

CHAPTER 9

DO CHURCH
DIFFERENT

DIFFERENT, NOT BETTER

Christianity is sometimes described as an upside-down kingdom. *If you want to become greatest, you must become a servant. If you want to live, you must die.* These commands show the counter-intuitive nature of Christianity.

In his book, *Good to Great*, Jim Collins argues the enemy of greatness is often the very good you're doing. Improvement isn't enough. Rather, achieving greatness requires a different set of beliefs. Oftentimes, the very actions that move you to greatness are contrary to the good currently being done.¹⁸

Consider the sport of high jumping. For years, athletes trained tirelessly in jumping higher and higher. They worked on their speed, technique and strength, but only increased their jumping by inches. When Dick Fosbury decided to jump *backwards*, this radically changed everything. The winning jumps increased by feet instead of inches, completely altering the sport of high jumping.

What if the *good* things we're doing in ministry keep us from accomplishing *great* things? What if *getting better* means doing *church different*?

What if *getting better* means doing *church different*?

After 30 years of ministry, I've found that cutting-edge solutions are not found in doing *church better*.

We must do ***church different***.

DEANGELO

He stood out. Everywhere DeAngelo went, he drew stares because of the tattoos covering every inch of his face and body. Despite growing up in church, DeAngelo never fit in. Depressed and struggling with an undiagnosed mental illness, DeAngelo turned to gang activity and drugs. His choices eventually landed him in jail.

Soon after finishing his sentence, DeAngelo played with his eight kids at the park when one of our pastors struck up a conversation and invited him to Bridge. Desperate to find a job and a new start, the opportunity to be surrounded by people with similar backgrounds who could point him to hope intrigued him.

When DeAngelo and his family came to Bridge, they encountered a multi-ethnic church where businessmen and professionals sat beside people with a history of gang activity and drug abuse. The curious stares he usually received were replaced by a church family who accepted him just the way he was.

DeAngelo felt loved and began to have hope that his life could mean something. Another pastor even promised to help him find a job. DeAngelo gave his life to Christ and began a faith journey of his own. Still navigating the ups and downs of leaving his old life of drugs behind, DeAngelo is getting help and growing as a loving husband and father. He still receives stares, but now DeAngelo is eager to share how God has transformed his life and wants to do the same for others.

SHAWN

Shawn grew up going to church with his mother, but the men in his life were physically abusive alcoholics who never attended church. Figuring Christianity meant being nice and good, Shawn left the church as a teenager because he felt more moral than most of the kids in his youth group. He dropped out of college multiple times and left several jobs in a futile attempt to find fulfillment through the American dream.

I met Shawn several years ago and invited him to church. Bridge flipped Shawn's world upside down as he encountered a church filled with hope and purpose. He and his wife, Jodi, immediately felt at home.

Shawn surrendered his life to Christ, and with discipleship, discovered God's call on his life. He and Jodi are now lighthouse leaders who help others find hope and purpose. They are everyday missionaries.

When we do *church different*, people encounter the powerful presence of Jesus who wants to have a personal and purposeful relationship with each of his

followers. DeAngelo and Shawn are great examples of the transformation that God intends when his church demonstrates love-hope-faith.

A NEW CULTURE

The early church didn't stay confined behind closed doors. And neither should we.

As Rodney Stark wrote in *The Rise of Christianity*, “Christianity served as a revitalization movement that arose in response to the misery, chaos, fear, and brutality of life in the urban Greco-Roman world . . . To cities filled with the homeless and the impoverished, Christianity offered charity as well as hope. To cities filled with newcomers and strangers, Christianity offered an immediate basis for attachments. To cities filled with orphans and widows, Christianity provided a new and expanded sense of family. To cities torn by violent ethnic strife, Christianity offered a new basis for social solidarity. And to cities faced with epidemics, fires, and earthquakes, Christianity offered effective nursing services . . . For what they brought was not simply an urban movement, but a new culture.”¹⁹

Can the church impact our culture in America today?

The task seems daunting. Impossible even. The size of the problems can overwhelm us until fear and doubt paralyze us.

