Church is to make disciples of non-disciples.

2. WHY IS INCORPORATING THE MISSION OF THE CHURCH IN OUR SMALL GROUPS’ GOALS SO IMPORTANT?

If you have ever run or been to an evangelism seminar, you will know already why the small group dynamic is essential. Most Christians are incapable of sustaining a focus on evangelism by themselves. Even after a highly motivational and inspiring evangelism conference with simple and practical training, most who attend the seminar will be doing very little evangelistically six months later (or even three months later). Ongoing personal encouragement is needed!

HOW DOES THE SMALL GROUP DYNAMIC HELP OUTREACH EFFORTS?

This is articulated well in ‘Because we care’. I will summarise a few points here.

1. SUSTAINED FOCUS

If the encouragement of certain values and practices are built into the way we run our small groups then we will be reminded of them on an ongoing basis. This can be powerful — producing change that no amount of motivation and encouragement from a pulpit can!

At the start of the year, members can assess their previous year’s goals, and set new goals for the coming year. This can include outreach goals, listing those for whom they want to pray for salvation. By listing things that might hinder them coming to faith we identify prayer items and conversational topics. By listing their interests we identify possible program ideas for our groups, or connection points for conversation. If the group has a habit of praying for these people, the focus on reaching them will begin to be sustained. If the group works as a team to help its members engage with these people in spiritual conversation, each member is helped. Action points related to all of this could be put on the group’s planning calendar, so they are not forgotten. Etc.

2. EFFECTIVE EQUIPPING

As articulated in the ‘4 pistons of evangelism mobilisation’ earlier in this book, people remember 10% of what they hear, but 40% of what they say (and 60% or more of what they do). The small group is an essential part of our equipping if lessons taught from the pulpit are to be effectively learnt.

However, small groups can do more than this. For example, the weeks prior to every Easter and Christmas could be viewed as a time to revise certain things — so they remain fresh for daily use. Groups could revise

conversational skills that will enable them to engage non-Church people in non-threatening two-way conversations about spiritual things. They can revise the concise sharing of their testimonies; how to concisely articulate the gospel; how to give a person a response opportunity, after which they turn it back to a more two-way conversational dynamic again in a non-awkward way. Etc. With such a habit in the group's annual calendar, equipping lessons would be remembered — resulting in them being more regularly applied!

3. TEAM WORK

We are all shaped differently by God — and He did this with purpose! Some can organise, some have the gift of the gab — and others are really good at listening. In a small group setting we can pray for those we desire to reach out to, and can work as a team to connect with them. Together we are better. You have the boat, another person has 5 friends who want to go fishing, and I have the gift of the gab — so lets fill that boat with his friends and go catch some fish! Relational teamwork is enabled — and it can become highly effective as the mission of the Church permeates the hearts of the members!

To reiterate the point: Highly effective!⁸

There are many books about how to run church small groups. It is remarkable to me how many of them overlook inclusion of our mission. However, they can still teach us things about how to grow small group leaders who know how to grow healthy groups.

**You have the boat,
another person has 5
friends who want to go
fishing, and I have the
gift of the gab — so
lets fill that boat with
his friends and go catch
some fish!**

8 Wider reading about the cell movement would evidence the principles. For example, look for books by Ralph Neighbour.

MY OWN JOURNEY OF DISCOVERY

(Why I am so convinced of the essential role of small groups in outreach)

I was brought up in a ‘program-based’ model of church outreach. Outreach was about bringing people to church and youth group programs. We didn’t take the gospel to people. We were to take people to church. I was not taught how to share my faith.

In time, I did a lot of ‘going’ — but with an event-based mentality (piston 3). We ran community events, we were engaged with schools — speaking in classrooms and assemblies, and running lunchtime programs. However, we were outreaching with only one piston (events/programs people can come to) — and four-cylinder cars don’t run well on one piston.

I grew to see that I needed to become more of a mobiliser — equipping individuals. Having now received some evangelism training (which was surprisingly rare and hard to find) I finally had content to teach to others. I began to equip people to share the gospel. This had some effect but the ‘come to us’ event-based model of outreach still seemed to work best. I still didn’t really get how to mobilise people. I was teaching them how to share the gospel, but it wasn’t mobilising them. I didn’t know how to change this.

