



REACHING THE LOST

Lessons from the Church at Ephesus



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By
Bruce Zachary

Eccl. 12:12-14 And further, my son, be admonished by these. Of making many books *there is* no end, and much study *is* wearisome to the flesh. Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God and keep His commandments, for this is man's all. For God will bring every work into judgment, including every secret thing, whether good or evil.

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Introduction: Important Lessons To Learn From The Church At Ephesus

Why should I bother reading this? Think of “Reaching the Lost” as a wide-angle lens giving you the big picture, and the following companion resources, “Making Disciples” and “Developing Leaders” as the zoom that will bring our mission into focus and provide Biblical, practical tools to help us be more effective in those things every other spiritual leader is called to do.

1. What are the primary functions of The Church? You could easily defend the ideas of worship, evangelism, glorifying Christ, loving God, loving others and living His word, knowing Christ and making Him known, etc. Nevertheless, I would suggest all of these goals and others flow from what the primary functions of the Church are: to reach the lost, make disciples, and develop leaders. All true Church growth happens when we reach the lost, but to effectively make disciples of these new converts, we must develop committed leaders. If we want to expand the kingdom, and engage in the essential functions of the Church, we must discover how to more effectively reach the lost, make disciples and develop leaders.

2. Where should we look to discover how to more effectively reach the lost, make disciples and develop leaders? There are countless leadership books, blogs, podcasts and information in a host of formats available to us, but many of these resources are offering to help church leaders “Break the 200, 500, and 1,000 barrier.” I’m not suggesting that sort of material should be avoided, but many of the proposed solutions appear to have been cultivated from the marketplace rather than from the pages of Scripture.

What I am suggesting is, the **primary** place we should look to discover what the Church is called to do, and how to do it most effectively, is the Bible. I presume that Jesus intended the Bible to be a sufficient resource for the job [2Tim. 3:16-17]; and that Church leaders have liberty to supplement their toolbox with lessons learned in whatever cultural context the church finds itself. A challenge of relying primarily upon the Scriptures is the material is not organized to be a primer for church leaders. Nevertheless, if you decided to use the Bible for your primary resource it would be reasonable to ask, “What church in the pages of Scripture seemed to most effectively reach the lost, make disciples, and develop leaders?”

3. What evidence do we have that the church at Ephesus is an effective model for reaching the lost, making disciples and developing leaders? About one-third of the New Testament books are connected to the Church at Ephesus: Ephesians, Acts, Revelation, 1st and 2nd Timothy, and 1st 2nd and 3rd John. The effectiveness of the church at Ephesus is noted in a summary statement in Acts, “*And this continued for two years, so that all who dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks*” [Ac. 19:10]. Space will not allow me to fully develop the idea here but suffice it to say the church at Ephesus not only proclaimed the gospel to the local metropolis, but

also the surrounding region of Asia Minor. They not only reached the lost, but made disciples and developed leaders by establishing neighboring churches in Asia Minor as referenced in Revelation 2 and 3 [effective church planting].

As we will see in the following lessons, the church at Ephesus is arguably the most effective biblical model for reaching the lost, making disciples and developing leaders. Our hope is to learn principles from this church that can be applied in a practical way to our cultural context so that we too can be effective in what God has called us to.

Lesson 1: Be an Influential Church

What is the vision for your local church? **Who and what would you like to influence?** The essence of leadership is influence. Spiritual leadership will inspire godly change. Even the most grandiose vision will not materialize if the leadership doesn't support intentional, strategic action. When a local church is effective in its mission to reach the lost, develop leaders and make disciples— the bar raises and the status quo changes.

All local churches should aspire to be an influential church. Let's consider three ways that the church at Ephesus was influential:

1. The church took advantage of a strategic (urban) location.

The early church was primarily an urban phenomenon with cities such as Jerusalem, Antioch, Corinth, Rome and Ephesus at the epicenter. Urban environments are centers for travel trade culture and the spread of ideas.

The dense concentration of humanity allowed the gospel to spread like wildfire throughout the Roman world.

In contrast, Jesus' ministry was centered in rural communities around the Galilee; Jesus clearly appreciates the need for healthy churches in rural (and suburban) communities as well as cities. Nevertheless, Jesus' headquarters at Capernaum was adjacent to the Via Maris (Way of the Sea), one of the two most important trade routes of the ancient world. This helped to spread the fame of the Messiah and the gospel effectively and rapidly.

I often hear aspiring or fledgling leaders bemoaning what they feel to be the limiting location of their churches, but effective leaders determine the strategic advantages of their location and leverage them. For example, rather than lamenting that your church is in a community with a college campus or military base that results in high turnover, leverage that dynamic to prepare kingdom leaders for other parts of the country or world [in the case of the U.S. Military it is like sending missionaries at the government's expense].

So what [or whom] do you believe God has called you to influence? Is the vision to impact a neighborhood, a community, a city or perhaps the world? Is the hope to influence a particular demographic, such as the homeless, refugees, at-risk teens, foster and adoptive families, victims of violence, or widows?

2. The church attracted leaders and prospective leaders.

Ephesus attracted many influential Christian leader, most notably Paul, John and Timothy. In addition to these top-tier leaders, several other major-leaguers served at Ephesus including Priscilla, Aquila and Apollos. Ephesus claims to be the last place where Mary, the mother of Jesus, lived, though the historical evidence for this is mixed at best.

Paul had a vision to establish an influential church at Ephesus and realized the work would require capable leaders. He came to Ephesus with some capable leaders in Priscilla and Aquila. He ensured that prospective high-impact leaders, such as Apollos and Timothy, were identified and developed. Because Ephesus became the type of church that influenced its community and beyond, it attracted influential leaders like John.

Influential churches attract high-impact leaders because their vision is significant, and high-impact spiritual leaders want their lives to have significance for the kingdom. These leaders expand the sphere of influence when their gifts are developed, encouraged and empowered. You don't need to be a mega-church to attract leaders and prospective leaders, but you do need a vision to change the status quo.

