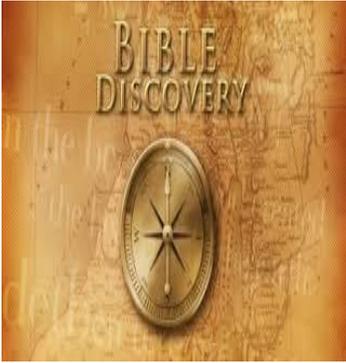


## Reaching the Unchurched of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century



What do you believe? That really makes a difference in how you look at others, in how you reach out to the unchurched of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. What you believe determines your priorities, and, deep down, will probably provide the measure you use to tell if your life's turning out the way you want it to. What you believe should affect the things you do and the way you behave so it is more than what you say – it is what you do – whether others are watching or if you are alone. Do you believe we're all sinners in desperate need of a loving Saviour to redeem us and restore us to a right relationship with our Heavenly Father, the only God, creator of the universe? Do you believe Jesus came to open the doors of heaven to everyone who would receive Him? Do you believe Jesus died for our sins and that on the third day God raised Him from the dead – never to die?

### What are you doing?

Knowing what I've asked you is what do you believe, and believing is about what you do, then the deeper question is, **what are you doing about it** – with your family, with your neighbour, with the clerk in the store, the stranger on the street? Are you stirred by restlessness, with a relentless, innovative heart to reach out to those who if they do not hear the good news are going to spend eternity in hell apart from our loving Father? If you're one of those, like me, that see the events of our world as clear indication that the Day of the Lord is drawing quickly closer, what has that caused you to do about it? How has that caused you, or has it, to reframe the way you think and act and talk about your faith and share your life with others?

Before everyone flees for fortification from a strong cup of coffee, consider that these are the questions we must ask ourselves if we're to be relevant to the society around us. If you haven't noticed, they're not exactly knocking down our doors to join us. Despite their comfort and their unawareness of a need for Christ, we're called to go and tell. How do we do that? How do we bring salt and light to a tasteless and darkened world?



**Restlessness** – Truly having a passion for serving Christ by reaching out to the unchurched around us, establishing an inviting culture and demonstrate honest concern for others, means we must be restless in doing what's necessary to bring light to our world. First, we must be restless for more of God. That's not a bad thing. To want to grow deeper, to draw closer, to our God comes because God pushes us to live lives designed for something much more than we've experienced. But a lot of us are afraid. We'd rather hold our chests tight; forget to how awesome our God is; and see God's calling us to play a small part in something bigger as a scary dream. News flash: "God wants to take the seemingly mundane messy threads of your life to weave something beautiful." What would happen if God got bigger than your fears, your insecurities, your contentment with the status quo, and you spent the rest of your life running after His purposes for you as you exposed your life lived in Christ to everyone God brought across your path?

**“God wants to take the seemingly mundane messy threads of your life to weave something beautiful.”**



**Rethinking** - Christian writer Mike Wittmer recently blogged,

*“Neuroscientists say our brains are flexible organs that harden over time. The more we think about something, the more that thought becomes embedded in our brains. It might be easy to change our minds when experiencing a new thought. It's more difficult when that thought has built a highway in our heads.”*

What processes must our brains be trained with to rethink the gospel taking it out from our culture and replacing it with the truth of God's amazing word? It begins by our understanding of Jesus' instruction for us to be salt and light in the world. Dr. David Jeremiah writes of this in his book, *I Never Thought I'd See the Day*, saying,

*“Salt is strong because it overcomes bacteria that would cause food to rot and decompose. It is unique in that it adds flavour to food and creates thirst for those who consume it. We are to do the same. As we keep God’s law and manifest His character, we preserve the character of His creation; we prevent deterioration and degeneration of the human society and we add a unique flavour to it. We hope to create a thirst for God in those whose lives we touch. The role of light is obvious – to bring truth into spiritually dark places. What truth are we to bring? To “love the Lord with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your mind”, and to “love your neighbour as yourself.” [Matthew 22:37, 39]*

**Rhetoric with Clarity** – The story’s told of a lady from a local church out driving one day who thought she’d stop and share her faith with a farmer she saw in a field along the side of the road. She spoke to the farmer with the conversation progressing something like this...