Then I felt a clear sense of call to become a pastor in a church in Singapore. In charge of the youth and young adult ministries, I also served in the welcome and cell ministries. Now the shoe was on the other foot. I was the pastor, and there were new things to learn about outreach.

It took me two years to work out that there were new things to learn. After my second year of running an evangelism-training seminar I was feeling very frustrated. Why did only 10 to 15% of our members attend? Didn’t they have a heart for the gospel? But then I had a revelation. I was the pastor so I controlled a pulpit! Why not put the same content

through the pulpit so everyone benefits? What better platform is there for discussing the mission of the Church?

Within a couple of years, all of our young people could share a testimony and the gospel. As a result the way we did things began to naturally change. For example, at an event, instead of preaching the gospel we could put some discussion questions on the screen and ask them to discuss them in small groups. We might have a couple of hundred people there — but amongst the ‘chaos’ there was order. The small groups would naturally gather with their members’ friends, and someone in the group would share the gospel during their discussion. It was effective.

But it wasn’t sustainable. It still required me to do the ‘pushing’. I had to motivate. I had to envision. Our leaders still hadn’t ‘got it’ as fully as they could. The question was, what hadn’t they got?

THE PROBLEM OF HARD WORK

Leading change isn’t easy. If we want a church we lead to become evangelistically engaged, and sustainably so, we are going to need to motivate, equip, reinforce, remind and model — and to do this consistently for a few years. In other words, it won’t happen by itself. It will require intentionality.

The problem is exacerbated by the fact that we have all been born into a particular church culture. If our churches are not effective in mobilising members to personal witness, then we inherit that knowledge and perspective deficit. It is our norm. This was part of my challenge.

The key word for a disciple is ‘choice’. We must make choices to grow each day.

We will not lead people to a given destination unless we work out what the destination is, and then plan out a realistic path to get there.

The key word for a discipler (disciple-maker) is ‘intentional’. We will not lead people to a given destination unless we work out what the destination is, and then plan out a realistic path to get there.

Intentionality really is needed to bring about change as a leader. For example, just because you are evangelistic as a pastor or leader, it doesn’t mean those you lead will become so (I’m evangelistic in my motivation, so I know this). They will not automatically become ‘infected’ by your self-perceived awesomeness! If you are not intentional in the way you cast vision, and equip them for success, they will not succeed — even if you are right in front of them modeling as well as you can. And even if you do cast vision and equip them with what you know, you still might not be effective — because the way you are leading, and the things you are teaching, might be things you inherited from the church culture you are within. The results will speak for themselves. If results are not forthcoming, somehow our equipping is not joining the dots sufficiently for members to apply the lessons in daily life. Somehow there is a dynamic that we aren’t yet seeing or understanding.

Leading people through change is a little more involved than being awesome and teaching a few things! Sometimes there is no book that can tell you how.

The Apostle Paul instructed in 2 Timothy 2:2, “And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others.” Paul had four generations in view in his discipleship of Timothy. Paul was instructing him to lead in a way that was intentional — not haphazard. Elsewhere Paul says, “I laid a foundation as an expert builder, and someone else is building on it...” (1 Corinthians 3:10). There is expertise involved in spiritual leadership. Effectiveness may not come by intuition because of our cultural lenses. Often we will face failure in our efforts

**Effectiveness may
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to produce change in people's lives — and this is our opportunity to sit back and consider what is missing in our perspectives. Leading through the kinds of changes that can produce results is not easy — because identifying the way forward is not easy!

Jesus gave an illustration from their world, saying 'You cannot put new wine in an old wineskin.' Some changes are nigh-impossible to bring about, because the mind-sets that uphold them are difficult to change.

I've spoken with successful leaders of cell churches who have admitted that they considered it essentially impossible to change the small group habits of non-evangelistic small groups in our churches. Instead of trying to reform the 'old', they recommended that it was better to start new groups from scratch.

However, I've also had some success (along with failure) in bringing change in a conservative environment, so hold hope that human 'wineskins' can adapt.

To get back to the story: With perspectives like the above in my mind I chose not to blame the members or others for lacking in tenacity or an ability to persevere. I began to consider what the missing ingredient might be in this picture — because we were already doing more than I'd ever been taught to do. Yet my equipping still wasn't producing sustainable results (in terms of members mobilised). Results were still considerably connected to my own energy and ongoing motivating of the members. I couldn't sustain that pace forever — or expect others we groomed to one day duplicate the energy levels needed to sustain what I was doing.

