

# **Becoming the Best Church for Your Community**

(in 2 Simple Steps)



**GENEROUSCHURCH**

GenerousChurch.com

**IS YOUR CHURCH HAVING THE TYPE OF IMPACT** on the community that you desire?

If you are like most church leaders, the answer to that question is a sheepish...*not really*.

We all know that the church was never designed to be a country club. We know that the church was not created for seclusion and isolation. A cursory reading of the book of Acts tells us that much.

God developed the church with expansion in mind. He developed the church for the purpose of sending and making disciples. He wanted the church to expand from Jerusalem to Judea and to the ends of the earth. In fact, this mission was so important to Him that God told us that as we joined Him on this mission, He would equip us with *His* authority and power. In other words, as we join Him in this mission, we will receive His muscle to complete it.

Unfortunately, our natural tendency is to stick with what we know. Whether we admit it or not, we like the status quo. We want to be around people who are like us. We desire comfort and don't necessarily want our surroundings to change.

That's human nature.

But, it's not God's plan for the church.

## **The Invisible Fence**

**A FEW YEARS AGO, SOME FRIENDS OF** mine bought an invisible fence for their dogs. Rather than erecting an old-school wooden or chain link fence, they decided to keep the open feel of

their yard and bury an invisible, electric fence underground.

The company that installed this fence tied into the electrical panel of the home, buried the wire under a selected area of the property and posted little white flags along the boundary. After the invisible fence was activated, they told my friends to walk the dogs up to the white flags, touch the flags and forcefully say, "No." Next, they were to put the shock collars on the dogs and gently lead them toward the boundary to show them the dangers of the white flag area.

For my friends, this worked like magic. The dogs felt a minor electrical impulse as they approached the invisible fence and they wanted nothing to do with the boundary. Eventually, when the dogs were used to their boundaries, the white flags were removed.

Even though there was no physical barrier between the dogs and people walking down the street, the dogs would not leave their property. Even though unrestricted freedom was clearly in view, they refused to cross the line of the invisible fence.

After several months of this training, my friends rarely put the shock collars on the dogs anymore. Even without their collars, the dogs would carefully avoid the invisible fence. The instincts of the dogs were altered by their months of training.

You can probably see where I am going with this. In the church, we tend to follow the same pattern. The longer a church is around, the more we erect an invisible fence between us and our communities.

This is not an intentional process, it just happens. We go out of our way to help a stranger and later learn that our resources have

been abused...so we erect an invisible fence. *"We won't do that anymore. Fool me once, shame on you. Fool me twice..."*

At other times, we've spoken the truth of God's Word with love and have had it thrown back in our faces. We've attempted to work with community leaders and have been overlooked. We have made attempts to do the right things, but when the results weren't what we expected...we erect invisible fences. *"We'll just hold the event at our building. We didn't need them anyway."* And one more fence is built.

Over the course of many months and years, when we see the white flags, hear the word "No" and feel the shock of rejection, we decide that the outside world is dangerous. Therefore, we focus on improving ourselves; constructing our projects; enjoying our kind of people.

There's only one problem.

God is not in the business of building fences. He's in the business of building bridges.

Jesus is a bridge-builder. He said things like, "I am the Way" to indicate that He is the bridge from brokenness to healing; from being lost to being saved; from wrath to grace.

When the 1<sup>st</sup> century religious leaders wanted to stone a woman for committing adultery, Jesus gave her a bridge to God. When a prostitute washed Jesus's feet with her tears, the holy men were outraged. They wanted to erect a fence. But, Jesus said, "I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven—for she loved much. But he who has been forgiven little loves little" (Luke 7:47). He offered a bridge. When the world needed a Savior, Jesus became poor for our sakes so that through His poverty, we could become rich (2 Corinthians 8:9). He wrapped Himself in flesh,

stepped into our world of pain, and offered a bridge to the Father.

*Isn't that closely related to our mission as the church?*

In the Body of Christ – the physical representation of Jesus on earth today – we need bridge builders. We need people who are willing to run through the pain of the invisible fence in order to extend God's provisions, justice, mercy, love and truth. Our communities need churches that are willing – at the risk of personal sacrifices – to extend the Kingdom of God.

