

POSTINGS

articles for missions mobilizers



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An Integrated Outreach Model

**Building an inclusive
framework for
church engagement**

The majority of churches that take the Great Commission seriously divide the task into two areas: global and local. In this article, we will propose an integrated model of church outreach that has the potential to both connect and expand your missional skills and impact by adding two more elements.

We will define all four pieces, explain our rationale for the additions, and list some needed skills and how your church can build them into your congregation's DNA. Finally, to keep from unnecessarily complicating your work, we will suggest some ways to avoid adding unwieldy structure.



FOUR ELEMENTS OF AN INCLUSIVE OUTREACH FRAMEWORK

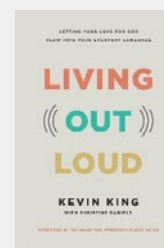
1. SHARING LIFE-ON-LIFE in daily interactions

The vast majority of your congregation's opportunities for gospel impact come in the course of daily life, not in organized missions activities. That means it is critical that every church prepare their people to integrate their faith into their normal interactions with those God brings into their various circles of influence.

Jesus called His disciples to be salt and light wherever they were. Every believer's mission is to represent Jesus to those they meet frequently (think work colleagues or moms at the bus stop) and to the one-off contacts that occur in the course of daily activities (such as the waitress at the restaurant or the couple in the doctor's waiting room). Sadly, just how to go about incorporating faith into daily interactions is often vague. "Share your faith" may be as specific as it gets.

With some relatively simple skills, believers can intentionally include their faith in daily life-on-life encounters. Kevin King's new book, *Living Out Loud*, equips them to initiate faith conversations. It's a practical resource for church leaders as well as small groups and discipling settings—really everyone.

Living Out Loud



Can we talk about Jesus to those around us without it being super awkward—or worse? King says that “the

most tangible expression of your love for God is talking about him...we should make statements that point to spiritual realities and the presence of God in our lives.” (pp. 11-12)

King makes a compelling argument that more people than we think are interested in talking about spiritual things, and we can trust God to bring them across our path. Our anxiety about speaking up is also reduced, he says, if we remember that we aren't responsible for the outcome.

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Adding this foundational means of witness to a church's outreach model has multiple benefits:

- The church recognizes that life-on-life outreach calls for leadership committed to seeing it integrated into the congregation's DNA. If the task of preparing the congregation to be witnesses to those around them is assumed to be everyone's responsibility, in reality it is usually not carefully planned by anyone. Locating it within the missions framework makes sense but does not mean that it becomes the sole responsibility of the missions leader/team. To best build vision and skills for life-on-life outreach, it needs a broadly representative team (see specific suggestions on page 7).
- The skills developed in life-on-life outreach are also essential to other aspects of missions.

Believers who have already developed the ability and confidence to naturally and clearly speak of their faith will be far more effective in other missions involvements.

- Church-based outreach events are more likely to produce long-term fruit if they are an extension of spiritual discussions initiated by someone the visitor knows. Follow-up after the event also becomes more comfortable and productive if there has been previous spiritual conversation.

In the chart below are some of the basic skills that your whole congregation needs to learn and practice in this foundational level of missions. In the second column are some skill-building activities your church can incorporate into your plan to disciple every believer in your body.

BASIC SKILLS	CHURCH'S ROLE IN PREPARATION
» How to identify opportunities to share faith statements that open doors for spiritual conversations; practice building friendship bridges through transparency and genuine caring	In classes, small groups, and worship services, feature testimonies of those who have learned to naturally talk about their faith journey, focusing on "anyone can do this" practices
» How to initiate spiritual conversations	Provide sample sentences that can lead into deeper spiritual discussions
» How to briefly share your spiritual-journey story without religious jargon	Create situations in which people practice a one-minute version of their spiritual journey without religious terms
» How to lead an evangelistic Bible study	Take small groups through an evangelistic Bible study to learn how to lead one
» How to invite a non-Christian to a church outreach event and follow up afterward with ongoing spiritual conversations	Provide possible invitation statements that would make coming to a church event more comfortable as well as some potential questions to launch a meaningful post-event conversation

2. SERVE HOLISTICALLY by addressing practical needs and opportunities

This category is what most churches have generally called “local ministry.” The difference is that outreaches to those of a different culture are not included here but in the third section of our framework. Holistic outreaches in this #2 category allow church people to be the hands of feet of Jesus, addressing practical needs and opportunities in your community and beyond. Such services are usually organized by specialized ministries such as homeless shelters,

food banks, prison ministries, anti-trafficking and pro-life organizations, and many more including parachurch organizations focused on high-school or university students.

