

Chapter 2

REACH THE LOST

My greatest fear growing up was getting lost. It terrified me so much at times that while hunting as a young boy I considered never going in the woods again. My fear of being lost would sometimes even cause panic attacks. One particular time, when I was about 10 years old, my dad and I were deer hunting and an awful snowstorm blew in. The day was nearly over and we had only an hour or two left of daylight. I was walking alone back to our pickup truck, far enough from my dad that I could get lost. Then, the snow became blinding. I struggled to see even a few feet in front of me. The next five minutes felt like five hours as I struggled to get my bearings. I remember feeling short of breath, fighting the panic, and trying to keep my mind focused. I was terrified of being lost in the woods during a horrible storm. By God's grace, I stepped out onto a main road and within 10 minutes after that, I made it to the truck where my dad was waiting. It took years of battling that fear to conquer it, and today I love the outdoors and the adventure of traversing God's creation.

I think back to that day and draw parallels to the world around

us now. When I see so many people lost and separated from God, my heart aches for them because I know the feeling. My stomach sinks as I consider that those who are spiritually lost have no idea of the perilous state they are in. It ignites a fire in my soul that I believe motivates me in my calling in Christian ministry.

A significant part of the discipleship process is reaching the lost. Unfortunately, what I have seen in the church today is that we alternate between two extremes. Either we establish our church structures to support a fortress mindset that appeals only to those who have made it inside the fort, or we focus solely on “getting people saved.” In either case the rest of the discipleship process is ignored or forgotten.

While I commend the courage of those who preach the gospel on a street corner or hand out literature with the path to salvation, I want to suggest a bigger and more holistic approach to our second guard-rail principle, which is reaching the lost.

When Jesus walked the earth with his disciples, his method of ministry embodied the message he preached. Did you catch that? *His methods embodied the message.* His very life reflected the truth of the gospel. The message of the gospel is woven like fabric with the threads of grace, love, truth, forgiveness, and mercy. Jesus demonstrated in tangible ways each of those concepts so that the gospel became alive. The *message* of Jesus Christ was lived out in the *method* of Jesus Christ.

Jesus lived the message of the gospel by modeling it through action. We see this in the way he diffused the situation with the woman caught in adultery, how he gently but firmly revealed the sinful lifestyle of the woman at the well, and how he marveled at the faith of the Roman Centurion and healed his servant. He was the embodiment of the message. When he told his disciples to go and preach the Kingdom of God, he meant for them to not only teach the gospel with

their words, but also to model the gospel in the way they lived their lives.

We as Christ followers are called to go and make disciples of Jesus Christ. Jesus makes this clear in the Great Commission of Matthew 28: “Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations” (Matthew 28:19-20). This passage means that our churches must reach the lost—it’s part of our calling. We must individually reach out to those who are lost and help them find their way home. Also, our church and organization structure must work in such a way that we not only reach them, but also help them connect in the church. So, go out into the world and share your life with those around you. Even more, *be* the message of Christ as you walk out the methods of Christ.

The idea of sharing your life in a way that can reach lost people may seem ambiguous. That’s why many church leaders and pastors have asked me, “How do we do that?” I tell them, “You have to choose to go after them.” That’s where it starts. The church has at times adopted a “build it and they will come” mentality. Some may join a group or attend your church on their own initiative, but most will not. You have to open up your life and get in the trenches with people. Amber and I do everything we can to connect with lost people. We invite them into our home, we have neighborhood barbeques, and we invite families from our kids’ sports teams to just hang out with us. We choose to go after people by opening up and sharing our lives with them. It’s why I titled this principle, “reach the lost” and not “catch the lost.” We have to reach out, go after, and pursue the lost by sharing our lives.

Implementing this principle starts with you as a leader. Sharing our lives with the lost must define who we are. Some argue, “Well, I do not have the gift of evangelism.” It is true that we all have different gifts, but every one of us can share our lives with the world around us. That clearly communicates that we are Christ followers. I believe

we have damaged the church by so strongly segregating spiritual gifts. Reaching the lost is everyone's job, not just one pastor that has a specific gift.

Staff and leaders in the church should model for ministry volunteers a lifestyle of sharing their faith and making disciples. This practice will then become part of the culture of a church. When we resist segregating evangelism to a department, our church body begins to live out the principle. It becomes a protective guardrail against thinking that only certain people are qualified to share their faith. Our staff, leaders, and volunteers can then work together to develop strategies and seek organic ways to reach anyone and everyone that is outside our walls.

READ

Open your Bible and read Luke 19:10.

REFLECT

Now ask yourself and challenge your team with these questions:

1. When was the last time I personally led someone to Christ?
2. How do I equip ministry volunteers to share their faith?
3. How is my church doing at reaching the unchurched?
4. What is a strategic partnership my church could pursue in our community to meet the needs of the lost world?

ACT

Here are some practical ways to ensure you are instituting the “reach the lost” guardrail principle:

- Pray for the salvation of those you know who are separated from God, but don’t stop there. Call them or take them to lunch—just care for them.
- If you are on staff or volunteer in a church, begin to discuss and challenge each other to share Christ with those around you. Go after the lost!
- Invite a friend, co-worker, or family member who does not know Jesus to just spend time with you and perhaps have a spiritual conversation.