## It's About the Kingdom

IN HIS BOOK, *KINGDOM MATRIX*, Jeff Christopherson makes an incredibly important point about the Church and God's Kingdom. He says,

Here is the rub. As much as I love the local church, I have to remind myself that the local church was never meant to be the goal. The local body of Christ is a *tool* to advance the Kingdom of God. Local churches are temporary; they have a life cycle, a shelf life...[but] The Kingdom of God is eternal. It began before time started ticking and will continue long after our planet has expired.<sup>i</sup>

The Kingdom is God's goal. He desires that all people would live under His reign and feast on His abundance. He wants the world to know His glory. Those desires are fulfilled through the

Kingdom; the church is the vehicle to get them there.

In the gospels, Jesus makes this very clear through His teachings. Throughout Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, we have only three (3) recorded times that Jesus mentions the church. In contrast, across those same books, He mentions the “Kingdom of God” or “Kingdom of Heaven” eighty four (yes – 84) times.

*It’s about the Kingdom.*

So, how can we – as the Body of Christ – move beyond the invisible fences around us and advance the Kingdom? How can we transform our churches from safe-havens for believers to community-wide and city-wide catalysts for the Kingdom?

Here’s the hard news: Someone has to run through the fence. You know what I’m talking about. There is always one crazy dog in each neighborhood. After his owners erect an invisible fence, he learns that he can run fast enough to penetrate the barrier.

The first trip through the electrical current is never pleasant. He may yelp and flop around a little bit. His dog buddies may laugh at him and make jokes. But, after a brief moment of fear, he’s free to roam the neighborhood. He’s free to follow his dog-instincts. And from that point forward, he knows how to get a running start so that he can move back and forth across the fence with very little pain.

Someone in our churches – whether it is a pastor or a Kingdom champion – needs to show people how to live outside the fence. Someone needs to be the first to risk momentary personal pain for the good of those in the community. Someone has to show the rest of the church what it looks like to live freely, under the reign

of God rather than under the reign of fear. Someone has to show them that there is more to the Kingdom than playing-it-safe.

***That is step 1 in unleashing your church in the community: Run through the invisible fence into your neighborhood.*** This may be the toughest part of the process of becoming the best church for your community. Breaking through the invisible fence may be the hardest thing that you do as you seek to unleash your church in the community.

The next step, however, is fun (and also clearly defined by Jesus).

Once our churches start moving people through the invisible fence, Jesus says there is a simple way to advance the Kingdom. ***Step 2 is to demonstrate the visible Kingdom through love, service and generosity.*** Maybe a more familiar way to say that is to say “love your neighbor as yourself and serve those around you.”

If we want our churches to become great, we must take them outside of the fence and teach them how to lovingly serve others. In other words, we move them beyond the invisible barriers and help them to display the visible Kingdom through selfless generosity.

## The Visible Kingdom

**LET ME GIVE YOU AN EXAMPLE** of how this works. One small church in Mississippi felt the prompt from God to give away all of their offerings for one entire year. *I know...that’s a little radical.* But, I want you to see how it brought the Kingdom of God to life for people in the community.

Although their offerings were much smaller than many churches, they were able to invest approximately \$60,000 in their neighbors over the course of twelve months. During that year, their church was truly unleashed on the community...and this is one of their stories:

In the middle of this project to help the hurting, a leader in our church nominated a friend for help. Donna and her husband were struggling to stay financially afloat. He was battling liver cancer and had endured debilitating side effects as the cancer was treated. Operations and ongoing medical treatments for the liver cancer forced him to leave his job, and although Donna was working full time, they could not cover their expenses. It would be several weeks before his disability income would be available to them.

During this time of crisis, Donna approached her friend from our church with tears in her eyes. It was a humbling moment, but she desperately needed help. Within a few days, our church was able to bridge the financial gap for them as they waited on his disability income. But God was orchestrating more than a transfer of funds. He was preparing this family for a valuable, loving friendship.

The weekend after we began assisting Donna's family, a couple joined our church from another local congregation. Phillip and Ginger agonized over leaving their

church home but knew that God wanted them to join his work at Traceway. They did not know anything about our work with Donna's family and had no intentions of intervening in this situation. But God had other plans. He brought them to Traceway with a missional assignment already in place.

Ginger came into our church as a survivor. Over twenty years prior, she had endured a liver transplant and now was able to boast that she was the longest surviving single transplant patient in the state. So, when Donna visited Traceway for the first time, she was able to connect with one of the only liver transplant survivors in our city. She found encouragement, and Ginger found a new outlet for sharing the love of God.