3. The church prepared kingdom leaders who would influence other areas.

The church at Ephesus developed disciples into leaders, and these prepared leaders went out from Ephesus, as led by the Lord, to expand the influence of the kingdom. Apollos went to Corinth. Paul went to Antioch before returning to Ephesus, and Priscilla and Aquila returned to Rome. In addition, the seven churches of Asia Minor referenced in Revelation 2-3 were likely established through the church at Ephesus. Finally, Paul's personal greetings at the end of Romans to about 30 leaders and prospective leaders is related to the work at Ephesus, as evidenced by the fact that Paul had not yet been to Rome.

Influential churches realize the necessity of preparing leaders to advance the kingdom beyond their walls. Churches that suppress, obscure or deter opportunities beyond the local church tend to be less effective. Influential churches encourage leaders and prospective leaders to discover whether God has called them to serve beyond the local church and then support that calling.

Lifework:

- 1. So what [or whom] do you believe that God has called you or perhaps you and your local church to influence?**
- 2. How are you communicating a significant vision to attract leaders and prospective leaders?**
- 3. How are you developing encouraging and empowering their gifts and calling?**
- 4. How do you encourage leaders and prospective leaders to discover whether God has called them to serve beyond the local church, and then support that calling?**

Lesson 2: Be Passionate for a People and a Place

And he came to Ephesus, and left them there; but he himself entered the synagogue and reasoned with the Jews. When they asked him to stay a longer time with them, he did not consent, but took leave of them, saying, "I must by all means keep this coming feast in Jerusalem; but I will return again to you, God willing." And he sailed from Ephesus [Acts 18:19-21].

How do you begin to reach the lost, make disciples and develop leaders? **The process begins with a passion for a place because there is a burden for the people.** Consider the beginning of the church at Ephesus. As Paul was returning to Antioch in Syria en route to Jerusalem his ship stopped at the thriving port city of Ephesus. As was his custom he entered the synagogue and reasoned with the Jews. The Jews invited Paul to remain longer with them, but he needed to travel immediately in order to arrive at Jerusalem in time for the feast. Paul sensed an open door for reaching the lost at Ephesus. And although he could not remain, he urged his traveling companions Priscilla and Aquila to remain at Ephesus and start the work. Yet, Paul yearned to return and assured the Jews at Ephesus that he would return if God allowed him to. And Paul did, in fact return, and labored at Ephesus to establish an exemplary church.

A church planter, pastor or leader must sense God has opened a door for the gospel in a particular place. Sometimes a leader will consider the strategic issues, including demographics, and the perceived advantages of planting a work in a particular community. **A leader must discern God's leading to serve in a particular place and must develop a passion for the people of that place and their need to be reached for Christ.** A balance sheet and marketing analysis may be the stuff of a savvy business plan, but **the work of Christ cannot be sustained without love for the people of a community.**

My wife is a gifted photographer, and she will tell you that she loves New York City. She loves the architecture, the food, the arts scene, the culture, the photo ops and would probably enjoy living in Manhattan. Nevertheless, she probably does not love the city in the sense of being motivated to sacrifice her desires to reach the people for Christ. When my wife says that she loves the city she is referring to loving the amenities – what is available for her to enjoy as a visitor or perhaps even as a resident. It is not that she is insensitive to New Yorker's need for Christ's salvation, but she has not been called to that city the way Paul was called to Ephesus. He returned and engaged in the hard work of church planting. He had a passion for a place because there was a burden for the people and a calling from God.

I love my community in Camarillo, California. There are good schools and plenty of great parks, renown weather, low crime, nice neighborhoods, plenty of amenities, but a small enough population to have a sense of community. I'm grateful to God for those realities. But when I say that, "I love Camarillo" I mean that I'm willing to sacrifice my

personal desires to see the lost reached and become disciples who are developed into leaders who can make disciples. And although it is undoubtedly an effort, it is assuredly a labor of love.

Lifework:

- 1. How have you sensed God's leading to serve in a particular community?**
- 2. How have you developed love for a particular group of people in a community that you were willing to sacrifice to see them reached for Christ?**
- 3. What are some people needs in your community that move you?**

Lesson 3: Be Reasonable

And he came to Ephesus, and left them there; but he himself entered the synagogue and reasoned with the Jews [Acts 18:19] (emphasis added).

And he went into the synagogue and spoke boldly for three months, reasoning and persuading concerning the things of the kingdom of God [Ac. 19:8] (emphasis added).

If you are going to reach the lost in your community you need to be reasonable.

When Paul first came to Ephesus from Corinth, and after returning to Ephesus from his visit to Jerusalem, he went to the synagogue to reach the lost. In this Paul was reasonable in a host of ways. **First, be reasonable about when and where you share the gospel, and with whom.** To be reasonable is to have sound judgment, be sensible and practicable. It was strategic for Paul to engage religious people with the gospel because he would encounter primarily Jews (and Gentiles) who were spiritual people familiar with the Scriptures and monotheism, but they had not yet believed that Jesus was the Christ (Messiah).

It makes sense to try to reach people at a place where they are gathered and where you anticipate some will be interested, where you are welcome and you can speak a narrative that is familiar to your audience. For example, if you want to reach college age people a university or college campus would be a reasonable place to go. If you are a photographer, you might try to have a showing of your photos and invite people to the gallery or whatever space you use. During the show you share how God inspired the collection and your testimony. If a sport is your mission field you can look for opportunities to gather families for a BBQ, and pray for the food and seek a chance to share your faith. It is reasonable to identify a local coffee house if you like to start the day with devotions (Bible reading) and coffee. As you become a regular and are seen reading your Bible frequently the opportunities to engage others about spiritual matters increase. So it simply makes sense to be reasonable about trying to reach the lost.