Why couldn't our small group leaders share this load? What were they not seeing? The gospel needed its own momentum in their lives and groups. How could I help them see whatever it was that they were not seeing?

MY OWN JOURNEY — CONTINUED

I became a student of church small groups. I read books, attended conferences, and had meals with people who I considered a success in this area. I sought to become an expert — and then produced what I labeled ‘the lounge chair model of cell group’. This model adapted timeless principles to the culture and tempo of the church I was in (which was a relatively relaxed church). I was blessed with plenty of opportunity to practice things too. I was overseeing 23 youth and young adult cells by then, and was also overseeing the adult cell ministry, which had another 35 cells in it (I only led this for two years). Not everything worked. I learnt from successes and ‘failures’. Everything was a lesson.

Because our leaders in the youth and young adult sector were increasingly mastering the basics of small group leadership, and being effective (as measured by regular attendance and the health and apparent spiritual ‘vibrancy’ of the members), I was able to focus less on these ‘basics’ and more on how they could lead their members into their mission — and do this together as a team.

Now, in anything like this, we are already busy in our churches. We don’t want to do more. We don’t need more programs. So the goal has to be to do what we already do better. This was the approach in all these transitions. I couldn’t do everything at once. One brick was laid at a time. The same must apply for our leaders — they can only do one thing at a time.

All the ‘evangelistic’ things we wanted our small groups to do had to have their place. Doing them would have to become our habit if it was to last — not just a good programme idea we apply for a year or two.

How are we to get all the various purposes of our small groups into our small groups? Everything needs its place! Our small groups existed

for three purposes. We summarised the goals as encouraging (1) a disciplined private life (love God), (2) an edifying corporate life (love one another), and (3) a God-glorifying public life (love the world around you).

The leadership principle is that every purpose needs a program. All the ‘evangelistic’ things we wanted our small groups to do (which related to the third goal area above) had to have their place. Doing them would have to become *our habit* if it was to last — not just a good programme idea we apply for a year or two.

- Goals regarding who we would pray for and try to reach out to were set at the start of the year, and reviewed mid-way through the year.
- Our congregational and church events and programs would then be placed on their calendars first. Their own small group activities were not allowed to clash with our large group activities.
- The primary motivating of members for outreach would take place from 6 weeks prior to an outreach event (which could be as simple as a Christmas or Easter service or program). This way we had three ‘evangelism seasons’ every year during which evangelism had a higher priority. This approach enabled the times in between to focus on other discipleship topics. Everything needed its place.
- Revision of skills took place in this six-week period.
- While prayer for friends took place throughout the year, it was a special focus in these seasons.
- Groups then discussed the interests of those whom they wanted to encourage to consider the merits of the Christian faith. They would plan social and other activities together, to which they

could invite these friends. Different small groups' activities were thus different in these periods. Some activities were in the weeks prior to an outreach event. Some ran their own programs over a period of weeks or months. It was up to them to come up with their own strategies, and to implement them.

Put simply, the application of the 'mission' dynamic in the small group was reduced to a set of specific habits, applied at specific times (in the same way we are articulating a path for change led by pastors based in 6 leadership habits). When first applied these practices were a little uncomfortable. It's like changing gears in a manual car for a first time. You put the clutch in and move the gear stick up out of second gear, across to the right, and the up to engage with the third gear. It feels awkward and unnatural. But, with time and practice, it comes naturally — and with little to no thought needed.

At first our leaders only did what I asked because I'd asked them to. It was like a 'program activity'. But then they began to 'feel' it. A knowledge of how to work effectively as a team in outreach was developing in the members — and their group as a 'body' (1 Corinthians 12). The dots were being joined in their minds, as they began to connect how certain encouragements produced certain observable results. They were beginning to work as a team in their witness naturally and instinctively.

Then I remember attending a leaders' meeting and discovering that people had come to faith in a few of the small groups that month, even though we'd had no outreach activities during that time, and I hadn't tried to motivate them to do this either. The same happened the next month — and the next. What we had taught them was now caught. We had hit momentum.