God was displaying the wealth of his kingdom.<sup>ii</sup>

Another great example of the visible Kingdom is seen through Antioch Community Church in Waco, Texas. Jimmy Siebert, the Senior Leader, has been a catalyst for advancing the Kingdom of God across the world. And since 1999, he has led Antioch to love their local neighbors through very tangible acts of generosity. He says:

Our journey in sharing Jesus with our city started out by identifying 350 homes nearby. We would go door-to-door sharing the gospel, praying for the sick, encouraging people and starting Backyard Bible

Clubs with kids. When word got out that we were a church who loved our neighbors, people started seeking our help. We eventually saw so many benevolent needs coming through our door that we started the Care Center, an outreach that allowed us to provide food, clothing and counseling for those in need. While many times we were able to give financial assistance, our goal was always to help people find long-term solutions through counseling and personal care.

Our heart is not to be a church with missionaries, but to be a church with a mission. Still today, we want to be driven by the purposes of Jesus, whether we are at home or in a foreign country. Focusing energy, love and attention on our neighbors here in Waco is our heart's investment in what God has placed before us. Even as we aggressively send people around the world, we desire first to go to our neighbors.

iii

When churches focus on generously serving their communities, people take note.

On the other hand, even non-believers have a growing sense of frustration over consumeristic churches. People throughout our neighborhoods are frustrated with the fact that Christians make great claims about a great God, when He can't be seen through the church. These people – often curious about God because of what they have seen in creation and science – want more than a dogmatic statement

of faith. They want to see the tangible outcomes of a church that loves each other while they are serving their community. They want to see the generosity of God in action. They want to experience a church that builds bridges to God instead of fences for members.

Andy Stanley says it this way: “The church thrives when it moves from declaration to demonstration.” And the demonstration that God calls us to show is a demonstration of love and service...a demonstration of His remarkable generosity.

## Nothing New Here

**LET'S BE HONEST. WE KNOW THIS STUFF.** This is not new information. In fact, many of our churches include a mission statement or a motto that reminds us to carry on Jesus's mission of loving people. We proclaim the Great Commandment with enthusiasm and adopt the Great Commission as our vision. We want to go to the ends of the earth, making disciples. We want to express the love of God to people around us.

The remarkable thing is that when we take these ideas a step further, we can see that our unchurched friends and neighbors desire the same thing. They desire to see the church living out the ways of Jesus. They desire to see a church that actively engages the community rather than one that stands curiously separated from the community.

When Jeff Christopherson was getting ready to launch a new church in Toronto, Canada, he decided that their core team (4 families) should “close the door” to other evangelical families.

He wanted the church to reflect the city – and most people in the area were far from God.

Therefore, the core planting team for The Sanctuary began initiating relationships with co-workers, neighbors and those that they met through ministry projects. After six months of developing these relationships, they had developed a sizable group of unchurched people who trusted them and their intentions.

Therefore, they asked these individuals to gather in a community center to share a meal and offer their insights on this new church. They assured them that no one would be embarrassed or put on the spot.

After sharing a meal of lasagna of salad, Jeff initiated the conversation with one simple question: “How would you describe your ideal spiritual community?” After a few moments of awkward silence, some of the group began to respond.

Unchurched person after unchurched person stood up and shared a picture of the ideal spiritual community. These were the three most common themes:

1. God would be important every day – not just one day
2. It would be a spiritual community that would care for the physical, emotional and spiritual needs of each other.
3. It would be a spiritual community that took responsibility for the greater community.<sup>iv</sup>

Jeff stood in amazement as those people who were far from God described the church in Acts. He was amazed that they described the ideal

spiritual community in the same way that the Word of God describes the church.

When the core members of The Sanctuary ran through the invisible fence and got to know their neighbors, they realized that these people were hungry for a spiritual community that demonstrated God’s love to each other and engaged the larger community with His generosity.

Remarkably, over the next twelve months, 52 of those 60 unchurched people were baptized and over the course of the next 9 years, those individuals went on to plant 9 new churches in the Toronto area.

The men and women of The Sanctuary were not doing anything new. They were simply doing what the church always does in its better moments: They were stepping out on faith (rather than living in fear) and they were loving their neighbors...out loud.

