

LIVING *Life2Life*

Re-imagining church through the power of relationships. Volume 1 | Issue 16

“My business is circumference” wrote the poet Emily Dickinson. Dickinson’s poetry flowed from a life circle of experiences and relationships, joys and sorrows. Like the poet, living life2life is a business of circumference.

All of us have a life circumference, a circle loosely drawn around a diversity of relationships. Family and friends, coworkers and contractors, barbers and beauticians all live in our circumference. As insiders, we’re planted in this circle of relationships to naturally advance the gospel.

The early church understood the power of circumference in evangelism. We assume that public preaching, exemplified in the Book of Acts, was how the Roman Empire was converted. History shows us something different.

The Christian faith was illegal until the fourth century. Churches neither owned property or advertised their meetings. Christ-followers were branded as atheists because they refused to worship at the shrine of the Caesars or the ancient gods. Large crowds bothered the “law and order” mentality of the Romans. The cramped cities were tinder boxes ready to ignite a riot (Acts 14:19; 16:19-22). The Romans would never authorize an outdoor rally for an illegal religion. Such an act was a riot waiting to happen.

Historian Robin Fox writes, “We have no historical text which refers to formal, open-air sermons outside a church after the mid first century.” If public evangelism was illegal and inappropriate, how was the gospel advanced? It was done in the circumference of people’s lives, the natural networks in which believers lived, worked, or played. Michael Green writes:

... the great mission of Christianity was in reality accomplished by means of informal missionaries ... this was not formal preaching, but the informal chattering to friends and chance acquaintances, in homes, and wine shops, on walks and around market stalls. They went everywhere gossiping the gospel ...

The power of circumference is found in our evangelism opportunities (EO). Here’s how you can calculate your church’s EO. You multiply the church attendance (CA) by the number in people’s relational networks (RN). If everyone in a church of four hundred has at least five unbelievers in their relational networks, the EO is now 2,000 people. When we think $CA \times RN = EO$, our worlds automatically expand! Our circumference is now enlarged.

Take a few minutes and establish your personal EO, brainstorming on all the people in your circumference of relationships, people with whom you have regular contact. Your list could include family, work friends, neighbors, PTA members, etc. Now turn this list into a prayer page, asking God to provide opportunities to begin faith conversations with each person. Carry this assignment over to your small group, adult Sunday School class, or congregation to establish your EO.

We can wisely turn the insight of a poet into an evangelism strategy. God wants to use the business of circumference to advance the gospel. Let’s pray for a 1 Thessalonians 1:8 experience in our lives, in our small groups, and in our churches – “your faith in God has become known everywhere.”

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