Second, be reasonable about how you share the gospel. In both passages quoted above we see that Paul *reasoned* with people at the synagogue at Ephesus. The Greek term *dialegomai* refers to mingling thoughts, to ponder, engage in discourse, argue, and discuss. The same term is used in regard to Paul seeking to reach the lost at Athens where he *reasoned* with Jews, Gentiles, and daily with people in the marketplace who happened to be there [Ac. 17:17]. With the Jews and Gentile worshipers at the synagogue of Ephesus Paul sought to persuade them from the Scriptures to demonstrate how Jesus had fulfilled the prophecies concerning the Christ and was thus their Messiah. On the other hand at the marketplace of Athens the approach to reasoning was different. In essence, Paul engaged with people and he discussed their worldview or philosophy of life. He would listen and demonstrate the logical inconsistencies of their belief system. Then he would prove why the gospel message

and the Christian faith are reasoned and reasonable beyond a reasonable doubt. **Are you willing and able to actually reason with unsaved people in regard to the gospel and the things of the kingdom of God?**

Effective churches have a considerable element of reasonable behavior as I've used the term here. Pastors who are effective at reaching the lost recognize that unbelievers who come to the church in a post post-modern era often have no cultural narrative towards a biblical world-view. These pastors recognize their Bible teaching must have a reasonable and persuasive basis that shows why the existence of God, the gospel and the Christian message are reasonable. Also, the church and its leaders engage the culture around them where the culture is congregating. Listen to people as they describe their worldview, and then ask questions to discern the basis of the view. Expose some of the logical inconsistencies with respect and humility. Finally, show the Christian message is reasonable in that it can withstand critical analysis.

Lesson 4: Be Engaged

But when some were hardened and did not believe, but spoke evil of the Way before the multitude, he departed from them and withdrew the disciples, reasoning daily in the school of Tyrannus [Ac. 19:9].

If you are going to reach the lost in your community you need to engage people with the gospel. Paul began his efforts to reach the lost of Ephesus primarily at the synagogue. After three months the Jews who rejected the gospel prevented Paul from proclaiming the message at the synagogue. Paul then moved his ministry hub to the school of Tyrannus. The school was typically a place where Gentiles were educated and trained. In the culture of Ephesus many businesses closed for several hours during the hottest part of the day. Paul leveraged the availability of the hall during those hours to train disciples and reach curious seekers with the gospel. The school would have been more accessible to Gentile seekers than the synagogue. In effect, Paul engaged the community and created a means to effectively reach the lost and make disciples.

Where and how do you engage curious seekers with the gospel? Leaders need to engage the lost. Seems simple and intuitive enough, but it is often neglected by Christians. Research published by the Barna Group in December 2013 revealed that only 52% actually shared their faith in the preceding year. Ironically one of the tenets of the evangelical is the responsibility to share the gospel. Unfortunately, many in the local church who have the term “leader” associated with their role don’t share their faith. Effective church leaders create a culture where Christians engage the lost. They model the behavior by actually doing it and sharing their experiences with others. Finally, they develop others to share their faith and create meaningful accountability especially among other leaders to share the gospel.

Church planters, pastors, and Christian leaders generally need to discover where they are *most effective at reaching the lost* (as well as making disciples and developing leaders). Generally, outreach and evangelism tend to logically be limited to about 5 generally described areas:

1. Relational Evangelism: Get to know your barista, neighbor, co-worker, other soccer parents, and others in “your community” and engage them in life. Develop meaningful relationship and then share the gospel as God opens doors.

2. Service Evangelism: Create service projects that provide opportunities to share the gospel as you minister to needs of the community.

3. Large-scale Events: This includes concerts, conferences, and worship services in public spaces.

4. Community Groups: The small groups become the front door to the church

community. People come to the group, get saved, and later to the church building for weekend services.

5. The Weekend Gathering: The “attractional church” model where seekers are invited and come to the gathering, and hear and receive the gospel.

Certainly churches do all of these to some extent. I encourage pastors and their core team to rank from 1-5 the order where they believe they are *most effective*. I encourage you to leverage where you are most effective at reaching the lost and stop activities that are not effective. For example, a church that hosts a large Halloween Alternative and sees many volunteers mobilized and multitudes of guests may consider the event successful. However, if there was no meaningful way to share the gospel and none of the guests returned to the church, I would not consider it a success. I would suggest they stop doing the activity unless they can resolve those hurdles.

Finally, print attractive invitations for as many of the above-described activities as possible. Make sure the graphic quality is excellent and the church service times, location and contact information are included along with all relevant event information. Print sufficient quantities so every person in the church community receives several to distribute. Encourage people to pray for God to open doors and direct the distribution then engage people with the gospel and share the stories of the experience.

Lifework:

- 1. Where and how do you engage curious seekers with the gospel?**
- 2. Where are you most effective at reaching the lost?**
- 3. Where is your local church most effective at reaching the lost?**

Lesson 5: Be Enduring

And this continued for two years, so that all who dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks [Ac. 19:10].

If you are going to reach the lost in your community you need to endure. Paul began his efforts to reach the lost of Ephesus primarily at the synagogue. After three months the Jews who rejected the gospel prevented Paul from proclaiming the message at the synagogue. Paul then moved his ministry hub to the school of Tyrannus where he reasoned daily with the disciples and those who were curious about the gospel. *And this continued for two years, so that all who dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks.* It would not be difficult to imagine Paul's disappointment when he was prevented from sharing the gospel at the synagogue. Similarly, Paul could have been frustrated when he returned to Ephesus to find only twelve men who were disciples [19:7]. Nevertheless, he persevered and endured and the effect was remarkable! In only two years the gospel had spread from Ephesus so that Both Jews and Gentiles throughout the Roman Province of Asia [modern Turkey] had been engaged with the gospel.

Enduring during struggles:

To truly grow the Church you must engage and reach the lost with the gospel.

Transfer growth of believers doesn't grow the Church. Reaching the lost of your community is difficult work in the best of conditions. Furthermore, in areas where the Christian worldview represents a small minority or there is no heritage of a gospel worldview the soil is even more difficult to work in. Reaching the lost requires endurance to overcome the struggles. Warren Wiersbe wrote "In Praise of Plodders" to highlight the effectiveness of enduring Christian leaders. The title is taken from the life of William Carey who is generally regarded as the "father of modern missions." Carey described the essence of his effectiveness to the capacity to be a plodder, "I can persevere in any definite pursuit. To this I owe everything." C. H. Spurgeon observed, "By perseverance the snail reached the ark."

