CITYLIGHT
CHURCH

SERMON NOTES & TRANSCRIPT

A Strategy for Reaching the Lost

How People Actually Come to Christ, and Your Part in the Process

Most people come to Christ through a relationship and a church service, so no one has to close the deal alone: build relationships, invite people to church, and let the church do its work.

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SERIES
We're Relentlessly Driven by the Mission, Week 2 of 4

MAIN TEXT
Mark 1:9-17

INSIDE

Contents

01 Sermon Transcript

02 Preaching Notes

03 Scripture List

04 About the Preacher

WATCH THE MESSAGE

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0:00	Mark 1:9-17
1:54	How people actually come to Christ
7:59	Called to make disciples
9:43	Relationships: reaching lost family
17:17	Everyone else: don't hide it, don't hype it
19:41	Invite people to church
27:37	Church is where the magic happens
35:18	Discipleship happens in the pulpit

01

Sermon Transcript

Amen. All right, if you will join me in your Bibles this morning in Mark chapter number one. Mark chapter number one. If you can find the New Testament, you'll see Matthew, you go one more book over and you'll be in Mark, the Gospel according to Marky Mark. Mark Wahlberg. Amen. Here we go.

> **MARK 1:9-17** ESV
>
> 9 In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. 10 And when he came
> up out of the water, immediately he saw the heavens being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove.
> 11 And a voice came from heaven, "You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased." 12 The Spirit immediately
> drove him out into the wilderness. 13 And he was in the wilderness forty days, being tempted by Satan. And he was
> with the wild animals, and the angels were ministering to him. 14 Now after John was arrested, Jesus came into
> Galilee, proclaiming the gospel of God, 15 and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand;
> repent and believe in the gospel." 16 Passing alongside the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and Andrew the brother of
> Simon casting a net into the sea, for they were fishermen. 17 And Jesus said to them, "Follow me, and I will make you
> become fishers of men."

Mark chapter one, verse nine says, "In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. And when he came up out of the water, immediately he saw the heavens being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove. And a voice came from heaven, 'You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased.'" Verse 12, "Then immediately the Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness. And he was in the wilderness 40 days, being tempted by Satan. And he was with the wild animals, and the angels were ministering to him."

I'm not going to preach on this this morning, but you know, according to Hebrews chapter 1, verse 14, the angels will minister for you and to you.

> **HEBREWS 1:14** ESV
>
> 14 Are they not all ministering spirits sent out to serve for the sake of those who are to inherit salvation?

You can actually put angels to work. I'll teach you that one day. Amen.

Verse 14, "Now after John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee, proclaiming the gospel of God and saying, 'The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.'" Verse 16, "Passing along the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and Andrew, the brother of Simon, casting a net into the sea, for they were fishermen. And Jesus said to them, 'Follow me, and I'll make you become fishers of men.'"

Last week we talked about our Great Commission, and we talked about how urgent fulfilling the Great Commission is. In fact, we're in a series this month called "We Are Relentlessly Driven By The Mission," and our mission is our great co-mission that was given to us from Jesus Christ, to go into all the world preaching the gospel and making disciples of all nations.

Now this week, what we're going to talk about is a little different from last week. We're going to talk about a strategy for reaching the lost. Now I'm going to be a little more — I'm going to nerd out on you a little bit today. I promise not to do this every week, so much as I can help it. I am a little bit of a nerd and can't help it. I'm a little dorky. Amen.

And so I'm going to do my best, but I want to share with you this morning a strategy for reaching the lost. Just statistically, I want to let you know how people come to Christ. How many of you want to see people get saved? How many of you want to see people come to Christ? How many of you want to see people experience gospel transformation in their life? Amen. Okay, give the Lord a praise real quick.

If you want to see it — well, if you want to see it, statistically, this is how it happens. Less than five percent of people who come to know the Lord — and we're talking about America right now, the Western world — less than five percent of people come to know the Lord through random encounters. This is people who are out witnessing, soul winning, door knocking, or you just happen to sit next to somebody on a plane and say the right thing at the right time and give your life to the Lord. Doesn't mean it doesn't happen. Doesn't mean it's not worth it. If God's called it to you, he'll give you fruit through it. But less than five percent give their life to the Lord through these means of random encounters.

Five to ten percent of people give their life to the Lord through media. This is somebody watching Christian TV and they come up on a Billy Graham sermon and are captivated and can't help themselves. But this is actually growing, because Christian media has broken out of television and now we're on YouTube and we're on TikTok and Instagram and Facebook and podcasts and whatever else you want to do. Ham radio, I don't know. And so media — I'm sorry, what was it? Five to ten percent of people give their life to the Lord through some type of media. Now media is an area that I'm passionate about. I need you to know that we've seen great fruit from media in our ministry. Five to ten percent.

Ten to fifteen percent of people give their life to the Lord through a home Bible study or a small group, some type of small out-of-church meeting.

Thirty to forty percent of people give their life to the Lord through personal evangelism. Personal evangelism. And personal evangelism versus a random encounter — the difference is a long game. You can go out and preach on the street and it will be less effective than if you have long-term relationships with people where you gradually move people towards the gospel. Okay, so that's a high number right there, thirty to forty percent.

But forty to fifty percent of people give their life to the Lord in church services. Okay, this is where it happens. Nearly half of people who have come to know the Lord have done it in church services.

Yet nevertheless, seventy-five percent of all born-again people, meaning three in four people — okay, three out of four people who are born again — will point to a relationship that influenced them for their decision for Christ. So even if somebody gets saved through a random encounter, watching Billy Graham on TV, coming to church, a home Bible study, they will be able to — most likely 75 percent of people trace that decision back to someone else's personal influence in their life. Do you hear me?