But we're not alone. God never meant for us to be a solo act. He gave us the church because we're better and stronger together. The church is the beginning point on the mobilization flywheel. As it turns, the biblical and disciple-making church makes everyday missionaries who birth new gatherings and churches and ultimately, a new flywheel where the process begins all over again.

MOVING PEOPLE FROM HERE TO THERE

Before becoming a pastor, I worked as a chemical engineer and served as an elder in one of the largest churches in Omaha. I taught Bible study classes and led outreaches where over 200 people joined me to serve and evangelize. My pastor noted my success in rallying people together and asked to meet.

Expecting to discuss leadership strategies, his question surprised me. “With such a large following, where are you taking them?”

Wow. What a question.

I’d never considered the idea of taking people anywhere. I just did church—or what I considered church to be. Go to Sunday morning service. Study the Bible. Serve. Not once did I think about the need for a road map to help people move toward a purposeful relationship in Christ.

When I became a pastor years later, this question transformed the way I saw the role of leadership within the church.

I needed to take my congregation somewhere. I needed a big picture—an outline.

The love-hope-faith revelation gave me a blueprint to take my congregation from here to there.

DEMONSTRATE LOVE

Start by demonstrating love. When we increase our social influence, we will have incredible spiritual impact. As we pursue a purposeful relationship with Jesus, we focus less on ourselves and become more aware of others. Focusing on others outside the walls of the church increases our cultural IQ and grows our heart and empathy for the hurting and broken around us. A sense of urgency wells inside us as we long for our co-workers, our neighbors and the lost in our community to experience the same hope we’ve found in Jesus.

The church which infiltrates and engages the community on a consistent basis through love outreaches heightens social influence, sensitivity and awareness in its members. By serving and loving our neighbors together where we worship and where there’s need, we begin to extend this same love into our own neighborhoods where we live using the practical strategy of connect, care, call. Loving our neighbors compels us to change our scorecard as we keep engaged with unbelievers and stay ready to share our hope.

INSPIRE HOPE

When pastors and leaders develop cultural inroads into the community, their congregation becomes consistently involved with unbelievers. As relationships form through loving engagement with neighbors, inspiring hope is the next step. So, what does hope look like?

Without understanding the difference between good works and God's work, we can get so caught up in providing temporary hope that we miss eternal hope. Helping meet physical needs is important but not at the expense of losing a soul. The church and the centrality of the gospel must be at the heart of inspiring hope. Only then can lives find real transformation and behavioral change.

Transformation is a messy process. The church must embrace the mess and be sensitive and welcoming to all guests. Intentionally building a culture of hope is critical to retaining guests week after week. Making a few key changes can make or break the newcomer's experience. Sunday mornings become an opportunity to stretch our faith and expect God to show up in powerful ways.

UNLEASH FAITH

Sermons and Bible studies alone don't produce disciples. Faith is shaped by cultivating opportunities for connection with unbelievers and experiences in disruption. When God breaks our hearts for what breaks his heart, we don't stagnate, and faith comes alive. Getting uncomfortable shapes powerful disciples who unleash their faith and share the good news with others.

Leadership must drive all three—love, hope and faith—if we're going to do *church different* and reach people far from Christ. Without placing leaders at the helm, there is no direction. Leaders must be empowered to direct love outreaches, build a culture of hope on Sunday mornings, and develop faith in their disciples by showing them how to share the gospel amidst disruption while connecting with unbelievers.

THE POWER OF LOVE-HOPE-FAITH

The spiritual gets practical when Christians get out of the seats. And the practical turns powerful when Christians get into the streets and make a difference in the world around them, being disciples who make disciples wherever they go. Gaining social influence is critical to our ongoing ability to have spiritual impact.

A church with a heart of love-hope-faith is tireless in its pursuit to make cultural inroads to see lives and cities transformed by the powerful love of Jesus.

Our neighbors in every part of our city are desperate for hope. As pastors and leaders, we lead the charge. We bear the privilege and responsibility for sharing the good news in our generation. We must lead the church to . . .

- **DEMONSTRATE LOVE** to unbelievers.
- **INSPIRE HOPE** in the church with the unchurched in mind.
- **UNLEASH FAITH** in God's people to impact a lost and broken world.

What would be the impact across America if the church got out of the seats and into the streets?

Imagine consistent love outreaches igniting God's people with passion for the lost.