It was the most fruitful thing I've ever touched in evangelism. When they 'got it' — and worked as teams, with the passion of Jesus in their hearts, it worked! The members were mobilised (Ephesians 4) in a way that I had never before been able to achieve when leading only from the

pulpit, or with groups running events, or through equipping individuals. When all four pistons of the car work, the engine hums!

I can't get away from what I experienced in those years. Worship, fellowship, learning and evangelism were effectively taking place in and through *the church small groups*. The small group leaders were doing the motivating — and so long as I continued to protect and enable the wider 'environment' within which all of this was happening (like the engine casing and the oil), they continued to function with vision and faith and fruitfulness. I didn't need to provide the energy. Everything functioned like a well-oiled machine — as compared to when the small group dynamic was not healthy. And every area benefited — not just outreach.

IN SUMMARY

It will take time to restore the mission of the church to our small groups, but if we are willing, we will get there, and it will yield fruit!

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!

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

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)!

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.

If the multiplication of our groups is not a specific goal, then the goal will not be achieved!

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.

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.

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!

8.

Qualitative vs quantitative assessment

Finding the way forward

I believe that in both discipleship and evangelism we need to recognise that there is a difference between quantitative and qualitative assessment. The Bible calls us to the latter — while we often settle for the former.

When discipling youth I developed a ‘curriculum’ of topics that I felt I was responsible to disciple them in. The curriculum was a ‘quantity’ of content — and by the time they were 18 I could confirm that most members understood these things.

As they reached young adult age (age 18 to 25) I had a separate list. It shared some of the same content, but also had some different content appropriate to the specific needs of their age group and cognitive development. However, as I assessed our effectiveness, I soon recognised that to be effective I had to measure the quality of the disciple (as measured by what they were applying), not just the quantity of our teaching (the range of things we had taught and which they understood).

The word ‘obey’ is significant. Jesus gave us a ‘qualitative’ goal — not a ‘quantitative’ one.

The Great Commission instructs us to ‘teach them to obey Jesus’ teachings’. The word ‘obey’ is significant. Jesus gave us a ‘qualitative’ goal — not a ‘quantitative’ one. If we have educated their intellect but they are not yet applying what they have learned as their own conviction and choice, our job is not yet done! As James says in James 1:25, the blessed man is not just the one who ‘looks intently into the perfect law.’ It is the one who does this, and who then also ‘puts what he has heard into practice’. It is insufficient to justify our leadership by saying, “I have taught it — they aren’t applying it because of the world, and because their hearts are hard.” For as long as we have influence it is our job to intelligently and prayerfully assess our efforts, and to seek to improve. Maybe our effectiveness is limited for a reason! It is our job to find that reason!

AN EXAMPLE: APPLIED TO YOUNG ADULT MINISTRY

So, to illustrate, I’d suggest the discipleship content for young adults who are a year or two into their work life (early to mid 20s) be defined

‘qualitatively’ — rather than ‘quantitatively’. What have they ‘learned’ that they are not applying? This is the last chance to get it right before they ‘sink’ into the spiritual mold they will probably stay in through most of their adult life. Surveys and discussions can highlight areas they are not applying so these topics can be repeated — after which you can openly discuss with them what it will take to see these things applied, and then help them do it. By taking responsibility as leaders for the quality of the disciple (instead of hiding behind the ‘quantity’ of our teaching), decades of bad habits in their lives can be avoided.

It remains that Jesus wants a harvest, and that the Great Commission is to make disciples, not only to pass on a message.

AN EXAMPLE: APPLIED TO HOW WE SHARE THE CHRISTIAN MESSAGE

The same principle (of qualitative assessment, rather than quantitative) is true for our evangelistic efforts — and this is controversial to some. Some say that our only responsibility is to communicate the message of Jesus (the ‘quantity’ only), because we cannot control people’s responses. While this is true to an extent, it remains that Jesus wants a harvest, and that the Great Commission is to make disciples, not only to pass on a message.

One danger of thinking we are only responsible to ‘tell’ is that we might justify a lack of fruit (salvations) by saying ‘we have done our part’, or that ‘the culture is hard’. But what if our methods are not suited to the culture? What if our message is missing the mark, telling them what we believe in words that we understand, but failing to connect with their cultural worldview and prejudices — like the belief that all roads lead to God? Here we are telling them about Jesus — when they don’t even believe in a single knowable God!