So the relationship is necessary. Now let me say this: the local church is always involved in the salvation process, because it's either going to be the point of origin or it will be the destination. You're either going to get saved at church or get saved and come to church. Amen. Okay, so we the church wins either way, because we're going to make disciples of all nations. Amen.

Nevertheless, relationships are typically the catalyst for someone giving their life to Christ, meaning that if you are born again, the people who you spend time around are the most likely people on this earth to get saved.

In fact, I came to know the Lord in one of the small categories. I actually got saved at a home Bible study. Now granted, I didn't know it was a home Bible study when I went. I thought it was a party. So there's also some merit to deceiving people. Amen. That'll be the one that just goes viral on the internet right there. That's going to get clipped a hundred thousand times today.

But I was at a home Bible study, but the only reason I was there — the invitation came through a bizarre avenue, but I went because it was at the house of a girl who was the lifeguard in our community and I knew who she was. So I went to the Bible study. It was a personal relationship. She had not preached the gospel. In fact, I didn't even know she was saved. I didn't know she was Christian. She had not done any of the work other than I knew her. She was going to be there. It was going to be her house. That's all it took. But a personal relationship made all the difference.

Now, I want you to remember this, and I'm going to strike the room a little bit here for a moment. We are not called to evangelize. We're actually called to make disciples. Okay,

> **MATTHEW 28:19** ESV
>
> 19 Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,

Matthew chapter 28, verse 19 says, "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit."

Discipleship is a process. Salvation is a moment. You go from death to life. You get saved in an instant, but discipleship is a process. There's a part of discipleship that starts before someone is saved. There's discipleship that happens after someone is saved. And this is what I want to encourage you with this morning. There's a lot of what we're going to talk about today — is that no one has to carry the burden to seal the deal. You don't have to do the whole process.

And we kind of teach it this way. We kind of teach everybody in here ought to go out and be a soul winner and win as many people to Jesus Christ as you can and bring them in here saved, because that's your job. But I'm going to be honest with you, I've met some of you people. I don't want some of you doing this. You need to involve a friend. Amen. So nobody has to bear up the whole burden of the process. We all get to participate in the process, and that's our responsibility: to participate in the process.

So I'm going to talk you through a process, and I think it's really going to help you this morning. So say, "Preach, preacher."

Okay, number one. We just talked about this: relationships are the catalyst for salvation. Relationships are the catalyst for salvation. Seventy-five percent of people trace their salvation moment back to being influenced by a person, whether it was directly related or not. There was some type of influence through a relationship.

Now, there are two types of relationships that I want to talk about today. One is your family, the other is everybody else. Your family — and in fact, some of y'all, your life would improve if you could view everybody in the world through two lenses: my family and everybody else. That would help some of y'all right there. That was the revelation for the day.

So let me talk to you about the family dynamic for a moment. Winning family members to the Lord I believe is the most important and most special thing to most people, yet it also seems to be the hardest. It is the most difficult thing to do. And so here are four things — you're going to want to write these down today — four things that are going to help

you maximize results in seeing lost family members saved. And just get prepared, I'm going to give you list on list on list today. You're going to walk out of here with a lot of homework. Amen.

All right. Number one: prioritize the secret place. Prioritize the secret place. You've got to get into the place of prayer and the Scripture. Okay, I'm going to start a series in five weeks on this. I'm going to spend most of the end of the year talking about what this looks like in your life, how to pray, how to hear from God, how to read the Scripture. We're going to really dive into that.

But there's a power that happens in the secret place that makes the difference. There's some stuff you can get accomplished in prayer you can't get accomplished any other way. And most of us wouldn't know, because we don't pray. That wasn't in my notes, that was for free.

But also, not only that, this becomes a powerful testimony of your authenticity. Look, there's a lot about my life that there would be reasonable doubt as to whether or not it's authentic. Like, I'm a preacher. I make a salary. I get paid to do this. So is it real, or is he — what do they call it? Fleecing the flock? So I get that. I get that my kids could have that view, because guess what, they see me preach and then they see me yell at them over dumb garbage, right? But guess what, when they see me in the secret place, I'm not trying to impress anybody. That's not for them. That's not for y'all. Nobody sees it. Nobody knows about it. And there is something that authenticates your faith in the secret place. Daily prayer is obviously just for you and the Lord.

Number two is stay faithful. Keep showing up for your family. Keep showing up for church. Be there with your family on holidays, big events, things for the grandkids. You've gotta just keep showing up. Stay faithful. But also stay faithful to the church. Don't stop coming to church. You've gotta anchor in two places. You've gotta anchor your schedule, but also hold your standards. Hold your standards.

Now, I'm not saying to be ugly and rude when people come into your house, but there's some moments where you've got to say, "We love you, but we do not do that in this house." And I want you to know, boundaries are caring. This is a caring thing for your family. Boundaries are caring, but also people respect boundaries even when they say they don't.

Just so y'all know, one of the things that I've decided I'm going to do in my life, in my family at home, with y'all, with the denomination, with everybody — I'm just going to be unwavering. I'm going to stay right here and I'm not moving. I'm going to hold the standard.

Number three: be patient. Be patient. If somebody needs to hear this this morning: you cannot teach, preach or shame your adult children out of bad decisions. You cannot teach, preach or shame your adult children out of bad decisions. You've got to be patient. People are going to make bad choices. In fact, I will even say this: if anything, the Bible says to turn them over to Satan for the destruction of their flesh.

> **1 CORINTHIANS 5:5** ESV
>
> 5 you are to deliver this man to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord.