Once you *know* that Christ has called you to a place you need to continue to live on mission to engage and reach the lost of that community until you *know* that Christ has moved you to another community. My pastor, Chuck Smith, was renown for encouraging pastors and leaders to, "Just give it six more months." In essence a leader who was sent from Calvary Chapel of Costa Mesa [CCCM] would be discouraged and contact Pastor Chuck. The leader was ready to give up and throw in the towel and wanted to return home to CCCM. Chuck urged them to endure another six months and see what Christ would do. Six months would pass and the discouraged leader would contact Chuck again and ask to come home. Again Chuck urged them to continue the work of an enduring farmer and wait for God to bring the increase. More often than not by the time two years had passed the calls stopped coming. By the grace of God the

enduring leader was gaining some traction and the work was moving forward and gaining momentum.

Enduring during success:

It may seem counter-intuitive, but success in ministry can be an obstacle to reaching the lost of your community. Church planters are highly motivated to engage the lost and reach them with the gospel. Planters and their core team leaders during the early years of starting a church expend considerable energy to engage and reach the lost. **The mission of engaging and reaching is not only a stated priority, but also an actual practice.** Leaders look to engage neighbors, co-workers, fellow students, baristas, soccer moms, strangers at the pub, etc. Then leaders share their experiences with others at the church, and other followers are motivated to engage the lost. As the church experiences greater success and the number of believers grow the leaders become more focused on caring for the needs of the church and less focused on *personally engaging the lost*. Thus, the leaders' experience and stories shift, and the church culture shifts with it. More and more relationships are developed with believers and fewer relationships exist or are created with the lost. Generally, the new converts have more connection to unsaved people and they have great potential to engage the lost. But rarely do leaders model engaging and reaching. They may talk about the priority but often neglect to put the behaviors into practice.

Lifework:

- 1. As a leader or prospective leader how did you engage the lost in your community in the last 60 days?**
- 2. How did you share the experience with other followers of Christ that you influence to encourage them to engage the lost?**
- 3. *Pray* for boldness and wisdom to engage and reach. *Plan* to allocate time weekly to engage. *Participate* in the mission of Christ. *Proclaim* the experience to others.**

Lesson 6: Be Effective

And he went into the synagogue and spoke boldly for three months, reasoning and persuading concerning the things of the kingdom of God. But when some were hardened and did not believe, but spoke evil of the Way before the multitude, he departed from them and withdrew the disciples, reasoning daily in the school of Tyrannus. And this continued for two years, so that all who dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks [Ac. 19:8-10]

If you are going to reach the lost in your community, you need to discover where you have been most effective, and ideally anticipate where you will be most effective in the future. Paul started his efforts to reach the lost at the synagogue at Ephesus. Paul was effective there at reaching the lost. So effective that Jews who opposed the gospel prevented Paul from proclaiming the message at the synagogue. Note, the synagogue efforts had been effective, but they stopped being effective. Paul then moved his ministry hub to the school of Tyrannus; and continued there with great effectiveness.

What are some morals we can glean? First, just because you've been effective in a particular outreach approach doesn't mean that you always will. Second, you have to realize when something has become (or is becoming) ineffective and change. Third, some changes will make you more effective. So don't wait to become ineffective before considering change.

Generally, outreach and evangelism tend to logically be limited to about 5 generally described areas: relational, service, large-scale events, weekend gatherings, and community groups (small groups). Take a look at the last lesson for a further discussion.

Where have you been most effective at reaching the lost? It is helpful to have a sense of your history, especially your last two to five years. At Calvary Nexus our weekend services and large-scale events have tended to be the areas where we were most effective at engaging lost people, presenting the gospel and actually seeing decisions for Christ. We are blessed to have amazing year-round weather that allows us to plan large-scale events outdoors during the spring [Resurrection Sunday], the winter [Christmas Eve] and in the summer [Church at the Park]. These events have been a catalyst for evangelistic outreach in our church. Similarly our weekend gatherings are attractive and have been effective. People invite the unreached, we present the gospel as part of the Bible teaching, give an invitation to receive, and decisions are made for Christ. We also discovered along the way that although we do an excellent job of promoting and hosting events like concerts and conferences they were not as well attended or effective for outreach as we hoped. Therefore we minimized our activities in those areas. Also, three to five years ago, evangelism through community groups, service, and relationships (missional living) were not as prevalent at our church.

So, if I had to rank from 1-5 where we *were* most effective at reaching the lost, it would be: weekend gatherings, large-scale events, service evangelism, and community groups.

Where are you most effective? During the last three to five years we have shifted our approach to evangelism. We've emphasized missional living and encouraged the church to "be the church" rather than simply inviting people to the church building; and to engage the lost in their community. More Community groups started hosting neighborhood BBQs to engage and reach the lost around them. Our servant evangelism ministry "beyond sunday" became more intentional about planning large-scale quarterly events and on-going smaller assistance projects where the gospel is proclaimed to the lost. More people have become comfortable engaging the lost *and* sharing their faith. These efforts have seen a significant rise in the influence of these areas in our overall outreach efforts.

So, if I had to rank from 1-5 where we *are* most effective at reaching the lost it would *still* be: weekend gatherings, large-scale events, service evangelism, relational, and community groups. But clearly we have shifted so that service evangelism, relational, and community groups are becoming more effective and are catching-up.

Where do you anticipate that you will be most effective? In the not too distant future our methodology will need to emphasize relationships and community groups. The days of handing a gospel tract or attempting to engage a stranger on the street will continue to become less and less effective in the United States and Western Europe.

Similarly, it will become more difficult for people to *reach* the lost solely through large-scale events or attractive church services. These approaches will continue to be a vehicle to *engage* the unreached but absent meaningful genuine relationship to supplement the large-scale gathering or event they will become less effective means to reach the lost. Similarly meaningful service projects that promote social justice will become more attractive means to engage and reach the lost as participants and recipients. Part of the reason relates to the demographic shifts created by Millennials and Generation X that are more concerned about participating in authentic relationships, genuine community and serving others than a quest for absolute truth claims. Part of the trend relates to shifts towards a post-Christian and post Post-modern worldview.

So, if I had to rank from 1-5 where we likely *will be* most effective at reaching the lost it would be: relational, community groups, service, weekend gatherings, and events. Having a sense of where we have been, where we are and where we should or need to go helps us to be more effective in reaching the lost. In essence we need to be prepared for these shifts and the needed changes in our methods of engaging and reaching the lost. Just because you've been effective in a particular outreach approach doesn't mean that you always will. You have to realize when something has become (or

is becoming) ineffective and change. Finally, some changes will make you more effective. So don't wait to become ineffective before considering change.