Gospel witness should be an integral element of holistic efforts and is often integrated most effectively when it is natural life-on-life sharing as learned and practiced in category #1. By working alongside ministries that have specialized facilities and expertise, churches can see hurting people flourish and many become disciples of Jesus.

BASIC SKILLS	CHURCH'S ROLE IN PREPARATION
» How they can identify a ministry that fits their passion and gifts	Survey your congregation to help determine which potential partner ministries would best match your people's passions and gifting
» How to find ways to engage their whole family	Develop a list of vetted ministry opportunities, looking especially for family-friendly ones
» How to evaluate whether the ministry is merely addressing surface issues and therefore creating dependence on the organization's help, or if they are addressing root problems in order to nurture long-term independence	Introduce the basic principles of “helping without hurting” (from book, <i>When Helping Hurts</i>)
» How to naturally and appropriately include conversation starters about faith as they serve holistic needs	Encourage participants to incorporate their “living out loud” skills into their service while respecting any restrictions established by the ministry

3. CROSSING CULTURES by building friendships with people unlike you

This category is a hybrid that incorporates aspects of all three of the other elements of our outreach framework. It also has unique characteristics because it develops the congregation's ability to cross cultural, religious, and often language barriers to serve well and share Jesus.

In 2025, more people than ever before are living outside their country of birth—upwards of 280 million according to the **2024 World Migration Report**. The majority of these have emigrated by choice, but more than 38 million have been forced to move due to war, economic collapse, persecution, or environmental issues.

Newcomers represent a wide spectrum of needs and opportunities. Some are refugees who come

with little or no financial resources, and with few job skills or fluency in their new country's language. They need physical provision as they transition, as well as language and job skills. These holistic needs may be quite similar to those served in the general holistic ministries described in #2, but with added challenges of culture, language, and religious differences. Many also are dealing with unseen wounds of severe trauma. Additional preparation is needed for those who want to serve them well.

On the other end of the economic spectrum, a large percentage of the foreign-born population in many countries come with professional skills and quickly integrate into middle-class neighborhoods. Reaching them involves the life-on-life faith sharing of #1, but the fact that many of these newcomers are Hindu, Muslim, Sikh, or Buddhist requires additional understanding, patience, and sensitivity. Churches are becoming more aware of the need for this type of culture-crossing, although they may need to learn the skills to do so effectively.

BASIC SKILLS	CHURCH'S ROLE IN PREPARATION
» How to identify the cultural uniquenesses of immigrants in your circle of influence	Engage the congregation in mapping your community to identify immigrant groups, businesses, and ministries
» How to relate in a culturally sensitive manner in order to develop true friendships across cultures	Provide cultural training sessions and individual "come with me" invitations that encourage people to learn from others how to reach out to internationals
» How to share Christ with people from other religions	Conduct timely training for your people focused on the predominant religion(s) of newcomers in your area
» How to encourage a nearby immigrant congregation or ministry	Take church leaders to visit an immigrant service or have coffee with the pastor; brainstorm mutual support opportunities

4. SPAN THE GLOBE by taking the whole gospel to the whole world

As never before in history, local churches in the Global North can help make disciples everywhere by going, sending, and partnering with the exploding Global South Church that in

many places is eagerly embracing their role in Jesus' mission.

This is the section of the framework that many churches are quite familiar with. But let's consider some individual skills you would like to see all of your people practicing.

BASIC SKILLS	CHURCH'S ROLE IN PREPARATION
» How to identify the roles God has designed you to fill in reaching the nations	Survey your members connections and skills; look for opportunities to engage them with your global partners
» How to pray specifically and consistently for Holy Spirit breakthroughs in unreached places	If your church focuses on a people group or geographic region, create on-ramps to teach your people how to pray for spiritual victories in these places; follow up with answers to prayer
» How to serve your church's missionaries and indigenous partners	Create some family-friendly missions projects in which everyone can participate; at the conclusion, celebrate with your global workers in person or via Zoom
» How to be well prepared for an international ministry trip	Integrate life-on-life and culture-crossing skills into preparation for international ministry trips

As you think about this traditional “heart of missions” area, consider how our four-element framework suggests ways your globe-spanning involvements could complement other aspects of your outreach and vice versa. Here are just two:

First, your people’s living-out-loud experiences will build deeper affinity with your missionaries—for many, it’s the heart of what they are doing on the other side of the world! Encourage each other with your passion for life-on-life spiritual impact; glean your global workers’ ideas for doing it better.