One thing I've seen in people for years is that well-meaning parents of adult children who have problems a mile long — you could unroll the list and it would roll out into the foyer, of the issues — what they'll do is, they'll get in there, and the parents, right before things go to hell in a handbasket, they'll rescue them. And I just want you to hear me: there is a grace and a mercy of the Holy Ghost at rock bottom. There's an anointing on rock bottom. Some people have to just

deal with their stuff. And I'm going to tell you right now, I know it would hurt to see your baby in prison, but prison might solve it, because you can walk out of rehab. My — I guess my raising was different than y'all's. Amen.

But also let me just say this: don't ruin every visit with an appeal. You don't have to sit down and bless the food and then just say, "Well, does anybody here want to give their life to the Lord?" And you know, you'll be staring right at that person. "Anyone? Going once." So don't ruin every visit with an appeal. Be patient.

Number four: be flexible. If an adjustment on your part builds trust, improves the relationship, or has a direct impact on their decision for the gospel — adjust. And I'm not asking you just to bend on your preferences here in the church, because I know we're talking about that some — I mean, I hit that hard last week. I'm not telling you just to do it here. You've got to do it in every area that you could see someone come to the Lord. You have to do it, not for the church's sake, not for the pastor's sake, but for the gospel's sake. And the gospel is happening here. It's happening there. It's happening in your house. It's happening at your job. It's happening everywhere. So we do what we have to do for the gospel's sake.

And I just want you to hear this this morning. I want you to hear your pastor. If you have an adult child that's ready to make a decision for Christ, but for whatever reason they are unwilling to come to this church, and they are willing to go to another — go. You have the blessing of the Lord and you have the blessing of this pastor. There is nothing in this church that is worth your kids not getting saved. I bless you right now in Jesus' name. Consider it done. Keep tithing for three months, but then — you're going to send me a letter. Just give me a little bit of a window, you know, at least. Amen. But I love you, and I want you to see your kids saved.

Now, there's also the relationships with everybody else. Now, by the way, I'm throwing the clock out, because I'm talking to y'all about some mission stuff this morning. We just got to be on it. So I'm going to ignore the clock for the rest of the morning, because I'm carrying on. And so buckle up. Amen. Just when y'all got used to it — y'all bought a Crock-Pot and everything, and here I am going to ruin it. Amen.

So, okay, so relationships with everyone else. I'm talking about work, friends, teams, clubs, whatever it may be. I'm going to give you a simple formula for ministering to these people and ministering the gospel, playing the long game of building a relationship that can result in them coming to Jesus Christ. This is very simple. I'm going to tell it to you a couple of ways though, just so you can get it.

Number one, here it is: don't be obscure about your faith. Don't be obscure about your faith. Don't pretend you're not born again. But also don't be obnoxious about your faith. Some of y'all can't let your co-workers go to the bathroom without you saying something obnoxiously spiritual. "Well, I was praying this morning and the Lord showed me you were going to go to the restroom today. Are you ready to give your life to the Lord Jesus Christ?" So don't be obnoxious.

Don't hide your faith, but don't hype your faith. I'm going to tell you something. The worst thing you can do is hype up how spiritual you are around people who are around you all the time, because they know you aren't. They know how you act. They have seen you cuss customer support out on the phone. You can't hype beyond that, baby. So you've got to be patient. But don't hide your faith, and don't hype your faith. They know that you're not an apostle. Just go ahead and get over it.

Here's the other side. Here's the third way I want to say it: don't overestimate what spirituality will do in your relationships, but don't underestimate what normalcy will do in your relationships. Do not underestimate what not being weird will do for you, right?

Okay, number two. Number two in the process: invite people to church. An invitation to church is the first step in personal evangelism. Number two.

People get saved — it's amazing to me some of the stuff we say to youth groups — but people get saved and then we treat them like they're supposed to go out and win the whole world to Jesus Christ. I'm literally — we'll have kids in youth group who've been, you know, off drugs for three weeks because they got saved radically, and we'll be looking at them going, "You're a missionary to your school." And that sounds really good and spiritual, but have you been around these kids? Have you spent any time with your teenagers? Everybody nervous in here now.

You can't expect teenagers, new converts, people who have no backing in any of the Scripture, know nothing, to go out and win everybody in personal evangelism. It is the most bizarre thing. We have a family member who I hope don't watch this message. Amen. But we've got a family member — we went to their church one time and on the wall there's a huge banner that says, "Who have you witnessed to today?" Well, nobody. It's Sunday. I'm at church. Everybody I've seen this morning is saved. Amen.

And so we have this expectation on people, and I'm telling you, if you can win somebody to the Lord, do it. But the first step is actually to just invite them to church. It's kind of like call center sales. Does anybody ever — have any of y'all ever got a call from somebody? Ashleigh was actually in call center sales. She was the number one woman salesperson for GEICO Insurance in the State of Florida. Everybody give her a hand clap for that. We still have a good price on our car insurance. Amen. I had a buddy call me recently and he goes, "We still haven't been able to beat that price." That was 15 years ago that she filled that out for him.

And so, call center sales. There's actually a process to it. There's someone who will call you if it's a cold call. They'll call you and they'll ask you, "Hey, are you interested in this?" Once you say yes, they put you on the phone with somebody else. The other person knows all the details. So this person's just asking. Now they've got you on the phone with the detail person. And once you figure out, "Hey, I like these details, I think I want to do it," and you say yes — when you say yes, you know what they do? They put you on the phone with another person, and that person closes the deal. They are the closer. It's a three-person process.