Lifework:

- 1. Where have you been most effective at reaching the lost?**
- 2. Where are you most effective?**
- 3. Where do you anticipate that you will be most effective?**

Lesson 7: Be Resilient

For you have brought these men here who are neither robbers of temples nor blasphemers of your goddess [Ac.19:37].

If you are going to reach the lost in your community you need to be resilient. You will encounter opposition to the gospel and you must overcome the opposition to be effective. Paul not only had to be resilient in overcoming the opposition at the synagogue of Ephesus [Ac. 19:8-10], but Paul later faced opposition by the silversmiths of Ephesus [Ac. 19:23-41]. One of the economic engines of Ephesus was the Temple of Diana and the related trade of silver shrines of the goddess. As the church reached the lost and made disciples, and they turned from idols, it was bad for business. The silversmiths stirred the whole city so that the 15,000-seat theatre was filled with confused and frenzied residents seeking to defend Diana the spiritual focus of the inhabitants of Ephesus.

Some of the obstacles and opposition flow from the cultural shift towards relativism pluralism and materialism.

Relativism is the doctrine that knowledge, truth, and morality exist in relation to culture, society, or historical context, and are not absolute. This is a growing worldview today and is now a predominant belief in America. The Barna Research Group [Barna] published research in 2012 that found: In 1997 50% of Christians and 25% of non-Christians agreed that there are moral truths that are unchanging, and that truth is absolute, not relative to the circumstances. In 2000 only 38% of Americans believed that absolute truth exists. In 2011, there were only 22% of Americans who affirmed a belief in absolute moral truth. This type of rapid decline is atypical [essentially unheard of] in the field of moral and religious values. Not exactly the kind of news that Christians want to hear. But it is really no different than the culture that Paul and the first Evangelicals faced at Ephesus.

Relativism was similarly prevalent in the New Testament [NT] world. The great Greek philosophers Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle contemplated the idea of absolute moral truth but did not lay hold of or point to its existence. The Romans followed them. The Roman governor Pilate declares their dominant idea when he cynically declares, "What is truth?" Yet, in these conditions the gospel spread thanks to the grace of God and resilient men.

Pluralism is a condition in which two or more principles or authorities coexist. Today "tolerance" is the mantra, and there is an ideal expounded that all religious views should be tolerated. But in practice, many liberals perceive the greatest threat to their ideal is the Christian worldview. Tolerance seems to disappear when there is a claim to moral absolute truth. Ironically, those in the liberal vanguard are determined to silence a biblical philosophy from being shared in a claimed pluralistic society.

The scenario can be seen in microcosm on American university campuses. Universities are intended to be pluralistic miniature societies whose official commitment is to free inquiry and intellectual diversity. But in practice they tend to have fewer real divisions than the society they exist to educate and serve. The pluralism on campus tends to evaporate when the ideas threaten the secular liberal ideas that the academic community clings to. So Christian (and other religious) groups are marginalized. When colleges require that religious groups not discriminate on the basis of religious beliefs or behaviors the religious philosophy and identity is diluted and marginalized. Although the rule is under the guise of promoting pluralism its actual effect is to minimize the voice of religious students and thus quench a truly pluralistic campus society.

Similarly, in both the Greek and Roman worlds the pluralistic ideal was expounded but was also limited in actual practice when the ideas exchanged threatened the status quo. Thus Paul was invited by the Athenians to exchange ideas among the philosophers who were the society's guardians of the exchange of ideas. When Paul spoke of the resurrection of the dead the majority mocked to such an extent that Paul departed from them although some did desire to hear more and some did believe [Ac. 17:32-33].

The rise of this skewed form of pluralism in our culture is a challenge to the gospel that cries out for resilient champions. Yet, the gospel did thrive in the NT world and will continue to thrive in pluralistic cultures. Wherever there is the exchange of religious ideas (and ideally truly open exchange) the gospel thrives.

Materialism in one sense values the acquisition of possessions and physical comfort as the means to promote personal satisfaction. Materialism is evidenced by the increasing consumer debt especially credit card debt in the United States. It appears that to most in this country that living within their means is simply not living – regardless of socio-economic class. Again this trend poses a threat to the gospel and a parallel can be seen in the Greco-Roman world that collided with the Jews and early church.

The Greeks were tolerant of other religions and rather than completely subjugate them sought to present Greek culture as an ideal that was so attractive that conquered subjects would gravitate towards them and adopt the Hellenistic culture. Jews had tended to live in humble dwellings and dress simply because their focus was not this world but the eternal world to come. The Greeks on the other hand sought to live in luxury. The Greek way of life and its emphasis on materialism threatened the Jewish way of life more than the Assyrian, Babylonian, or Persian conquerors before them. As Jews adopted the materialism of the Greeks in an attempt to find personal satisfaction God was marginalized and sacred life was corrupted. Jews adopted the fashion of the Greeks and mosaic tiles and similar luxuries become fashionable in Jewish homes. None of this materialism is specifically precluded in the Scriptures. Yet the effect of departing from God's authority is evidenced by the rise of the Pharisees ("separated ones") who sought to stand against the tide of growing spiritual corruption among the Jews that was the result of the spread of materialism.

The True and Living God and the gospel of Jesus were attractive to Greeks and Romans because they discovered the futility of materialism – things can't bring true satisfaction. Furthermore the existence of a loving God and the hope of eternity redemption and restoration are powerful ideals that are supported by evidence beyond a reasonable doubt. So the gospel spread thanks to the grace of God and resilient men.

Materialism in another sense relates to the notion that nothing exists except the material world (ie. that there is no spiritual world and there is no God/gods). Here there is a departure from the paradigm encountered by the early church. The early church lived in a world where the reality of the spiritual world was accepted although there were widely varying views as to its nature. Thus the exchange of worldviews started with a fundamental understanding of the existence of a spiritual realm.

