



Building an
Outreach
Ministry
to Your
Community

How to Grow Your Church
by Ministering to People

Tyrone Barnette
THOM S. RAINER, SERIES EDITOR

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A Tyndale nonfiction imprint

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

A catalog record for this book is available from the Library of Congress.

ISBN 978-1-4964-6702-7

Printed in the United States of America

29	28	27	26	25	24	23
7	6	5	4	3	2	1

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Introduction

Outreach Is Our Family Business

MY PREOCCUPATION WITH OUTREACH started when I was nine years old. I awoke one morning to the sound of weeping in the kitchen. I crept toward the hallway and peeked around the corner to see my mother and father seated at the table with a young woman. She was the source of the sobbing, and I noticed she was holding a napkin stained with blood.

For a few moments, I listened undetected to their conversation and discovered that she had been beaten by her husband or boyfriend and had run to our house seeking my parents' protection and support. My parents were known in the community for their openhanded love and compassion for anyone in need. I recall feeling proud to be their son and that our home was seen as a safe place for anyone needing comfort.

Throughout my life, my family has modeled sacrificial love, especially to the marginalized in society. I grew up watching my mother volunteer at women's shelters in our small town in North Carolina. Even into her seventies, she still works with patients experiencing memory loss. My father and grandfather hired men who were suffering with alcohol addiction as day laborers in their

construction business. My maternal grandparents employed young men and women who needed a job to work on their farm and gave them a place to sleep for weeks until they could fend for themselves.

My family members weren't motivated by political or social ideology. They gave themselves away unselfishly because they had internalized and responded to the call of God to reach their community and share the love of Christ. They were inspired by our little church and the faithful preaching of pastors who continually challenged us to go and make disciples for Christ. Despite limited resources and a lack of formal ministerial training, they did many other magnanimous things as well.

Somehow I always knew that their example would inspire and inform my own life's mission. You could say that helping others is our family business.

Outreach: It's Your Family Business Too

If I may be so bold: Outreach should be *your* family business as well. The command to “go and make disciples” (Matthew 28:19) was not just a directive for the original disciples or for today's clergy. It is a mandate for every one of us to use our lives as conduits of God's grace to those in need. Christ intends for us to invest whatever gifts or opportunities he has granted us to advance his Kingdom. We are called to reach every tribe, every tongue, every nation—starting with our own neighborhoods.

Many books have been written to encourage Christians to reach their communities through evangelism. They suggest dozens of ideas and concepts suited to their particular setting. However, I've learned that successful strategies in New York may not translate well in Kentucky. A community cookout that works in Texas may not have the same success on a beach in California—though I

don't know many people who can resist a good barbecue. Outreach and evangelism are not cookie-cutter endeavors. From church to church, each expression will look different.

In these pages you will not find geographic, racial, or cultural ideas that work only in a specific context. We will explore God's mandate to reach the world by using time-tested, biblically supported principles that any church—of any size, location, or age—can immediately use.

I will attempt to challenge the way we think about outreach. I will question how we view our church, its leaders, and the members' responsibility to the Great Commission. We'll discover new ways to view our communities—especially the difficult, hard-to-reach areas—and prayerfully learn that God can take the little we have and multiply his Kingdom beyond our wildest dreams.

The church is the only hope for redeeming and renewing the world. It has its flaws and imperfections in how it proclaims the power of God and carries out his mission on earth; but Jesus loves the church—it's his body—and he has equipped his church with not only defensive spiritual armor, but with the powerful offensive weapon of his Word to challenge the very powers of hell (Ephesians 6:14-17). The church's mission is not to just hold our ground and march in place, but to take back territory that is occupied by the enemy. Christ calls us to work in partnership with him to transform any person or any culture, and to confront any issue that prevents humanity from reflecting God's glory.

I've chosen to frame our discourse by using the one miracle (other than the resurrection of Jesus) recorded in all four Gospels: the feeding of the five thousand. I don't believe it's a coincidence that Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John all include this event in their accounts of the life of Jesus.