Listen, I don't know how many people of the process it is, but there can be several pieces of the process in seeing someone come to know the Lord. So listen, let me take a little bit off of you. You can invite someone to church. Just have a good rapport with them, have a good relationship, invite them. We'll seal the deal. We'll get it done. Amen. Every week we'll give the opportunity. I'm not going to get discouraged. We've had weeks in here where people haven't given their life to the Lord. I don't like it. I preached one time and like 10 percent of the church got saved, and so I'm a little taken back when nobody gets saved. It throws me off. But I don't care. I will look the devil in the face and just say, I don't mind being a little embarrassed. I'm going to get this city if it's the last thing I do. Starting to feel like Wednesday night, when I ignore the notes and just say I'm going to say what I want to say. Amen.

So personal evangelism is very similar to that call center process. You just take people through the process. You can hand them off. You can involve another believer if they've got deep spiritual questions at your work. By the way, if somebody at your work's asking you deep spiritual questions, they're probably ready to get saved. You can always get a believer who's a little more known to come into it. You can always bring them to church.

I just want you to know, if you come to me and say, "Pastor, will you come meet with this person?" — no, I won't. I'm too busy for it. I do it in here. I'm not a line fisherman, I'm a net fisherman. Okay? I give the invitation from here. I don't get out and meet with every person in the community who's got spiritual questions. I don't have the time, patience or

bandwidth. Okay, y'all hear me? Y'all clammed up when I said I won't meet with everybody. How many hours do you think I have in the week? I'm not living on a 32-hour day in a 13-day week. Amen. There's stuff that's got to get done. You know who changed all the light bulbs in here? The preacher. Think about that. Okay.

Now, when you invite your family to church, let me give you some tips on inviting your family to church. Okay, when you want to invite family to church, focus on these events. Focus on holidays and significant moments. Okay, if your child is getting baptized and your brother is far from the Lord, that's the day to invite him. Okay, invite him that day. Christmas, Easter. Listen though, Easter and Mother's Day — invite your family on these days. We put a lot of energy, me and Ashleigh, into making sure that Easter through the beginning of the summer, we give people constant reasons to come back to church. You're going to see it. It's miraculous. It's going to be awesome. You're going to see it next year. And so if you'll get them here in that season, we will get them in the process. Amen. So we're going to focus on those big moments.

Now, other people, you just invite them any opportunity you get. If it comes up, you just invite them. Anytime. And we actually have a resource for you this morning that's going to help you with that. Now first of all, great opportunity — Ashleigh talked about it earlier, we've got this Trunk or Treat coming up. This is about as non-threatening as it comes. And I'm not going to explain this to you, but you're going to trust me. Say, "I trust you." Okay. We actually are asking you to buy a certain type of candy size for a reason. It's because we're going to reward children for bringing their parents to meet me and Ashleigh. Y'all are going to give them little candy. Me and Ashleigh are going to have big candy bars. So if the kids come and find me with Mom and Dad, I'm going to give them a big candy bar. Why? Because when you meet the preacher, that's a big deal, and we want them to feel like they had something special happening. Guess what'll happen from that night? They'll come to church. When they come to church, what's going to happen? They're going to get saved. Hallelujah. There's a 50 percent chance they'll get saved right here in the house. Amen. Better than anything else.

So Trunk or Treat, but there's another opportunity for you. The other opportunity is this morning. You're going to see a little display when you leave today that says, "Invite people, change lives." If you invite people to church, change lives. And we've got some cards that we want you to take. Take them all. Make this the most expensive thing we do at the church, printing these business cards. Take them, take them, take them, and you just invite people to church. That's all you've got to do. Anytime the opportunity comes up, anytime you go, "Well, you know what, y'all, why don't you just come to church with me Sunday?" In fact, hey, I've got it right here in my pocket. I just keep one with me at all times. Maybe you're the guy that's supposed to have it today. "Come to church with me. You can sit with me." It says that right there on there: "Come with me. Come sit with me at church." Amen. What a good opportunity. So invite people. Invite people. I don't want to see any of these left when y'all leave today. Invite people to church. You can change their lives. Somebody say amen.

All right, number three: church. Church. Church is where the magic happens. It's where the magic — some of y'all are freaking out because I've said "magic." Good grief. Don't underestimate normalcy. But y'all are just — y'all are gone now. Amen.

Church is where the magic happens. I bet big on the local church. I bet big on the local church. Some say that the local church is the hope of the world. The hope of the world. There's something that happens at church that moves people to a decision point. I've seen it for years. I can't explain it. It's stuff that don't happen in the living room. It don't happen at the restaurant. But there's something about getting in a church service where people just move to the decision point. I think it's the anointing. But the anointing also takes a lot of work.

And I'm going to share with you seven things that church experts say that we have to do right as a church if we're going to win our community. And if you've been with me on team nights, you're going to find out that I keep talking about these things over and over and over again. In fact, if you went into my office, I have a giant Post-it note. It's like two by three foot. It's on my wall and it says, "Do these things." And this is what it is.

Number one is preaching matters most. If I do say so myself. Amen. Preaching matters most. Church growth research consistently places preaching as the number one driver for retention and spiritual formation. Okay, so preaching is important.

Quality worship is non-negotiable. Ninety-two percent of churched adults say worship is very important. Churches investing in meaningful and high quality worship report stronger growth and engagement. It's crazy. It's like, if we just do the stuff the Bible says, the church will grow. Crazy, right? Y'all wake up. I feel y'all falling asleep on me. I literally hit the 30 minute mark and now y'all are done. I've trained you badly over the last several weeks.