For the first time in the history of the planet there is a concerted effort to destroy the existence of the spiritual realm. The rise of Darwin's notion of natural selection was distributed in earnest with the publication of "On The Origin of Species" in 1859. Yet, Darwin did not seek to aggressively silence the existence of God. On the other hand the Neo-atheists have vehemently sought to oppose God and promote materialism since the early 2000s. Again there is concern among the Christian community especially in light of a radically new order. And again there is a need for resilient people to reach the lost in this age.

How can we overcome the opposition? What lesson can we learn from the church at Ephesus? I think it is important to focus on the words spoken by the city clerk in his effort to quiet the mob that had gathered in the theater, "*For you have brought these men here who are neither robbers of temples nor blasphemers of your goddess*" [Ac. 19:37]. The answer is to resiliently proclaim Christ and his gospel rather than carelessly attack other worldviews. They did not blaspheme or attack Diana. Those who came to Christ rejected other opposing worldviews. But the church emphasized Christ and the gospel rather than bemoaning the perceived and actual ills of the pagan world.

An approach:

1. Be resilient so that you do not allow the opposition to silence the message of Christ and His gospel.

2. Leverage the prevalent social ideals to advance the gospel. When people that I engage ask me, "Do you have to talk about your religious views?" I've learned to say, "Whether you realize it or not, you constantly share with me with your philosophical and religious views of materialism and relativism. And if we really want a pluralistic world where ideas are exchanged and considered I should be allowed to share my views too, right?"

3. Keep the message focused on Christ and the gospel; and avoid recklessly attacking other worldviews. Many Christians use social media as a platform to rant attack and bemoan the real and perceived evils and dangers of the culture around them that rejects Christ. This may rally the faithful to “like” the post (which tends to promote more of that type of content) but does little to engage the lost and actually repels them. So whether in the face to face or the electronic exchange of ideas we must be respectful and humble.

Lifework:

1. How has opposition to the gospel message silenced you and/or others you know from sharing your faith?

2. How do you keep your message focused on Christ and the gospel rather than recklessly attacking other worldviews?

a. Check your social media feed (or other communications) to ensure they actually reflected your answer.

3. How do you plan to be resilient in the coming year? What would you like to do differently?

Lesson 8: Be Biblical - Preach the Word

Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching [2Tim. 4:2]

If you are going to reach the lost in your community, you need to preach the Word.

Paul refers to the importance of sound doctrine thirty-six times in this letter, and warns against false doctrine seventeen times. Leaders must proclaim the gospel and biblical truth generally. It is not sufficient to simply avoid false doctrine. Yet, in many churches the Bible is neither proclaimed nor taught in a meaningful way. Leaders may fear that preaching the word will alienate the lost or be ineffective to reaching them. But Paul had declared the inspiration and sufficiency of the word [2Tim. 3:16-17], and now directs the proclamation. Let's consider four elements:

1. Preach the word! The content of the message is to be primarily the Word of God. The goal is to explain what the Bible says so that the audience can understand God and what God expects them to do in the application of biblical truth to their life. Inspiring anecdotes and illustrations are to help us understand the Bible, but don't replace the Scriptures. We want to primarily reveal God, and man's responsibility to God. Rather than revealing man [e.g. the teacher or the audience's perceived needs]. Finally let's remember, *Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God* [Rom. 10:17]. There will be times when leaders are tempted to minimize the Bible to try to be more attractive to unbelievers. Resist the temptation and preach the word!

2. Be ready in season and out of season. There is a sense that the teacher or preacher should always be ready or prepared. When I sat under the teaching ministry of Pastor Chuck at Calvary Chapel Costa Mesa I never saw him unprepared. But there is another sense of anticipating that there will be curious God seekers present and cynics too. Be ready to anticipate their objections and be ready to communicate in a language they understand. Be ready to clearly present the gospel every time you teach. To be ready in all seasons also implies being ready for seasons when the Bible will be more or less popular. There are times where the word of God is less acceptable to the general culture around the local church. Don't stop proclaiming the word, but do so with awareness of the lost culture that is hearing. Finally, when I see church ads that declare, "Relevant Bible teaching" I think the Bible is always relevant. The problem isn't the word of God. The Bible isn't boring, we as teachers can be boring – but not the word – it is alive!

3. Convince, rebuke, and exhort: *Convince* may be logically connected to the *mind* sphere. We should proclaim the word in such a way that a reasonable person can follow the progression of thoughts supporting the argument that the truth claim is valid and reasoned. *Rebuke* may be connected to the *spirit* sphere. The word should be proclaimed such that the Holy Spirit brings conviction through the word to bring

correction and alignment with God's declared truth. *Exhortation* can be seen as relating to the *emotional* sphere. Proclaim the word to connect the heart of the listener with the heart of God. The most effective preaching and teaching that reaches the lost reaches the mind spirit and heart.

4. With all longsuffering and teaching: *Longsuffering* is the quality of patient endurance steadfastness and consistency. If you are to reach the lost you must trust that the word of God is the message that must be proclaimed. Paul likened teaching and preaching to farming [2Tim. 2:6]. You prepare the soil, sow the good seed of the word of God, water tend and trust God to bring the harvest. *Teaching* relates to observing a text, helping people to understand what it means and helping them to apply it.

There will be times when leaders are tempted to minimize the Bible to try to be more attractive to unbelievers. Resist the temptation and preach the word! Trust God! When the test of time reveals the effectiveness of all methods to reach the lost preaching the word will prevail.

Lifework:

- 1. How does the (Bible) teaching at your local church impact whether you invite unsaved people to attend?**
- 2. How can believers proclaim the word of God in community groups to reach the lost?**
- 3. What are some Scripture verses that you might use when engaging the lost outside of the church?**

Lesson 9: Be Unashamed to Share Christ

Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord [8]

For this reason I also suffer these things; nevertheless I am not ashamed, for I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that He is able to keep what I have committed to Him until that Day [12]

What are you afraid of?

If you are going to reach the lost in your community, you need to be unashamed to share Christ. Paul knew from experience how difficult it is to reach the lost when the culture around the local church generally ridicules and rejects the gospel. So he begins to strengthen Timothy by reminding him of the legacy of faith that was entrusted to him [3-6]. Then Paul encouraged Timothy to stir up the gift of God that was in him, “**For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind**” [6-7]. The Greek term translated “stir up” refers to kindling a fire or keeping the fire blazing.