**"Do you belong to the Christian family?"**  
**"No." said he, "they live two farms down."**  
**"No, I mean are you lost?"**  
**"No, I've been here thirty years."**  
**"I mean are you ready for Judgment Day?"**  
**"When is it?"**  
**"It could be today or tomorrow."**  
**"Well, when you find out for sure when it is, you let me know.**  
**My wife will probably want to go both days."**

**Are we guilty of not communicating clearly in a language that is understood by those we’re trying to reach?**

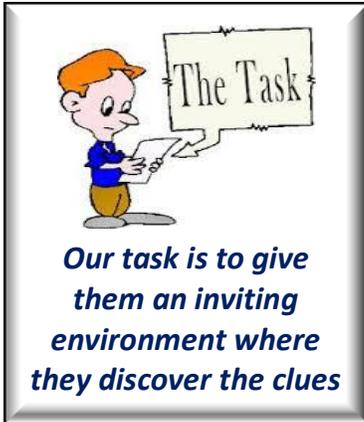
Do you understand the dilemma for this farmer? His wavelength was completely different from that of the lady. From then on it wasn’t going to bring a reasonable result. Are we guilty of not communicating clearly in a language that is understood by those we’re trying to reach? If we’re salt and light to our world we must be in our world where we’ve contact with those who don’t have a relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ. We must ensure we speak in a way they appreciate and understand. This is particularly true in our age where so many’ve never stepped foot in a church, never heard the name “Jesus” except as a swear word, never heard the good news they’re loved and lovable having a purpose in relationship with the creator of the universe. They’ve never heard they’re forgiven. In conquering the challenges that face the 21<sup>st</sup> century church perhaps the biggest challenge for us is reaching those under 35 recognizing that ***they will not wait long for the church to get it right!*** With so many competing and compelling options for how they’ll spend their lives they’re not looking for a rehashed look at themselves in the world, they’re not seeking external moral standards that seem incapable of affecting our own behaviour, their looking for the salt and light that Jesus offers through His Sermon on the Mount that changes hearts, encourages genuine love and enables behaviour to be a reflection of our Living God. Many of our children can be counted among those who’re looking. And yes, alongside these are the marginalized of society – the poor and broken; the single mother struggling to raise her family, the woman abused and neglected left believing it’s all her own fault – feeling shame and anger and fear and not knowing anyone cares. What message have we? Church missiologist and president of *Lifeway Research* Ed Stetzer tells us...

**Those under 35 looking for the salt and light that Jesus offers that changes hearts, encourages genuine love and enables behaviour to be a reflection of our Living God.**

*I think the two biggest challenges are nominalism and secularism. Nominalism is the idea that people are Christians in name only (Nominal Christians). As that category begins to decline, and in a sense, I am glad to see it go, it means that people will either move towards secularism, or be reached for the gospel, or for some other religious value. One of the challenges is that the church is not readily equipped to engage secular people and will have to do more to train people to evangelize the “far-unchurched.” We are accustomed to evangelizing the “near-unchurched:” people who have perhaps been to church, dropped out because of a bad experience, but are familiar with terms, language, and emphases.*

This isn’t to suggest those in the world around us aren’t interested in spiritual matters. Most have some concept of a spiritual world yet many are confused readily buying tales through media and other distorted

offerings. Their decline in attendance is more about distractions and living in a modularized world than an absence of wonder and knowledge – they are informed, they do have opinions yet they're offered many options ~ our task is to give them an inviting environment where they discover the clues they'll need to feel welcomed and not judged; to determine this place we call "church" has clarity and purpose to offer to their life.



If we're God's healthy growing church we'll connect with and engage both the "far-unchurched" and "near-unchurched"- those within our families, those under 35, and those pushed out to the fringe of our society. So many have grown up with a plethora of options and opinions; the marginalized have fallen into a place where they believe they've no voice and therefore neither believe they have any options nor offer any opinion when it comes to the church. How do you reach those who have for so long heard loud and clear, "**Need not apply!**" As God's Church we must be equipped to engage them in fresh, purposeful ways that clearly connect with them and their struggles.