So number three: kids ministry builds church health and growth. Sixty-two percent of parents say children's ministry was a key factor for choosing a church. I've said this several times: we have a unique opportunity in Saraland, Alabama, in that we know why everybody is moving here. They're telling us: we care about our kids. That's why they're coming. And so we have to make sure that we get that right. I'm going to tell you, over the next several months we are looking and evaluating, but I am trying to move us towards a full-time, professional, high quality, next level children's pastor as soon as we possibly can, because your children matter.

Number four: hospitality makes it personal. Hospitality makes it personal. Guests often decide whether they'll come back based on how they were greeted, treated and seated. In fact, Nelson Searcy wrote a book called "Fusion," and this is what he says: "Seven minutes is all you have to get to make a positive first impression. In the first seven minutes of contact with your church, your first-time guests will know whether or not they are coming back." Everyone is involved in the process. Everyone is involved in the process of leading people to Jesus Christ.

Number five — those were all four ministry things that happen in the church. Number five is not so much what happens in the church, but it's media and online engagement. Eighty-four percent of adults still attend in person, but 16 percent now stream services. Here's what's crazy though: churches are seeing increases in in-person attendance by having internet media broadcast. Not just seeing online increases. So having your services online doesn't increase your online audience — it also increases your in-person attendance. That's pretty crazy. In fact, listen to this statistic: that people who have a hybrid model of online and in person have grown 4.5 percent. Churches are growing 4.5 percent that are doing both, compared to a 15 percent decline in in-person only churches. People who are not taking the internet serious, businesses that aren't taking it serious, churches that aren't taking it serious — guess what? They're all dying. We have to reach people online.

Number six: landscaping and signage serve as first barriers or breakers. Remember, we only get seven minutes. So clarity in signage and purposeful landscaping helps reduce confusion and builds comfort from the moment people arrive. Let me just encourage you: if you see trash on the ground, pick it up. I walked through the other day and I was picking up coffee cups.

Hey, let me encourage you with something else, since I'm just going ahead and preaching along. We'll be here till 6 p.m. Don't worry. We won't. It won't get dark. But let me encourage you with this — another thing that you can do, if you are physically able: park further away from the building. I don't know if y'all know what my car looks like, but you notice every Sunday morning I'm parked at the end of the parking lot, because I want to give sinners the best parking spaces.

Amen. I want people to have the best opportunity to come in. I had a pastor one time who started the Love Club. The Love Club. It was designed so they could keep the parking lot free and clear. It stood for "Leave Our Vehicles Elsewhere." They were growing so much they had to carpool to church. Amen.

But church is where the magic happens, and church is where it takes work and money to accomplish the vision. And I'm not going to take another offering, but I just want to explain this to you, that there are three mechanisms involved in the church growing.

There is vision. Vision is like a steering wheel. We often quote it from Proverbs, but it's mentioned about four times in the Old Testament that when there is no prophetic vision, the people run wild, they run astray, they get off target.

> **PROVERBS 29:18** ESV
>
> 18 Where there is no prophetic vision the people cast off restraint, but blessed is he who keeps the law.

So prophetic vision sets the direction. It's the steering wheel of the church. If there's no prophetic vision, the church will go in any direction except wherever it ought to have gone. Okay, it won't stay on the road.

So there's vision. There's manpower. That's the oil, because if there's no manpower, the organization will break down. Interesting thing about oil: oil is only symbolic of the Holy Spirit once it gets on a person. So you are anointed to do work in the church. Amen.

So there's manpower, and then there's cash flow. Cash flow is the gas. You can only go as far as you can pay. So if you've got one tank of gas — I can tell you this, one tank of gas will get you from Saraland to Huntsville, but it won't get you to Tennessee. That's why we sow and we give: because we don't want to get right up to the line, we want to be able to take it over the line. Amen.

Number four is the last one: discipleship. Discipleship. I'm talking about growing in grace. Now remember, the whole process is discipleship. The whole process is discipleship. But now we're talking about the point where people begin to embrace being a disciple. Discipleship happens both on purpose and by proximity. It happens on purpose and by proximity. Last week I mentioned that we're going to have an intentional process that we walk people through so that they can go from the moment that they get saved to being a mature believer of Jesus Christ. But there's also some things that don't happen in the process. They just happen from kind of being around. That's how discipleship works.

Now, often when we think of discipleship, we think of a class. But the majority of discipleship — listen to me, church — happens in the pulpit. It happens in the pulpit. It doesn't happen off in a room somewhere, or in a cellar, or in an attic. It happens in this room. This is where discipleship happens the most in a church.

And I want to just say this: if we were to go back to the numbers that I showed you in the beginning, I showed you almost 50 percent of people will give their life to the Lord in a church service. Less than five percent will give their life to the Lord in a random encounter, street preacher going out and witnessing, doing X, Y and Z. The church has a very bad habit of putting most of their emphasis on the things that we know — we could look at, all you have to do is put eyes on it and you would know it's the least effective. And what we will do as a church oftentimes — I'm not talking about this church, I'm talking about the whole church — the devil's primary game with the church is to get people distracted with well-meaning things that produce no results. That's how the devil works. That's how the devil is working on the kingdom of God. If he can just get you distracted with stuff that looks or sounds like it'd be great, but it really isn't and it really doesn't do anything, then he'll just keep you there.

And so when we talk about those two ways, the 50 versus the less than five percent, what we get so obsessed with when we talk about people coming to the Lord is the less than five percent. Almost all preaching is about it. Almost all testimonies are about it. Almost all stories are about it. And we know that the vast majority of people who are giving their life to the Lord just happen to come to the church and sit in a seat. It's not as spectacular. It's not as mystical. It's not as fantastical. But it is effective.

And Jesus gave us a metric to make decisions for ministry. He said when you look at a prophet, you will know them by their fruit.