Picture churches brimming with guests because Sunday mornings elevate and inspire hope.

How would regular faith-shaping experiences with disruption and connections with the lost unleash world-changing disciples to impact a broken world?

My prayer is that God will lead your church in becoming different, changing the world through the principles of love, hope, and faith.

What got us here won't get us there. It's time to change.

Together, let's do *church different*.

Section III: UNLEASH FAITH

Key Concept: Because we are more formed than informed, preaching and teaching are not enough in our discipleship plan. We must form disciples through regular experiences in brokenness, disruption and faith-shaping connections.

Commitments:

1. Commit to regular experiences in disruption by creating a consistent pathway for your congregation to be stretched through brokenness.
2. Regularly make faith-shaping connections with the lost by serving together as a congregation where you worship and where there's need.
3. Do church *different* not better . . . demonstrate love, inspire hope and unleash faith.

Questions:

1. What does it mean that we are more formed than informed?
2. As a leader, how can you *inform people less* and *involve people more*?
3. What is the benefit to your congregation to have regular faith-shaping experiences in brokenness and disruption?
4. How can you develop faith-shaping connections with the lost by loving your neighbors where you worship and where there's need?
5. Is your church experiencing conversion growth? Why or why not?

6. How do you unleash faith in God's people to impact a broken world?
7. Revisit your initial understanding of love-hope-faith. How do you understand the revelation now?

HOW TO SHARE YOUR CONVERSION STORY

Many Christians feel inadequate or freeze when they are asked to share their conversion story. Fear and confusion often keep believers from sharing the greatest treasure in their lives.

A popular radio host and proclaimed atheist didn't take offense when a listener gave him a Bible. When asked why, he responded that if you believed Jesus was the only way to heaven, you would have to absolutely hate someone NOT to share your hope.²⁰

Wow.

Many believers don't know where to start or what to say.

As leaders, we need to help Christ-followers process and practice sharing their conversion stories. Consider *before* and *after* pictures on make-over shows or diet commercials. As Christians, we also have a *before* and *after* picture.

At Bridge, we encourage believers to **process** and **practice** sharing their conversion stories in the following 3-step process.

Step 1. Choose three words/phrases that best describe your life without Christ at the center. Many people have a spiritual perception and believe that God is *important*. While this sensitivity, along with a connection to church is helpful, becoming a Christian has a decisive starting point. Choosing to turn away from our self-motivated plans and self-focused lifestyle in order to place Jesus at the *center* of our lives is where real change takes place.

When Christ becomes central in our lives, everything we do revolves around His dreams and plans for our lives. Instead of God or church being another important thing in our life, we deliberately build our entire lifestyle, plans and future around the ways of Jesus. Rather than *run our own lives*, we are now *under new management*, where we commit to following God's plans for the rest of our lives. Jesus becomes *the boss* of our lives, and we live to love, obey and fulfill His purpose.

Examples:

- EMPTY—I felt empty and alone.
- DRUGS—I was addicted to drugs.
- PURPOSE—I had no purpose in my life.

Step 2. Choose three words/phrases that best describe your life at the time you surrendered to Jesus. How did God use this circumstance(s) to get your attention and eventually your affection?

Examples:

- ACCIDENT—I almost died in a car accident. Thinking about death really got my attention, and I decided to surrender the control of my life and follow Jesus.
- DRUNK—I woke up with a hangover and knew there had to be more to life. Empty and depressed, I gave my life to Jesus.
- BROTHER—My brother became a Christian, and I saw how he changed. I wanted the same, so I repented, asked God to forgive me, and invited Jesus to come into my life.

Step 3. Choose three words/phrases that best describe what Christ is doing in your life today. What is God doing, that you could never do on your own, that reveals His love and power? Make sure to give practical, concrete words/phrases to describe the change.

Examples:

- I SMILE MORE—I am so hopeful for my future. Suicide is not the answer. I have so much joy. Every day is a gift I want to share with others.
- CLEAN AND SOBER—I'm no longer addicted to alcohol and drugs, and I'm helping others find freedom as well.
- I LOVE SHARING MY FAITH—My life has meaning now, and I want others to find hope and purpose, too. I talk with people regularly about how God changed my life.