Another danger is that we become convinced that we must share the ‘whole’ gospel every time we talk with a person. The person thus

becomes a bit of a target for our whole sales pitch — and this could undermine our ability to actually engage a conversation with them. For example, they say early on that they don't believe in a God because there is so much evil and suffering. The person seeking to present the gospel then bounces past this, because of their goal to share the 'whole' gospel. Had they paused to ask a question it could be that this person had lost their mother to cancer when they were young, and felt God was responsible. The Christian would then have been positioned to show care, and to engage a two-way conversation about this person's real objections to faith — a conversation in which full opportunity to share the rest of the gospel might yet have come also. The 'qualitative' goal is to move the person a step closer to Jesus — while the 'quantitative' goal is to share the message. If we focus too much on the latter we might overlook the former.

The 'qualitative' goal is to move the person a step closer to Jesus.

In addition, there is a time and place to plead with people to respond ("With many other words he warned them; and he pleaded with them, "Save yourselves from this corrupt generation."" Acts 3:40). This is something we might not think to do if we are only trying to share the 'whole' gospel. However, with a vision of the harvest, motivated by love, and believing that God is with us to bring a harvest, we might become so bold as to plead with people from time to time like Peter did.

What we do does affect the possibility of results — and Jesus wants a harvest.

AN EXAMPLE: APPLIED TO OUR OUTREACH EQUIPPING AND MOBILISATION

The same quantitative vs qualitative reflection applies to our evangelism mobilisation efforts in our churches. If we are equipping people to share the gospel (the 'quantity') and they are not applying it as witnesses (the 'quality' of application), we need to pause to

consider what our equipping efforts are missing — because we are failing to get the desired results! I have suggested here, and in ‘Because we care’, that equipping people for a conversational approach has been a significant missing link. However, even when we do that we will find that a certain percentage do not take it up. This is my experience. We could rightly argue that anyone can have a conversation, and blame the church member — but it is also true that some people really are not conversationalists by gifting or nature.

Some people are extremely introverted. Some older people are stuck within a cultural mindset that says they should not talk about religion — but they might be able to outreach effectively in other ways if we could show them how.

One teaching created to summarise this is called ‘10 ways to share your faith — 8 of which do not involve words.’ The point was, while some might share the gospel directly, others might more readily give gifts like tracts, booklets, books and DVDs. Others can give referrals — like to view certain websites, while others can extend invitations to church events and programs, or their small group’s programs. If the quality of their application is lacking, the question is why. Sometimes it is because the content of our equipping has been too narrow in perspective! With this approach I’ve seen many church people encouraged, and then become active in one or more of the ‘other’ ways to share faith that have been suggested.

If we are equipping people to share the gospel and they are not applying it as witnesses, we need to pause to consider what our equipping efforts are missing.

AN EXAMPLE: RESOURCES FOR DIGITAL NATIVES

Another area for adaptation is of our approaches and media to connect with digital natives (the current generation who have grown

up with devices like smartphones in their hands). Approaches and media need to be adapted for their use too. This thought is one of the reasons why, after writing the book 'Because we care', I decided to try to condense some of its core messages into 10 concise video teachings. I knew already that most younger people and leaders would never read the book — but it had gems in it that were not readily accessible in other media. The 'Because we care' video series was placed for free online — and became the most-used equipping resource for the Hope Project in New Zealand, with many congregations viewing the videos in their weekend services after the announcements, week by week. This series of short videos, produced on a zero budget, proved to be effective. One lady in New Plymouth who saw this series nearly a year before the first phase of the Hope Project in New Zealand wrote to us before the first phase had even begun to encourage us that, as a result of this equipping, she has led four friends to Christ already.

It was the exact same thinking that led to the idea of a discipleship resource for new believers that would be readily (and freely) available on smart phones and other digital devices. The 10DayChallenge.co.nz discipleship resource was the result. It is concise, easy to learn to use, and online for free. It came about because people like me in ministry were struggling to get people to value and use paper resources. Discipleship of new believers was thus limited to the church 'classroom' — which is to say it wasn't taking place where people normally engage in conversation, like in their homes or in cafes. Non-church people are more likely to have a planned discussion with their church friend than to come to a church classroom. The web-resource has made one-on-one discipleship very easy indeed!