> **MATTHEW 7:16** ESV
>
> 16 You will recognize them by their fruits. Are grapes gathered from thornbushes, or figs from thistles?

What does it produce? I don't care how good it looks on video. I don't care how good the ministry name is. I don't care how spiritual it sounds. What produces the most fruit? If we'll just get about the work of the kingdom, we will see God change this region. Man, I feel like preaching.

And the reason I say that is, we have tried to overcomplicate discipleship to the nth degree. We try to make discipleship — we're sitting in rooms going, "How are we going to do it?" I don't know. Just preach the word. Just preach the word. People get changed when they get exposed to the word. They call it the washing of the word of God.

> **EPHESIANS 5:26** ESV
>
> 26 that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word,

You can get into this place and be washed by the word. It can change your life. It will change your life, if you let it.

But the discipleship process is important because it multiplies the kingdom. Disciples multiply disciples. Building relationships, inviting people to church, participating in the magic of church — I promise you, if you'll do those three things, you will see people around you begin to come to know the Lord in droves. Build relationships, invite people to church, join the team. Build relationships. Don't be weird. Don't be bizarre. Don't hide your faith. Come sit with me. Hey, I do have to stand up for a few minutes because I do this over here. I'll be back in a few minutes, but this is where we're going to sit today.

If you'll do that process, my God, I'm telling you, we will see people come to Jesus Christ in droves. If you believe it and you want to see it, give the Lord a praise. Amen.

02

Preaching Notes

Before You Preach

This is the second message in a four-week series on the value "we are relentlessly driven by the mission." Last week was urgent and heavy. This week moves from urgency to method, and it is practical: lists on lists, with homework. Tell the congregation up front that you are going to "nerd out" a little.

The message rests on statistics about how people come to faith. Those numbers are unsourced in the original notes (see the review notes). Check them, or present them as estimates, before you preach.

The tone is relief, not guilt. Many believers carry the idea that they are supposed to win everyone they know to Jesus by themselves. This message lifts that burden: everyone participates in the process, and no one has to close the deal alone.

Introduction

> MARK 1:9-17 ESV
>
> 9 In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. 10 And when he
> came up out of the water, immediately he saw the heavens being torn open and the Spirit descending on him
> like a dove. 11 And a voice came from heaven, "You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased." 12 The
> Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness. 13 And he was in the wilderness forty days, being
> tempted by Satan. And he was with the wild animals, and the angels were ministering to him. 14 Now after
> John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee, proclaiming the gospel of God, 15 and saying, "The time is fulfilled,
> and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel." 16 Passing alongside the Sea of Galilee,
> he saw Simon and Andrew the brother of Simon casting a net into the sea, for they were fishermen. 17 And
> Jesus said to them, "Follow me, and I will make you become fishers of men."

(An aside, not preached on: the angels ministered to Jesus in the wilderness, and Hebrews says angels are "ministering spirits sent out to serve for the sake of those who are to inherit salvation" (Hebrews 1:14).)

Jesus did not only preach repentance. He called ordinary people and told them, "Follow me, and I will make you become fishers of men" (Mark 1:17). Fishing takes a strategy.

Last week: our Great Commission is urgent. This week: **a strategy for reaching the lost.**

HOW PEOPLE COME TO CHRIST

Statistically, in America and the Western world, this is how people come to know the Lord (figures as given in the original notes):

- **Less than 5%: random encounters.** Street witnessing, door knocking, the right word to a stranger on a plane. It happens, and if God has called you to it, He will give you fruit. But it is the smallest number.
- **5 to 10%: media.** Someone flips past a Billy Graham sermon and can't look away. This is the fastest-growing category, because Christian media has moved onto YouTube, TikTok, Instagram, Facebook and podcasts.
- **10 to 15%: a home Bible study or small group.**
- **30 to 40%: personal evangelism.** Not a random encounter but a long game: long-term relationships in which you gradually move people toward the gospel.
- **40 to 50%: church services.** Nearly half of people who come to know the Lord do it in a church service.

Yet 75% of all born-again people point to a relationship that influenced their decision for Christ. Even someone saved watching Billy Graham can usually trace the decision back to someone's personal influence.

The local church is always involved in the salvation process, because it is either the point of origin or the destination. You either get saved at church, or get saved and come to church.

So relationships are typically the catalyst. If you are born again, the people you spend time around are the most likely people on earth to get saved.

Illustration: the party that was a Bible study. I got saved in one of the small categories: a home Bible study. I didn't know it was a Bible study when I went. I thought it was a party. I went because it was at the house of a girl who was the lifeguard at our community pool, and I knew who she was. She had not preached the gospel to me. I didn't even know she was a Christian. But a personal relationship led to a Bible study, and the Bible study led to salvation.

CALLED TO MAKE DISCIPLES

Let me strike the room a little: **we are not called to evangelize. We are called to make disciples.**

> MATTHEW 28:19 ESV
>
> 19 Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,

Salvation is a moment. Discipleship is a process. You go from death to life in an instant, but discipleship is a process, and part of it starts before someone is saved.

Here is the relief in this message: **no one has to carry the burden of sealing the deal.** We have taught that every believer should go out, win as many people as possible and bring them in saved. Honestly, some of you should involve a friend. Nobody has to bear the whole process. We all get to participate in it, and that is our responsibility.

1. Relationships Are the Catalyst for Salvation

Seventy-five percent of people trace their salvation back to the influence of a relationship. There are two kinds of relationships: your family, and everybody else. (Some of you would improve your life just by seeing the world through those two lenses.)