We should be bold or “on fire” to reach the lost is because God has given us a spirit of power, love, and sound mind *not fear*. It is interesting that Paul felt that it was necessary to encourage Timothy to be bold about 25 times in 1 and 2 Timothy. Timothy was a leader and pastor of a healthy thriving church at Ephesus, yet there was a danger for him and us to be afraid of the ridicule and to let the fire diminish.

Many pastors and commentators observe that Timothy was likely of timid disposition. He was prone to be afraid of the conflict and opposition inherent in reaching the lost and leading generally. Yet, I believe it misses the greater point: **the overwhelming majority of church leaders and Christians generally are afraid to reach the lost.** God did not give us that spirit of fear – we learned it. Babies have only two innate fears, loud noises and falling. All other fears are learned from experiences in a fallen world. God wants to renew our minds, and give us courage by giving the redeemed a new spirit with power and love!

What are you afraid of? What consequences do you project that keep you from sharing Christ?

What are you ashamed of?

The gospel – God’s plan of salvation is the message we are not ashamed of [8-10]. Paul experienced radical suffering for the gospel but he wasn’t ashamed *for he knew whom he had believed* and was confident in Christ’s salvation [12]. **One reason why Paul was not ashamed was because he knew Jesus.** Paul’s experience with Christ gave him reason not to be ashamed of Jesus or His gospel. Another reason why

Paul was not ashamed of the gospel was because he understood it was the only way that mankind could be reconciled to God [Rom. 1:16].

As I reflect, I've done too many things I'm ashamed of [simply not enough space here to elaborate upon them]. Similarly, I've seen the Church do way too many things that were wrong, embarrassing and caused me to feel ashamed. **Now on the other hand, what has Jesus done that you are ashamed of?** If you look at the words and works of Jesus, it is extremely difficult to find anything reasonable people can take objection to. Unless you take exception to His gospel statements such as, "I am the way, the truth, the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" [Jn. 14:6]. As C.S. Lewis observed, Christ is either a liar, a lunatic or Lord. If He is a bad man (liar or lunatic) we should not worship Him, and if He is Lord we must. Praise God that the overwhelming evidence should cause reasonable people to conclude that He is Lord. So there is nothing about Jesus or His gospel message of love, reconciliation, and restoration that I'm ashamed of.

What will you do differently?

In a culture that in many respects is hostile to a Judeo-Christian worldview, there will be an attempt to shame followers of Christ to be silent. Many of us have felt that pressure and have been silenced so that we do not share our faith. **It is time to be unashamed to share Christ and His gospel.** So what will you do differently? Perhaps begin by praying for God to bring people into your life that you can share your faith with. Or ask God to give you boldness and to prepare the hearts of friends, family, fellow students, or co-workers that you want to share your faith with. Trust that God will prompt you by His Spirit to share, and then trust that He will give you the right words. Some people that I know aim to share their faith a few times a week, and others once a week. A very few that I know try to share their faith daily – praise God. I'm not suggesting that a goal or quota is mandated, but it might be helpful to reach the lost. The essence is to pray and seek God's will and plan to think and act differently.

Lifework:

1. What are people afraid of?

a. What consequences do *you* project that keep you from sharing Christ?

2. What are people ashamed of?

a. What about Christ and His gospel are *you* ashamed of that keep you from sharing Christ?

3. What will you do differently?

Lesson 10: Be an Evangelist

But you be watchful in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry [2 Tim. 4:5].

And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers [Eph. 4:11]

What are some of the reasons many people don't fulfill their ministry to engage the lost?

If you're going to reach the lost in your community you're going to need to do the work of an evangelist. When you think of evangelists, there are probably some well-known individuals who come to mind. There are probably some lesser-known people you think of, including the handful of individuals in every local church who seem to have the knack of leading others to Christ. You probably don't think of yourself in that list. Timothy would likely have felt the same way. **Apparently, Timothy wasn't called to be an evangelist [Eph. 4:11], but to do the work of an evangelist [2 Tim. 4:5] - and so are you.**

In the conclusion of Paul's final preserved letter to Timothy, he warned that the end times would be generally characterized by falling away from Christ. There would be a departure from sound doctrine. People would be drawn to false teaching or teaching that fails to fully reveal God's requirements for Christian living [2Tim. 4:1-5]. This would include teaching that seeks to avoid offending the sensibilities of the culture, or focuses on man's perceived needs, and teaching that is intended to entertain. The departure from strong sound doctrine based communities would accelerate the falling away from Christ, and would make it more challenging to reach the lost. This is the world we live in.

Timothy was a recipient of Paul's letter addressed to the church at Ephesus about five years earlier. Therein Paul noted that, "Christ gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers" [Eph. 4:11]. Presumably Timothy read that list and thought, "I'm not an evangelist." Likewise many of us think, "I'm not an evangelist." Was Timothy to simply defer to the evangelists? Are you? Or is there something else that we are called to do? I suggest that Paul's solemn directive to Timothy, and us, "But you be watchful in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry" [2 Tim. 4:5] can be dissected into some simple action items:

1. But you be watchful in all things: In contrast to those who were drifting away from the Lord (and thus His mission), we are to be *watchful* or spiritually alert. This implies an awareness of the condition of the culture outside of the church. And it also suggests being sensitive to the leading of the Holy Spirit. When God is moving by His Spirit to direct us to engage and reach the lost we need to be sensitive and obedient to the

prompting. **When was the last time that you sensed the Spirit leading you to share your faith? What did you do?**

2. Endure afflictions: Spoiler alert – not everyone wants to hear about Jesus. Some will be offended because of the nature of the gospel message regardless of how respectful and humble that you are in your communications. In most places on the planet the worst thing they will do is scorn, ridicule, or reject your message and you as a messenger. You are unlikely to face true martyrdom, but may experience varying degrees of persecution. **What afflictions are you willing to endure for Christ and His gospel?**

3. Do the work of an evangelist: What does it mean to do the work of an evangelist? Christ has called all of His followers to make disciples [Matt. 28:18-20]. To make disciples we need to engage lost people with the gospel, and seek to reach them for Jesus. It has been observed that D.L. Moody sought to share his faith daily. That makes sense since he was an evangelist. Most of us won't share our faith daily or even weekly. But if we at least occasionally engage the lost we begin to do the work of an evangelist. **When was the last time that you shared your faith?**