AN EXAMPLE: REGARDING GOSPEL TRACTS

It was with the exact same 'qualitative assessment' that I realised that the gospel tracts I was faithfully providing for our members' use weren't delivering results. Upon reading them more closely, with an open mind,

I saw why our members weren't using them. They quoted Scriptures (when their target audience doesn't necessarily trust the Bible), said up front that Jesus was the only way to God (which is a slap in the face for someone who doesn't believe that, and is also considered culturally disrespectful today), and often had outdated graphics. Standards of graphic design have changed hugely over the past decade, as has religious culture over the previous few decades.

My response was to produce a series of tracts that, instead of claiming Christianity was true, claimed that Christians believed that Christianity was true. This small point of differentiation is the difference between humility and 'arrogance' in the eyes of many non-Church people.

A side benefit of this effort was that, for almost a first time in my life, I felt comfortable giving away some gospel tracts. I had struggled to give tracts away for decades. I realised that a key reason was that my cultural intuition told me my friends wouldn't relate to the tone and style of these 'older' tracts.

**If what we have been
doing in evangelism
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SUMMARY

If what we have been doing in evangelism hasn't been working, we have a choice to make. We could justify ourselves by saying that we are still sharing the gospel by various means (assessing the quantity of our effort), or we could look at the results and start to seek a new way (a qualitative assessment). I believe the latter is needed.

God wants a quality of response with regard to our evangelism and discipleship, and we are responsible to see that come about. The greatest diligence is required!

Working together, and helping each other, I stand convinced that we can adapt to our changing environment and become more fruitful!

This book — which we are about to summarise — has shown us a different paradigm for evangelism mobilisation through our churches that might workwork (a nexus of thoughts and perspectives held together and applied through the strategic approach articulated on pages 45 to 52).

With a growing understanding of the various perspectives mentioned in the background, are we willing to apply the six habits?

9.

Modeling the value of repetition

We have said that purposeful repetition is necessary for effective learning to take place. To set a good example of this we have summarised the key points of this book into this one chapter. (Do you wish you knew about this chapter at the start of the book?)

What this book has proposed is as follows:

1. THE ELEPHANT IN THE ROOM

What is it? It's the sad reality that the mission of Jesus is not really the mission of most local churches in an authentic, measurable or observable way.

We need clarity on exactly what the mission of the Church is — and how that is different from the wider ministry of the Church. The mission is to make disciples of non-disciples. It involves evangelism and relational discipleship. This mission is distinct from the wider ministries of the church — and yet inseparable from them at the same time. As William Booth put it, “If you want to give a hungry man a tract, put it between two pieces of bread.” The actions of love and the words of love are inseparable.

It is suggested that a key hindrance to our addressing this ‘elephant’ is discouragement — which is disappointment that we have wrongly allowed to sink into our hearts, resulting in a loss of courage to stand and lead change. Discouragement is a sin (while disappointment is not). The Bible instructs us not to be discouraged. Overcoming it is a choice of faith. It is more of a hindrance than is at first apparent. Discouragement affects us. Our vision and ability to be excited about things that we would normally feel excited about is limited (or entirely robbed) by discouragement. Our ability to bring significant change in the area of outreach is also undermined by it. In response it needs overcoming through courage and faith in God’s Word — which always gives us a perspective of hope.

Another hindrance is our often-uncritical replication of the way we do church. There could be blind spots in our teaching and application which we often perpetuate unknowingly because this is what we saw and were told when we were young. If we do not stop to recognise the possibility of this, it can blind us from seeing the kinds of solutions or changes that might be needed to see our members effectively mobilised as witnesses.

This book is a call to Christian leaders to recognise this problem for what it is, and to be willing as a result to engage this conversation with the fullest of heart, mind and ability.

The third hindrance mentioned is a general lack of brokenness in our hearts for the 'lost'. If we saw as Jesus sees, we would be dissatisfied with the status quo, and moved to action.

There is an elephant in the room: Evangelism is integral to our mission and yet it is in the 'too hard basket' in many of our churches and movements — and many seem content to leave it there. This book is a call to Christian leaders to recognise this problem for what it is, and to be willing as a result to engage this conversation with the fullest of heart, mind and ability. If change in this area is possible, it is our duty to bring it! The rest of the book is about changes in perspectives that might be necessary if we are to find a realistic solution for this problem — because we are not looking for a new program. We need a new paradigm!