Second, training and experience in the other three types of outreach are highly valuable preparation

for those looking to serve on an international short-term team. For example, short-termers’ habit of comfortably including faith statements in their normal conversations will multiply their impact on their overseas trip. Understanding the importance of compassionate listening and serving in holistic ministry are transferable to any context. Going overseas with some culture-crossing skills already learned in ministry to internationals in their own country will help your people serve in settings with much higher cultural barriers, and in unsettling physical and spiritual contexts.

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EXPAND YOUR OUTREACH MODEL WITHOUT COMPLICATING STRUCTURE

Maybe you like the concepts in our proposed outreach framework but immediately think it is too complicated to implement. Here are some ways to make it workable and less intimidating.

1. **Create a cross-church team that focuses on helping your congregation impact those in their circles of influence.** Since this mentality and lifestyle are at the heart of discipleship, leaders in various ministries across your church have a vested interest in seeing your people grow in this area. Perhaps a member of your missions leadership team could serve along with your pastor, youth pastor, discipleship pastor/leader, small groups leader, a Sunday school teacher, etc.
2. **Consider combining the leadership of your domestic crossing-cultures ministry with your globe-spanning work** since passion to reach peoples of different religious blocs or ethnic groups is a key to both types of ministry. Recruit two or three people for your missions leadership team who are specifically interested in serving immigrants or international students. Team members who come with the mandate

to represent these ministries will introduce questions like how ESL teaching experience could enrich overseas team service, and how one of your missionaries serving in a Muslim/Buddhist/Hindu people could help your domestic culture-crossing volunteers better understand the mindset of those they serve.

3. **Create occasional opportunities for brainstorming how each of the four missional elements could enrich the others.** Regardless of whether you are in a small church that organizes all four under one leadership team or a larger congregation that has enough leaders to create four teams, you want to avoid ministry isolation by cross-pollinating and sharing strengths and resources. **Here is an example of an exercise to stimulate ideas.**
4. **Create events that enrich all four types of ministries at one time.** For example, the church could hold a prayer event focused on Muslims including time to pray for Muslim neighbors, colleagues, or fellow students; another part of the program to focus on Muslims who come to the food bank or an after-school tutoring program; a third prayer focus around Muslim students in ESL classes; and lastly, your missionaries who are working in Muslim contexts.

Or perhaps you could plan a children's fair as an outreach event specifically for children with special needs and their families. Then hold it twice—the first time at your church and the second time at the facility of one of your holistic ministry partners in a needy community. Invite immigrant families to both. Could a short-term team from your church organize a similar event with one of your missionaries overseas?

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ANSWERING SOME QUESTIONS

Are the elements in this framework sequential? Churches are tasked with simultaneously carrying out missional outreach in all four of these spheres of ministry. The first-century church understood this clearly as the Apostle Paul and his partners quickly moved with the message toward the farthest edge of the Roman Empire, and tradition has it that the Apostle Thomas traveled all the way to modern-day India with the good news. This ends-of-the-earth missionary work was going on while evangelization of the Middle East was still far from finished.

However, as we have already pointed out, individuals within the church are likely to have much greater impact internationally if they first learn to share their faith in daily interactions with neighbors and colleagues, and to cross cultures here before heading overseas. As we are often reminded, getting on a plane doesn't make a person a missionary.

Does this framework represent a geographic interpretation of Acts 1:8? There is much debate about whether Jesus' list of four locations in His last words to His disciples should be taken as increasingly distant geographic regions. You may define our framework in this way, but geographic strictures may not be accurate. For example, a person's circle of influence could well include

colleagues in another region or even a different country. Crossing cultures could be with a neighbor over the backyard fence or it could be in a city hundreds of miles away.

Does the word "missions" apply to all four of these elements? There are strong differences of opinion about the definition and parameters of "missions." Since it doesn't appear in the biblical text, there is freedom in choosing vocabulary. Some may choose to separate "witness," "outreach," and "missions." Others may call it all "missions." Proactively engaging in all aspects of outreach matters far more than what you call it!

ALL PEOPLE, ALL MEANS

Paul shared the gospel in synagogues, along riverbanks, before rulers, on Mars Hill, in church buildings, on the steps of a Roman barracks and certainly in countless other places. He declared himself ready to use all means to see some saved (1 Cor. 9:22). Every local church today has been given unlimited opportunities to reach people in myriad contexts. Engaging people well is the church's privilege and responsibility. How will your church best take the challenge?

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