
5 Ways To B.L.E.S.S. Your Neighbors

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*An edited transcript of a message
given at the Verge Conference*

Act Your Way Into A New Way Of Thinking

Eighty percent of people will act their way into a new way of thinking and behaving.

This past year I got to write a book with Alan Hirsch. And I remember we were in the middle of writing chapter 6 and he leaned across the table and Alan said, "Eighty percent of the people will act, not think, not be taught, but will act their way into a new way of thinking and behaving."

Two thoughts immediately came to mind. First of all, I think he just made that up. Because as you know, 85% of all stats are made up on the spot. Right?

But secondly, I thought, "What if it's true?" As a practitioner and also a pastor who wants to see every person in my church engaged in mission, this has huge

significance. And if it's true, how do I get that to happen? How do I get 80% of the people to act their way into a new way of thinking and behaving when it comes to missional and incarnational living?

Shifting The 20%

Well, I started thinking about Malcolm Gladwell's book *Tipping Point* where he talks about the best social research says that if we can get 16% or 17% of a group to change or to shift, it'll influence the whole. The 16% or 17% will actually change the other 80-some%. Then I also began to think of the life of Paul and how he led as an apostolic leader in Philippians 3:17. He says, "Dear brothers and sisters, pattern your lives after mine and learn from those who follow our example."

It was like Paul had seen the same phenomenon and he actually encourages it in leaders and influencers. He says, "Leaders, influencers, set the pattern and then watch others follow the example."

So with that thinking in mind, for the last two years, we've been on an experiment at Community Christian Church. We've put a laser light focus on the 20% at Community. The staff, the leaders, the key influencers. Why? Because we are betting that if that group will set the pattern for living, that the 80%, like Paul says, will follow their example.

If we can shift the 20% to missional, incarnational living, where God has sent them, 80% will then act their way into a new way of thinking and behaving. So here's what's happened in the last 24 months.

A Clear Understanding of Mission

Number one, we gave them a clear understanding of the mission. I think there is a lot of talk about mission, but I think it's still confusing about what exactly is the Jesus mission.

For example, some people and even here, you know what I'm talking about, community transformation and community development. And we go, "Yeah!" Other people, you hear them talk about evangelism. That's the Jesus mission. We go, "Yeah."

And if you were to ask me about what's the mission, I couldn't help but talk about, like Alan would, movement. We have to have a movement. So what is the mission? We spent a couple of years on theology, on formation, and identity. But we also want it to be something that we could actually teach that was simple and reproducible. Easily explained.

Reach, Restore, Reproduce

We conclude that the Jesus mission can be shared in this diagram with these three words.

Here's the first word: Reach.

Part of the Jesus mission is to reach people far from God. Matthew 28:19, "Go into all the world." And we have to accept the challenge to go. To go and reach people who are headed towards a hell in this life and the next life. People far from God.

Here's the second word: Restore.

We have to restore God's dream for planet Earth. As Christ's followers, we can't just shake our heads at issues of injustice or poverty. We have to take action. I mean, Jesus said about his own mission here on Earth in Luke 4:18, "God has anointed me to bring good news to the poor."

It was a part of his mission. It has to be a part of our mission. To restore God's dream to this Earth.

And here's the third word: Reproduce.

We have to reproduce the mission in others. See, Jesus' vision was that of a movement that would spread from Jerusalem to Judea to Sumeria to the ends of the earth. And for the mission to be accomplished, there has to be a movement.

And for there to be a movement, we have to reproduce this life of others. We have to always be invested in other apprentices. Apprenticing people. Well, then you put all those things together and we told our people...we said, "That is the Jesus mission."

Now not only is that the Jesus mission, we told them, the 20%, "But that is your mission. Somewhere in there is why God made you. Your purpose. Your mission." So we gave them a clear mission.

But then we also secondly gave this 20% a clear set of missional practices. From the very beginning, God's way for reaching and restoring the world has always been through what I would call a blessing strategy.

In Genesis chapter 12, he says to Abraham, "I'm going to bless you. I'm going to make your name great. You are going to be a blessing and the people of the earth will be blessed through you."

So God blessed Abraham. Blessed him financially. Blessed him spiritually. Blessed him relationally. And he blessed him, okay, not just to receive the blessing, but he blessed him to what?

To be a blessing. And the same is true with all of us that followed after him. If that was God's strategy in the very beginning, I begin to wonder, would that work? Could simply challenging people to be a blessing accomplish the Jesus mission? Well, I ran across a fascinating study. It was actually called "Blessers versus Converters."

The study was based on two teams of missionaries that went to Thailand. And they both went to Thailand with two distinctly different missional strategies. The converters went with the sole intention of just

converting people. Evangelizing people. The blessers went with the intention of just blessing people. They said wherever God sends us, we are going to be a blessing to that place and that people.

After two years, here's what they discovered.

First, they discovered that the blessers' presence in the community resulted in tremendous amount of social good. Not so with the converters.

Secondly, and this was surprising, the blessers actually had 50 times as many conversions as the converters. The blessers helped 50 times more people find their way back to God. And the bottom line of that study was to accomplish the mission to reach and restore, we need to be blessers.