**Relevance** - Kendall Conner writes,

*"The continual danger confronting the church is irrelevancy. We live in a world filled with innovation and ever-changing technology. In the midst of this fast-paced modernization, the local church is often left behind as it's seen as stuck in the past and irrelevant to 21st century life. I believe many of the unchurched don't necessarily have a problem with Christianity.*



*Rather, they simply cannot fathom how the Church could possibly fit into their modern day life."*

What's it they see when they look at us as God's Church? What distinctive flavour and light are we bringing to our world today? If we're ignored is it because we're truly preaching the beautiful word of "*the message of Jesus Christ and Him crucified*" or because we're deemed by those who are watching us irrelevant ~ **an anemic version of them?**

### ***What traits are holding us back from revealing Christ?***

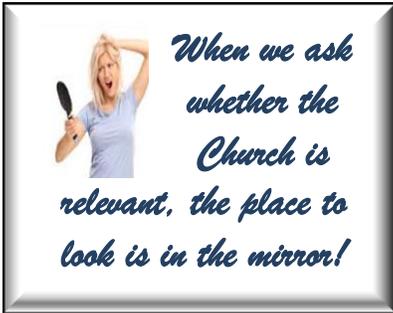
1. **Spiritual Lethargy** – we lack vitality because we fail to obey the God we profess to follow. We're not growing spiritually (many believing at least subconsciously we've arrived) and that lack of spiritual growth leads to us not being salt and light with those we meet.
2. **Pluralistic faith** – One of the fastest-growing systems for faith today is pluralism (the concept all religions lead to God and are equally valid). The subtle belief shown among many in the Church that somehow "good" behaviour wins us a place in heaven rather than true Christian conversion demonstrates to those we're trying to reach that we believe the same as them – so why change?
3. **Disbelief in God's Claims of a Real Hell** – I'm told only 26% of self-proclaimed Christians accept that Hell and Satan are actually real. If as the body of Christ we've forsaken the message of real danger and real need for a Redeemer, what message do we tell others?
4. **Fear of Rejection** – If those looking at the Church for any answer at all see trepidation and fear how can they believe we're "*more than conquerors*"? We should fear rejection if we go out with a "holier than thou" attitude judging and criticizing but what would happen if we, like Christ demonstrated compassion, grace and concern for our neighbour? In the end perhaps we've built the wall of rejection as an excuse against going and telling as we were commissioned to do by Jesus.

So when we ask whether the Church is relevant, having an impact on the world the place to look is in the mirror. In a recent email, Gabriella Hoogstra from WRRRC gave this challenge, "*There is much in our lives which we cannot control; intentionally cultivating gratitude in ourselves is something we each can do.*" It's a reminder each of us holds the capacity to be that first gleam of light shining in the dawn, becoming brighter till the full light of day breaks upon our world. It's a reminder as we cultivate fields for the harvest with gratitude, empathy and compassion,

***"There is much in our lives which we cannot control; intentionally cultivating gratitude in ourselves is something we each can do."***

~ Gabriella Hoogstra, WRRRC

we'll be something the world at our door can't resist. They'll find a thirst as they taste the salt and they'll find their way as they're led out of darkness into the joy of knowing Christ. Dr. Thom Rainer, president and CEO of *LifeWay Christian Resources* of the Southern Baptist Convention tells us, "*One of the key reasons we do not reach the unchurched is that most Christians in America are members of churches that do not reach the unchurched.*" Will we answer the call to be salt and light? Those around our doors desire conversation about spiritual matters. Many believe the Jesus we know and trust may have answers for them but they've been told so



do many others. In the midst of their queries I believe they're overwhelmed, distracted, exhausted, and mistrusting. Are we willing to walk beside them letting them begin their journey in finding faith on their terms? Are we willing to give them room to tell us how to connect to meet their needs? If we are we must be authentic and must accommodate their need for reflection and connection.

*Hey, isn't that what Jesus did for you and me?*

If you would like to discuss this further, give us a call or send us an email. We'd love to hear from you.



*Blessings,  
Pastor Dave*