THE FAMILY DYNAMIC

Winning family members to the Lord is the most important and most special thing to most people, and it often seems the hardest. Four things will help you see lost family saved.

i. Prioritize the secret place. Get into prayer and the Scripture. There is power in the secret place that makes the difference: some things are accomplished in prayer that cannot be accomplished any other way. It is also a powerful testimony of your authenticity. My kids could reasonably wonder whether my faith is real: I'm a preacher, I get paid to do this, and they see me preach and then see me get upset over nothing at home. But when they see me in the secret place, I'm not trying to impress anybody. Daily prayer is just for you and the Lord, and it authenticates your faith.

ii. Stay faithful.

- Keep showing up for your family: holidays, big events, the grandkids.
- Keep showing up for church. Anchor your schedule.
- Hold your standards. You don't have to be ugly or rude, but sometimes you have to say, "We love you, but we don't do that in this house."
- Boundaries are caring, and people respect them even when they say they don't.

Decide to be unwavering: at home, at church, everywhere.

iii. Be patient.

- **You cannot teach, preach or shame your adult children out of bad decisions.**
- If anything, the Bible speaks of handing someone over "to Satan for the destruction of the flesh" (1 Corinthians 5:5). Well-meaning parents often rescue adult children right before things fall apart. There is grace and mercy from the Holy Spirit at rock bottom. ("I know it would hurt to see your baby in prison, but prison might solve it, because you can walk out of rehab." Preached this way; see the review notes.)
- Don't ruin every visit with an appeal. You don't have to bless the food and then stare at someone: "Does anybody here want to give their life to the Lord? Anyone? Going once..."

iv. Be flexible. If an adjustment on your part builds trust, improves the relationship, or has a direct impact on their decision for the gospel, adjust. I am not only asking you to set aside your preferences at church (we covered that last week), but everywhere someone could come to the Lord: not for the church's sake or the pastor's sake, but for the gospel's sake.

A word to parents. If you have an adult child who is ready to make a decision for Christ, but will not come to this church and will go to another one: go. You have the blessing of the Lord and the blessing of your pastor. **There is nothing in this church that is worth your kids not getting saved.** (Lightly preached: "Keep tithing for three months, then send me a letter.")

RELATIONSHIPS WITH EVERYONE ELSE

Work, friends, teams, clubs. Here is a simple formula for playing the long game, said three ways:

- **Don't be obscure about your faith. Don't be obnoxious about your faith.** Don't pretend you're not born again. But don't greet a coworker's trip to the restroom with "The Lord showed me this in prayer this morning. Are you ready to give your life to Jesus?"
- **Don't hide your faith. Don't hype your faith.** The people around you every day know you. They have heard you lose your temper with customer support on the phone. You can't hype your way past that.
- **Don't overestimate what spirituality will do in your relationships, and don't underestimate what normalcy will do.** Do not underestimate what not being weird will do for you.

2. Invite People to Church

An invitation to church is the first step in personal evangelism.

We treat brand-new believers as though they should win the whole world on their own. A teenager three weeks off drugs gets told, "You're a missionary to your school." It sounds spiritual, but it isn't realistic. One church had a banner on the wall that asked, "Who have you witnessed to today?" On Sunday morning, at church, everyone you have seen is saved. If you can lead someone to the Lord, do it. But the first step is just to invite them.

Illustration: call center sales. (Ashleigh worked in call center sales, and she was the top-selling woman for GEICO in the state of Florida.) A call center sale is a three-person process:

- the **opener**, who introduces the offer;
- the **informer**, who explains the details;
- the **closer**, who secures the deal.

Personal evangelism is similar. Not everyone is ready to be the closer. Have a good relationship, invite them, and let the church help close. You can hand someone off: involve a more mature believer, or bring them to church. (And if a coworker is asking you deep spiritual questions, they are probably ready to be saved.)

The pastor cannot meet one-on-one with everyone who has spiritual questions. **"I'm not a line fisherman. I'm a net fisherman."** The invitation is given from the pulpit, every week.

INVITING FAMILY

Invite them any time, but focus on holidays and significant moments:

- Easter and Christmas;

- Mother's Day;
- water baptisms (if your child is being baptized and your brother is far from God, that is the day to invite him);
- baby dedications.

INVITING EVERYONE ELSE

Every opportunity you get.

- **Invite cards.** Take a stack, keep one in your pocket, and hand them out: "Come with me. Come sit with me at church." Leave none on the table.
- **Trunk or Treat.** About as non-threatening an invitation as there is. Children who bring their parents to meet the pastor get a big candy bar, because meeting the pastor is a big deal. Families who come to that night come to church, and families who come to church get saved.

A practical gift: park farther away. If you are able, leave the best parking spaces for guests. (One pastor started a "LOVE Club": Leave Our Vehicles Elsewhere.)

3. Church: Where the Magic Happens

I bet big on the local church. Some call the local church the hope of the world. Something happens in a church service that moves people to a decision point. It doesn't happen in the living room or the restaurant. I think it is the anointing. **But the anointing still takes a lot of work.**

Here are seven things church leaders and researchers say every church must get right (statistics as given in the original notes):

Ministry:

- **1. Preaching matters most.** Church growth research consistently places preaching as the top driver of retention and spiritual formation.
- **2. Quality worship is non-negotiable.** 92% of churched adults say worship is very important, and churches that invest in meaningful, high-quality worship report stronger growth and engagement.
- **3. Kids ministry builds church health and growth.** 62% of parents say children's ministry was a key factor in choosing a church. Families are moving to our area because of their kids; we have to get this right.
- **4. Hospitality makes it personal.** Guests often decide whether they'll come back based on how they were greeted, treated and seated. Nelson Searcy, in *Fusion*, says a church has about seven minutes to make a positive first impression. Everyone is involved in the process.