## Doing the Two Step

**SO, WHAT IS IT GOING TO TAKE** for you to change your answer to the initial question? What do you – and the members of your church – need to do in order to have the type of impact on your community that you desire?

God has promised that as we imitate Him and as we teach others to do the same, His power and authority goes with us. He has also reminded us that His Kingdom starts through people like you and me. Although we may feel insignificant at times, God indicates that our insignificance is no problem for Him. In fact, it is a good thing. Because the Kingdom of God starts small – like a

dash of yeast in several pounds of dough – but it eventually works its way through the entire batch.

Are you ready to become the best church for your community? If so, it's time for you to do the two step:

## **Step 1 – Run through the invisible fence into the community.**

## **Step 2 – Demonstrate the visible Kingdom through love, service and generosity.**

*There are several ways that you can engage in this process of becoming the best possible church for your community. For example, you may want to consider two sermon series on this topic with one set of sermons dedicated to “penetrating the invisible fence” and another dedicated to “demonstrating the generous heart of Go.” You could begin to engage your community in an entirely new manner! See the last couple of pages in this ePaper for a list of ideas and resources to consider for both of the mentioned steps.*



Want to go deeper in the area of Biblical generosity? Download these additional free ePapers from GenerousChurch:

- [7 Attributes of a Generous Church](#)
- [The Generosity Ladder](#)
- [Assessing the Financial and Spiritual Health of Your Church](#)
- [Recognizing and Imitating the Generosity of God](#)
- [Why You Cannot Make Disciples Apart from Generosity](#)
- [How to Preach on Money, Stewardship and Generosity](#)
- [Wrestling with the Tithe](#)
- [The UNcampaign](#)

<sup>i</sup> Christopherson, Jeff. *Kingdom Matrix*, Russell Media, 2012. Pp. 50-51.

<sup>ii</sup> Richardson, John. *Giving Away the Collection Plate*, Tate Publishing, 2012. Pp. 89-90.

<sup>iii</sup> Seibert, Jimmy. *The Church Can Change the World*, Antioch Community Church, 2008. Pp. 169-170.

<sup>iv</sup> Christopherson, Jeff. *Kingdom Matrix*, Russell Media, 2012. Pg. 70.

---

# Resources

## **Step 1 Ideas for Your Church**

1. Talk to your community leaders about opening your church building for community events and then make sure you attend those events to meet others.
2. Go out of your way to make friends outside of the church – invite neighbors over for dinner, invite co-workers to a local parade, etc.
3. Become a regular at a store or bank and engage the employees in friendly conversation.
4. Plan a church “play day” at a local park and invite friends and neighbors to join you.
5. Go Reverse Tick-or-Treating” and instead of seeking candy, introduce yourself to your neighbors and give them a card with your phone number included in case they ever need anything.

## **Step 2 Resources for Your Church**

1. “How Generous Are We” Assessment from GenerousChurch (<http://www.generouschurch.com/assessment>)
2. Church-wide or small group study using Gordon MacDonald’s *Generosity* devotional and its accompanying resources (<http://www.generouschurch.com/generosity>)
3. Church-wide or small group study using Chip Ingram’s book, *The Genius of Generosity*, with its accompanying resources (<http://www.generouschurch.com/genius>)
4. Church-wide or small group study using Jeff Anderson’s book, *Plastic Donuts* and its accompanying resources (<http://www.generouschurch.com/donuts>)
5. Small group study of *The Treasure Principle* from Randy Alcorn (<http://www.epm.org/resources/2010/Mar/24/treasure-principle-resources/>)
6. *Living Generously* – a video-driven small group study from Rhemedia (<http://www.rhemedia.com/living-generously/>)
7. Inspirational videos of love, servanthood and generosity can be found at <http://ilikegiving.com/> and <http://www.generouschurch.com/videos>

---

Other questions to consider:

*Is there a local organization that aligns with our mission and values that is already serving God by serving others? If so, how could we join them in their work?*

*Does our denomination have active or on-going ministry projects in our community that we could participate in or even spearhead?*

*Should we identify a block of houses to focus our efforts on or should we should we start with an intense focus on one or two people groups (cancer victims, first responders, gas station clerks, etc.)*

*Where and when do the unchurched gather in our community and how can we serve them at that time/place?*

---

To think deeply and intentionally through this process, you may want to download the free [Servant Evangelism Planning Guide for Churches](#) from DiscipleWriter.com.