2. THE FOUR PISTONS OF EVANGELISM MOBILISATION

This chapter sought to impart a broader perspective of the necessary scope of our evangelism mobilisation efforts. We will be at our most effective when we are mobilising the members of our churches to ministry, as in Ephesians 4. The four pistons of evangelism mobilisation are:

The individual

The church small group

The congregation

The combined effort

All are needed. The small group is the home base of sustainable evangelistic efforts. Pastors must lead from the pulpit. Members must be personally equipped and readied. Without innovative combined gospel efforts we will fail to connect the gospel with the majority of people in our nation. We need all four pistons.

If our churches can gain this perspective, it will help us to value all four of these components which are necessary to the picture. It will also help us to help each other in getting all four of them working!

3. THE MISSING LINKS OF 1993

I believe our churches have articulated the significant cultural changes that occurred in past decades well, but that the articulation of our responses to them has been insufficient. While various missing links exist (chapter 7), the most significant two are:

1. A clearly defined content for evangelism training that the average Christian would consider to be realistic for use in our current cultural environment.

2. 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 his/her local church.

Regarding the first, we summarised the key areas of learning as being about the gospel, conversational skills, teamwork, and partnership with the Holy Spirit. ('Because we care' provides more detail on these areas).

To achieve the latter we reduced the nexus of solutions to their core components, articulated as the six leadership habits of motivation, equipping, reinforcing, reminding, modeling, all of which we do with consistency.

All Together Consulting then exists to demonstrate how this could be done, and to assist pastors in leading their leadership teams to embrace the habits — entered in their annual calendars consistently from that time onwards forever.

This demonstrates just how easy change can be — if we are willing!

4. THE IMPORTANCE OF STRATEGY

1. The spirituality of intentional leadership

To clarify an important perspective, we noted that some churches have been struggling with the idea that leadership wisdom is earthly wisdom — while praying is spiritual. This is a Greek way of thinking, not a Biblical way of thinking. The correct perspective is that we must be 100% dependent upon God in all things — while giving our 100% best effort!

We will not see the current status quo changed unless we lead the change. While God can work without us, he rarely does. Without well-considered strategy, many churches will not see sustained change come about. Programs cannot bring it. Mere enthusiasm cannot sustain it. Both are needed.

2. The challenge of change in a fast-changing world

We then considered ideas related to the importance of stopping regularly to reflect upon our effectiveness, with a view to our improvement. The world has never changed as much or as fast as it has in recent decades — and we need to adapt to this environment. Instead of thinking in programs, the chapter suggested we needed to learn to think in principles that are timeless. This makes change easier to understand and adapt to — and adapt we must!

5. SMALL GROUP MINISTRY — A MISSING WALL

There appears to be a knowledge gap in the area of small group ministry, almost nationwide. It relates to a widespread neglect of the mission God has given to our churches' small groups (aka the missing cladding in the illustration given). In some churches there is also a broader lack of intentionality given to small group ministry altogether (aka the missing wall in the illustration given).

To summarise the issue being highlighted: If the purpose of our small groups is only that they be places of caring for one another, then it is fine if our churches have ‘happy small groups’ where their focus is on their own health. However, *their mission is the same as that of the church* (which is also the mission of the individual Christian, and the Christian family). Because they have a mission, which most are not achieving, a change is needed in the perspectives and goals we have for these groups. Unfortunately, this will be costly change for some because they love the ‘warmth’ of their groups as they currently are (tight-knit, inwardly looking, loving communities). The question is whether or not we will value reaching out to non-Church people more than our own comfort! If we are willing to take this journey, ‘Because we care’ articulates how the mission of the small group can be reinserted into healthy small groups without overriding everything else. In other words, change, based around leadership habits, can be easier than expected. But not all churches have healthy small groups. For this reason the rest of this chapter presented a case for valuing small groups, explaining why they are important, along with a careful explanation of why the reinsertion of their mission is important if we are to see our members mobilised in a sustainable way to personal witness.

I believe it was always God’s intent that small group fellowship in our homes be the home base of our outreach. If we are willing to build brick upon brick, all these things are possible — and could prove very fruitful in the long-term.

6. SMALL GROUP LEADERSHIP TIPS

To begin a conversation about small group theory three broad perspectives were highlighted.