Marketing:

- **5. Media and online engagement.** Most adults still attend in person, but a growing share stream services. Churches with a hybrid model of online and in-person services have grown, while in-person-only churches have declined. Being online does not only grow an online audience; it helps in-person attendance too.

Property:

- **6. Landscaping and signage are the first barriers or breakers.** You only get seven minutes. Clear signs and purposeful landscaping reduce confusion and build comfort from the moment people arrive. If you see trash, pick it up.
- **7. Well-maintained facilities.** Guests often decide whether to return based on the cleanliness and condition of the building, before they ever hear a sermon.

WHAT IT TAKES

Church is where the magic happens, but it takes work and money to accomplish the vision. Three things move a church forward:

- **Vision is the steering wheel.** "Where there is no prophetic vision the people cast off restraint" (Proverbs 29:18). Without it, a church goes in every direction except where it ought to go.
- **Manpower is the oil.** Without people, the organization breaks down. And you are anointed to do work in the church.
- **Cash flow is the gas.** You can only go as far as you can pay. One tank of gas will get you from Saraland to Huntsville, but not to Tennessee. That is why we sow and give: not to get right up to the line, but to take it over the line.

4. Discipleship: Growing in Grace

The whole process is discipleship. But now we come to the point where people begin to embrace being a disciple.

Discipleship happens on purpose and by proximity. Last week we talked about an intentional process that walks a new believer to maturity. But some discipleship happens simply by being around other believers.

We often think of discipleship as a class. **But the majority of discipleship happens in the pulpit.** Not in a back room, a cellar or an attic, but in the room where the word is preached.

DON'T GET DISTRACTED

Go back to the numbers. Nearly half of people come to the Lord in a church service. Fewer than five percent come through random encounters. Yet most of our preaching, testimonies and stories are about the five percent. The church has a bad habit of putting most of its emphasis on the least effective methods.

The devil's primary game with the church is to get people distracted with well-meaning things that produce no results. If he can keep you busy with what looks or sounds great but does nothing, he will.

Jesus gave us the metric for ministry decisions: "You will recognize them by their fruits" (Matthew 7:16). Not how good it looks on video, how good the name is, or how spiritual it sounds. What produces the most fruit?

We overcomplicate discipleship. Just preach the word. People are changed when they are exposed to the word, as Christ cleanses His church "by the washing of water with the word" (Ephesians 5:26).

Conclusion

Discipleship multiplies the kingdom, because disciples multiply disciples. The strategy is simple:

- **Build relationships.** Don't be weird. Don't hide your faith.
- **Invite people to church.** "Come sit with me."
- **Participate in the magic of church.** Join the team.

Rinse and repeat. Do those three things, and you will see people around you come to know the Lord in droves. And every Sunday, we will give people an opportunity to get right with God.

OPTIONAL: SALVATION PRAYER

This prayer is in the original notes but was not prayed in the recorded message on September 14, 2025. Use it for the invitation.

Dear Jesus, I know that I'm a sinner, and I need a Savior. Today I put my faith in You. I believe You are the Son of God, God in the flesh. I believe You lived a sinless life, died for my sins, and rose again to give me new life. I receive Your forgiveness, and I confess right now: You are the Lord of my life. Thank You for saving me. In Jesus' name, Amen.

03

Scripture List

Every passage read, cited or alluded to in the message, in the order it comes up.

Read

Read aloud in the message.

MARK 1:9-17	9 In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. 10 And when he came up out of the water, immediately he saw the heavens being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove. 11 And a voice came from heaven, "You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased." 12 The Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness. 13 And he was in the wilderness forty days, being tempted by Satan. And he was with the wild animals, and the angels were ministering to him. 14 Now after John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee, proclaiming the gospel of God, 15 and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel." 16 Passing alongside the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and Andrew the brother of Simon casting a net into the sea, for they were fishermen. 17 And Jesus said to them, "Follow me, and I will make you become fishers of men."

Cited

Named or quoted along the way.

HEBREWS 1:14	14 Are they not all ministering spirits sent out to serve for the sake of those who are to inherit salvation?
MATTHEW 28:19	19 Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,
PROVERBS 29:18	18 Where there is no prophetic vision the people cast off restraint, but blessed is he who keeps the law.
MATTHEW 7:16	16 You will recognize them by their fruits. Are grapes gathered from thornbushes, or figs from thistles?

Alluded to

Drawn on without naming the reference.

1 CORINTHIANS 5:5	5 you are to deliver this man to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord.
EPHESIANS 5:26	26 that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word,

Pastor Jason Mayfield

SENIOR PASTOR, CITYLIGHT CHURCH

Pastor Jason Mayfield is the Senior Pastor of Citylight Church in Saraland, Alabama, where he and his wife, Ashleigh, lead a church devoted to Building Lives on Jesus. His preaching is rooted in the Bible, full of hope, and grounded in one conviction: an incredible life is built on the finished work of Jesus Christ.

For more than 20 years, Pastor Jason has given his life to the local church. He has been credentialed with the Assemblies of God for 21 years and ordained for 14, and he has led revitalization in churches that went on to rank among the Top 100 Fastest-Growing Churches in America. He carries a deep conviction that the church can be both excellent and supernatural, and a passion for revival.

He is an author and the creator of Tear Up Your Bible and POWER 27, a daily rhythm of Bible reading, prayer and worship. His resources have helped more than 100,000 people go deeper in the Scriptures. Above every title, his greatest joy is seeing people meet Jesus, be filled with the Spirit, and grow into everything God has called them to be.

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