This significant miracle gives us insight into how we can advance our evangelistic mandate and execute dynamic outreach work now and throughout time. It shows us how to use the resources we have by relying on Christ's power to multiply our efforts. Christ's example teaches us that any church or individual—no matter their age, background, or environment—can meet the demands of a hungry world and fill people with the life-giving bread he offers.

People are hungry. The majority are starving. Sadly, they crave things from this world's system that will never satisfy and only leave them thirsting for something more. The church of Jesus Christ has been equipped with the sustenance they need. The gospel will quench their thirst and gratify their hunger. But we must believe that what we have to offer is enough and sufficient.

When I was growing up, my family didn't have a lot of the material wealth this world relies on to address human needs. My parents believed that what Christ had put in their hands was sufficient. And they were not afraid to give their best to Christ and trust that he could cause it to flourish if they would simply release it.

For three decades I have pastored one church. In that time, I have attempted to live out the principles that transformed a gathering of fourteen adults in my living room into a congregation of more than three thousand ordinary men, women, and young people who have witnessed the miracle of multiplication, not only in our church but in our community and around the world as well. We have not mastered outreach—we are certainly still learning; but I'm grateful to God for entrusting to me one of the most loving and forgiving communities of believers to join me in distributing Christ's life-giving bread.

I long for your church to become a place of refuge like my childhood home. I pray that your church will stand as a beacon of hope for all who long for relief and rescue from the darkness

that envelops far too many. I also pray that you will experience the phenomenal release of God's power in your life as Christ reveals the miracle of multiplication.

How the Book Is Organized

I got the idea for a book about the miracle of the feeding of the five thousand the last time I visited Israel. As I sat on the Bethsaida hillside that is believed to be where this miracle occurred, I visualized Jesus, the disciples, and the horde of humanity assembled there. I saw a clear picture of how God wants to use us, his church, to respond to the hunger that swells up from deep within the souls of people in our community. I made an immediate connection between how Jesus responded to their needs and how we must respond today.

In Part I, we will look at specific Scripture verses explaining what Jesus did while performing this miracle. I will identify principles of outreach that can help us in our quest to reach our communities with the living bread of the gospel. At the end of each chapter, brief prayers or exercises will help you integrate the lesson into your own life and ministry.

Part II consists of practical ways that a church or individual can apply these principles in their community. Since the COVID-19 pandemic, the world has radically changed. Patterns of church attendance, giving, discipleship, and worship look different today than at the beginning of 2020. Yet God still expects us to reach the world and fulfill our Great Commission directive from Matthew 28:19-20. I'll offer suggestions to help you pivot into this "new normal."

At the ends of certain chapters, you will find interviews with critical thinkers and gospel practitioners who share their insights concerning outreach and evangelism. You will glean wisdom from a professor, a church planter, pastors, and parachurch practitioners with decades of experience.

My hope is that this book will renew your passion for ministry and inspire you and your church to pursue transformative engagement with your community. I'm excited to see how the church and community can intersect today in what I am calling a technological reformation. Let's embrace these technological and cultural changes and emerge stronger than ever to deliver the Bread of Life to spiritually starving people who need to be fed.

Jesus Feeds Five Thousand

As soon as Jesus heard the news, he left in a boat to a remote area to be alone. But the crowds heard where he was headed and followed on foot from many towns. Jesus saw the huge crowd as he stepped from the boat, and he had compassion on them and healed their sick.

That evening the disciples came to him and said, "This is a remote place, and it's already getting late. Send the crowds away so they can go to the villages and buy food for themselves."

But Jesus said, "That isn't necessary—you feed them."

"But we have only five loaves of bread and two fish!" they answered.

"Bring them here," he said. Then he told the people to sit down on the grass. Jesus took the five loaves and two fish, looked up toward heaven, and blessed them. Then, breaking the loaves into pieces, he gave the bread to the disciples, who distributed it to the people. They all ate as much as they wanted, and afterward, the disciples picked up twelve baskets of leftovers. About 5,000 men were fed that day, in addition to all the women and children!

MATTHEW 14:13-21

PART I

**HOW JESUS REACHED
HIS COMMUNITY**

Ministry Can Happen Anywhere

As soon as Jesus heard the news, he left in a boat to a remote area to be alone. But the crowds heard where he was headed and followed on foot from many towns.