4. Fulfill your ministry: Unfortunately, we sometimes think that pastors and evangelists should be the only ones to reach the lost. Engaging the lost is not someone else's ministry it's yours. Each of us needs to fulfill our ministry – to do the work of an evangelist even if we don't think of ourselves as evangelists. What are some of the reasons that many people don't fulfill their ministry to engage the lost and do the work of an evangelist? Perhaps it is fear, unbelief, cares of the world, or they don't develop relationships with unsaved people. Perhaps we don't share because we presume they don't want to hear or because we feel inadequate to share the gospel. Some people undoubtedly don't share because they worry that they won't be able to respond to questions or challenges that arise. Undoubtedly, most of us neglect to think about the eternal consequences of our silence. **What are your reasons for not fulfilling your ministry to do the work of an evangelist?** Write them down and look at your responses. What will you do so that you can fulfill your ministry?

The Early Church prayed for boldness to engage the lost with the gospel despite opposition. In response they were filled with the Holy Spirit, and they spoke the word of God with boldness [Acts 4:29-31]. Presumably that is a very fine place for us to start.

Lifework:

1. What are some of the reasons that many people don't fulfill their ministry to engage the lost and do the work of an evangelist?

2. What afflictions are you willing to endure for Christ and His gospel?

3. When was the last time that you sensed God's prompting and you shared your faith? What happened?

4. What are your reasons for not fulfilling your ministry to do the work of an evangelist? Write them down and look at your responses. What will you do so that you can fulfill your ministry?

Lesson 11: Be a Transformer

Also, many of those who had practiced magic brought their books together and burned them in the sight of all. So the word of the Lord grew mightily and prevailed [Acts 19:19-20].

Moreover you see and hear that not only at Ephesus, but throughout almost all Asia, this Paul has persuaded and turned away many people, saying that they are not gods which are made with hands [Ac. 19:26].

If you are effective at reaching the lost, making disciples, and developing leaders you will impact your community. Paul's ministry certainly impacted Ephesus. It is fair to say the city was transformed. **I would suggest that the two primary factors to transform a community are: transforming individuals, and transforming churches (discovering and fulfilling your unique church calling).**

1. Transform individuals: Paul's ministry was gospel centered. The proclamation of the gospel of grace was balanced with a call to repentance. Grace was not a license to sin. Christ was elevated as a standard of holiness, love, and life. As the Ephesians understood the gospel and responded to God's love they repented of sorcery and idolatry and other practices that were contrary to Christ. **Transformed communities reflect a critical mass of transformed individuals.**

When previously lost people receive Christ they are immediately sanctified in their position before God. At the moment of conversion, Christ's holiness is imputed (given) to the believer. Progressive sanctification refers to the process in our daily lives by which we are being conformed to the image of Christ. This involves a change in attitudes and actions to reflect Christ. We must communicate the need to grow in progressive sanctification (being set-apart to God by being set-apart from sin). Churches that confront sin and challenge people to repent in response to God's love are likely to transform individuals. How is the gospel of grace balanced with a call to repentance at your local church?

2. Transform churches - discover and fulfill your unique church calling: When Paul established the church at Ephesus it was *the only church* in the city. Paul recognized that he was called to establish a church that would be a hub to make disciples and develop leaders. Some of those leaders would plant churches outside of Ephesus. Today, there are likely to be numerous Protestant churches in any community that has been reached with the gospel. Presumably, Christ has allowed numerous expressions of the local church to reflect the greater Body of Christ. So, no local church is likely to effectively be all things to all people. **Too many leaders are attempting to be all things to all people, and thus failing to discover their unique kingdom calling.**

3. How to discover your unique church calling: the convergence of your purpose, passions, and potential is the place you'll discover your unique church calling.

In determining your **purpose** consider the following:

What needs exist in your community? Is your community urban, suburban or rural? Is it a blue-collar, white-collar or no-collar college town? Is your area populated by Millennial hipsters in skinny jeans with beard oil, or retired senior “hipsters” (recipients of hip replacements)? Consider whether the community needs a pregnancy center, teen center, homeless shelter, English second language (ESL) program, pre-school, job-skills and development program, etc. *What makes you different?* What is different about your church that causes people to drive by other local churches to attend your church? Do they come for the teaching, facility, youth program, children’s program, another special program, worship music, social justice ministries, community, or some other reason?

What is your greatest opportunity to impact your community? What is the niche that you can serve that provides the greatest influence? Is there an unmet or underserved need that you can effectively serve for Christ?

In determining your **passions** consider the following: What needs excite you? What brings great joy or heartache? What issues energize you to stay up late or wake up early to make a change for the better? Each church has values that reflect their passions and motivate them for calling. Some churches are passionate for prayer, or Bible teaching, or community service. Still others feel called to care for the homeless, sex-trafficking victims, foster and adoption needs, widows, global missions, the next generation or the prior generation. There are churches that are passionate about developing leaders and church planting. What are you passionate about?

In determining **potential** consider your individual gifting and talents and the collective potential. The collective potential is the leverage created by the unique gifts of the local congregation. For example imagine a local church where there is an abundance of talented musicians, artists, doctors, nurses, carpenters, teachers, athletes, engineers, etc. How can those talents be mobilized to transform the community?

When local churches discover and fulfill their unique calling people will be reached with the gospel, and communities will be transformed. Because each local church will accomplish the facet of the kingdom work that Christ intended for that local church. Each of us has a unique calling in our united effort to make disciples for the glory of Christ. Rather than trying to primarily grow a particular church, or implement what another church was called to do, or try to be all things to all people, discover and fulfill your unique calling. I contend that **if each local church discovered and fulfilled their unique calling their communities would be transformed.**

Lifework:

- 1. How is the proclamation of the gospel of grace balanced with a call to repentance at your local church?**
- 2. Work through the questions described in the section, “How to discover your unique church calling ...” Make notes for reflection.**
- 3. What might be a (some) potential calling(s) for your local church? How might this transform the church and the community?**