So we begin to ask, how do we, how do we in a very practical way, that's theologically grounded, explain to

people how they could bless the people in places where they are incarnating? We came up with this and I'll share it with you.

We came up with this word, this acronym: B.L.E.S.S. And these are the missional practices we gave them.

B. Begin with prayer.

We want you to ask, God, how do you want me, how do you want me to bless the people in places that you've sent me to?

L. Listen.

Incarnate again. Don't talk, but listen to people. Their struggles, their pains. The people in places that God sent you."

E stands for eat.

That's my favorite. You can't just check this off. It's not

quick. You have to have a meal with people or a cup of coffee. It builds relationships.

S stands for serve.

If you listen to people, and you eat with people, they will tell you how to love them and you'll know how to S, serve them.

The last S stands for story.

When the time is right, now we talk and we share the story of how Jesus changed our life.

We asked them, "Here's what we want you to do. You do one of those missional practices every day. Just one of them. Every day. You can pick which one. And secondly, we want you to start every one of your missional groups weekly with the question of who did you bless this week? Just answer the question. Who did you bless this week?"

Well, as one of the leaders and influencers, I had to start integrating these practices into my own life. And I'll tell you, things started changing for me.

Specifically, I actually started praying for my neighbors. And as Sue, my wife, and I began to pray for our neighbors, we noticed that we became much more intentional about building relationships with them. About listening, and eating with them.

Just like this last fall, I mean. For the first time...we should have been doing this long ago. At Halloween, we had them come over and in the drive way, we set up the fire pit. My wife made chili. Together, me and my neighbors we passed out trick-or-treats. We sat and talked for three or four hours. We passed out candy.

That was probably more time I spent talking to my neighbors than I had in probably the previous two years. We went to trips to Starbucks. At Christmas time, we have them over for dessert. We went to a musical

together. And it was like, imagine this, I was becoming friends with my neighbors.

Well, a few weeks ago, I was out walking my dog, Cody. I don't normally talk about my dog. It's kind of a family secret. We have this dog that we have shared custody with. There's this guy named Dale in our church who whenever we're gone, he always takes care of our dog. And he totally spoils the dog.

He feeds Cody steak. He lets him sleep with him. I mean, just totally spoils him so when Cody comes back to our house, he walks in the door and he's depressed.

He walks over to his bed. I'm not kidding, he walks over to the bed and he looks at me. And he just looks at me with these eyes like, "This place sucks."

So, I'm walking our dog. I'm walking our dog and my neighbor comes out. Now we've lived in the same

neighborhood for seven or eight years now. And in the last year, she was diagnosed with cancer, went through chemo. And it's been a tough year.

But just out of the blue now after listening and eating, she says to me, "Hey, Dave. I remember Sue saying that you were going to write a book about finding your way back to God. Did you ever write that book?"

I swear I didn't even know she knew I authored anything. And I said, "Well, no, not yet. I'd like to. Why?" And she said, "You know. I just kind of feel like that's what I need." And then it got kind of quiet and emotional. And she said to me, "I think I'm afraid of dying."

I want you to hear this. I've lived next door to them for seven or eight years. And that was probably the first serious spiritual conversation I've had with them. And we're talking about a guy who leads a big church. A large church planning network.

And so I say that both with repentance, but also gratitude, that this is starting to change me and it's starting to change the other 20% in our church.

Now, after two years here of focusing on that 20% and getting them to make this shift, what we did this winter is we unleashed that 20% then on the other 80%. And it...and so far, it's been nothing short of amazing.

Now, it's not quite the 80% that Alan promised me. All right? But I'll tell you what. Here's some exciting things. We're getting close. Right now, and we try to keep track of this stuff, 75% of our people are in missional groups.

Seventy-three percent of those groups have a clearly stated mission that they've stood on a stage like this at one of our campuses and articulated to the rest of the church that they want to be held accountable for in their communities, their neighborhoods, in their workplaces.

They were prayed for and anointed by our leaders and they are on mission. Now, I don't want to oversell this, because here's the truth. We have a long way to go. It's just starting to get traction. But I just want to tell you this.

Your church can make this missional incarnational shift. And remember this. Focus on the 20%. Focus on them and 80% of the people will then act their way into a new way of thinking and behaving.

About the Author



Dave Ferguson is a founding pastor of Community Christian Church; an innovative multi-site missional church with eleven locations locally that have grown in average attendance from 5 to over 5, 500 since it's beginning 20 years ago. CCC empowers over 800 lay leaders to oversee difference-making ministry throughout Chicagoland. Dave is the visionary and Movement Leader for the NewThing Network (www.newthing.org) whose passion is “to be a catalyst for a movement of reproducing churches relentlessly dedicated to helping people find their way back to God.”

Dave is the co-author of *The BIG IDEA – Focus the Message, Maximize the Impact* published by Zondervan in 2007, *Exponential: How you and your friends can start a missional church* in 2010 and his new book *On The Verge: The Apostolic Future of the Church* with Alan Hirsch in 2011. Check out the latest from Dave on his blog www.daveferguson.org or follow him at twitter.com/daveferguson