MATTHEW 14:13 (EMPHASIS ADDED)

I RECENTLY HAD A CONVERSATION with a pastor of a small rural church in South Georgia. His church was experiencing what he described as a season of coasting along and drifting. He attributed this melancholy ministry mood to the fact that the church was in a small town with one high school, one McDonald's, and a short drive to the nearest Walmart in the next town. He had resigned himself to believing that the church would not grow because it had been planted years ago in a deserted place that provided few opportunities for innovative ministry to be established.

Not long after that conversation, I spoke to another pastor who ministered in the inner city of Indianapolis, Indiana. He had a similar complaint that it was nearly impossible to grow the church because it was in the poorest section of the city and had an out-of-control crime rate that hindered his ability to make a significant

impact. He longed to convince the church to sell its property and move out to the suburbs near a popular mall so the church could finally grow.

Sadly, this is the attitude of many leaders. They follow the advice of real estate agents who say the most important factor in finding a good home is location, location, location. This belief is pervasive among church leadership, regardless of the church setting. I have heard this sentiment from leaders and congregants alike whether the church is in a rural area, in a population-rich urban center, or in a growing suburban community with homes valued well above the national average.

Many have subscribed to the notion that “we can’t grow here” because the location is not picture-perfect. They envy the ministry in the next town or state that seems to be in the ideal community. They imagine what it would be like to have a community with better demographics, newly constructed homes, and modern infrastructure. And those churches in the model communities with all the cutting-edge advantages are frustrated because they coexist with disengaged residents who have no time for, or interest in, church. These suburban pastors yearn for smaller places where true community and relationships can form like in a Norman Rockwell painting.

But Jesus shows us in the feeding of the five thousand that ministry can bloom and blossom anywhere. Even in a solitary and remote place.

Luke’s account prefaces the miracle by stating that Jesus “slipped quietly away with [the disciples] toward the town of Bethsaida” (Luke 9:10). He was seeking out a place for quiet rest. This miracle happens in an area that should not have experienced this measure of success. There were no grocery stores, no gardens or farms, and no access to supplies of any kind. Yet, Jesus feeds five thousand plus without calling Uber Eats or DoorDash or relocating anyone.

Now there are legitimate reasons to relocate a church once it has outgrown the current space, or there's a desire to reach a new target group, or the area has become too industrial or commercial. However, in my experience, though the motive to move may be reasonable, many churches move without fully exploring the opportunities at their current facility.

Expanding to two or three worship times could provide the necessary growth potential without a physical move. Other options include going multisite or starting a weeknight service, as many churches now do. Adding a weeknight service has become a viable alternative to relocation for some ministries in communities where many residents work on the weekends. A weeknight worship service also accommodates people who may be traveling that weekend.

Ministry can happen anywhere. Take time to examine your neighborhood with fresh eyes, and allow God to show you opportunities that await your discovery. When churches are inwardly focused, they almost completely prioritize keeping the current members satisfied and put little effort into reaching new people who are just outside the doors.

As Tony Morgan writes in his book *The Unstuck Church*, "Many churches don't have a strategy; they have mission statements. They know why they exist. They have a vision. They know where they believe God has called their ministries to be in the future. What they don't have is a strategy on how to accomplish that vision. Without a clearly defined strategy, churches gravitate toward what they've always done. . . . With every iteration of the vision, more things are added, but nothing is ever subtracted."¹

So the answer for church health and growth may not be adding new programs or relocating to what appears to be greener pastures on the other side of town. Instead, it may be to clarify a strategy for

how the church in its current state and location can reach its community and become more outwardly focused. This might require eliminating some existing programs to have energy and margin to connect with the neighbors and new people groups right where the church is located.

Don't consider a move until you have explored and exhausted every opportunity to evangelize the community your church is in. Jesus said in John 4:35, "Wake up and look around. The fields are already ripe for harvest." Ministry can happen anywhere!

Thank God for where he has called you. Express your gratitude, apprehension, and anticipation for what he will do with you there. Pray for your church that it will take full advantage of the opportunities that have been and will be presented to it over the next year.