1. The importance of environment and culture to small group health.

Broader leadership culture also affects the health of the individual groups.

2. The importance of having multiplication as a group goal from the beginning.

I suggest that multiplication, while not the only goal in most Church small groups, needs to be one of the goals. Knowing this from the start affects how we lead. We therefore summarised the life-cycle of the Church small group that comes into existence when we include multiplication as a goal:

Stage 1: Orientation

Stage 2: Transition

Stage 3: Community

Stage 4: Action

Stage 5: Multiplication.

By understanding the stages, we gain perspective on how we might lead a group differently at the orientation stage, as compared to the transition, community and action stages. These stages lay before us the kind of path that will need to be taken to achieve the important end goal.

3. The usefulness of annual goals for member growth, and a united sense of purpose in the group.

7. THE TOP 12 MISSING LINKS

An explanation was given for each one. These are potential solutions to the overarching problem this book addresses: namely, the non-missional focus of our churches. When these are all put together, we begin to see why a certain approach might work in our times — in contrast to how things are currently approached in many places.

#1. Clarity regarding exactly what the mission of the Church is.

- #2. An unyielding commitment in our Church leaders to ensure that the mission of the Church is authentically the mission of our local churches.
- #3. A clearly defined content for evangelism training that the average Christian would consider to be realistic for use in our current cultural environment.
- #4. An understanding of the need for a conversational approach.
- #5. A commitment to pulpit-based equipping.
- #6. An understanding of the importance of repetition (spiral curriculum).
- #7. A healthy recognition of the essential place of small groups in the life and outreach of the local church.
- #8. A recognition of the continuing need for ‘proclamation’ ministries.
- #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 his/her local church.
- #10. A commitment to clear gospel preaching from our pulpits.
- #11. A supply of trusted equipping evangelists.
- #12. An approach to discipleship that suits our fast-paced multi-media age.

8. QUANTITATIVE VS QUALITATIVE ASSESSMENT

— FINDING A WAY FORWARD

We reflected on the difference between quantitative and qualitative assessment — because the Great Commission is a specific call to produce a certain quality of disciple, not merely to teach Christian things. This point echoes a call made throughout the book *to think differently*. If what we are doing is not producing results, could it be that what we are doing is missing something? What is it we are not seeing? How could we become more effective? As painful and ‘laborious’ as these kinds of reflections can be, we are in a fast-paced fast-changing world, and an ability to adapt quickly to it is essential.

9. YOU ARE READING IT.

10. IT’S TIME TO CHOOSE!

10.

It's time to choose!

Tim's travel company existed to provide luxury tours to many of the world's most luxurious locations. This was their mission. When some of his country offices changed their focus toward the hospitality industry it was a problem. As valid as the hospitality industry is, providing luxury tours was what his company was about. In addition, a business needs to be profitable — and what they chose to do instead of their core work turned out not to be!

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Evangelism is widely recognised as being in the 'too hard basket'. We should be disturbed by this reflection — and equally so by the general lack of hope that this could change. We do not serve a God who calls us to do things that are impossible. With God, everything he calls us to do is possible! There are more than seven billion people on this planet right now, and our mission is to share Christ with all of them. As impossible as achieving that might seem humanly speaking, it is possible! The grace and love of God say so, and the onus is upon us to trust God's character, and believe for more!

This book has sought not only to articulate a range of 'missing links,' but to also provide highly practical pathways to change. The big goal is to provide an approach that will help the 'average' church leader, who is not an 'evangelist' and probably already feeling overly busied by their many responsibilities in the church, to become effective in leading his or her congregation to evangelistic effectiveness (through mobilising their members). Leadership through change is not easy. I believe we have put together a holistic yet simple picture and process that can enable it! The six habits are the central framework for it.

Please discuss this book with others. Please discuss it at your church leadership meetings, considering how you could apply the six leadership habits in your annual calendar. Please note the strategy and resources provided via 'All Together Consulting' page at AllTogether.co.nz.

All that is left is for you to choose whether or not you will embrace a little change, if it is needed!

The Church has a mission.

That mission is not really the mission of many of our local churches.

Change is possible.

Change is necessary.

Please make this your mission.

'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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Big Book Publishing Limited

www.bigbookpublishing.co.nz

ISBN 978-0-9941085-5-5



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