



## Missionally Engaged

Seeking opportunities for gospel conversations in our community and around the world

Q: Does the church give the impression that the world is supposed to come to us or are Christians doing a good job of engaging the culture? Why or why not?

It is common for Christians to bemoan the state of affairs in our world. Society has and will continue to decline in moral standards...the Bible is clear on that. Too often we as Christians “hide” from the world and treat the church as a fortress. We can get the idea that the purpose of the church is to protect us from the culture. In his book *Lifestyle Evangelism*, author Joe Aldrich makes this observation as to why some Christians avoid engaging the culture:

“Somehow in the church we’ve made it to where spirituality is defined by how much you can withdraw from culture. However, the true mark of spirituality is how much you can engage the culture and penetrate it for Jesus Christ.”

Q: Why do some people believe that it is spiritual to withdraw from the culture?

In order to understand what it means to be culturally engaged, we need to look no further than the ministry of Jesus himself. Notice this exchange between Jesus and the “religious” people of His day when they see him spending time with “sinners.”

### **Matthew 9:9-13**

<sup>9</sup>As Jesus was walking along, he saw a man named Matthew sitting at his tax collector’s booth. “Follow me and be my disciple,” Jesus said to him. So Matthew got up and followed him. <sup>10</sup>Later, Matthew invited Jesus and his disciples to his home as dinner guests, along with many tax collectors and other disreputable sinners. <sup>11</sup>But when the Pharisees saw this, they asked his disciples, “Why does your teacher eat with such scum?” <sup>12</sup>When Jesus heard this, he said, “Healthy people don’t need a doctor—sick people do.” <sup>13</sup>Then he added, “Now go and learn the meaning of this Scripture: ‘I want you to show mercy, not offer sacrifices.’ For I have come to call not those who think they are righteous, but those who know they are sinners.”

Q: If you saw a member of the church hanging out with a group of “sinners,” what would you think?

Q: Have you ever avoided spending time with “sinners” because you did not want “religious” people to accuse you of being one?

We can see that Jesus wasn't concerned about what the “religious” people would think of His spending time with sinners. He was committed to His mission. Luke 19:10 says that Jesus came to seek and save the lost. Jesus' goal was to reach sinners. He also instructed His disciples that they were to be salt and light in the world (Matthew 5:13-14). Salt is symbolic of the spiritual health essential to Christian virtue and counter to the corruption of the world. Light symbolizes the witness that we have for Christ in a world that is darkened by sin.

However, we cannot be salt and light to sinners if we are not engaged with them. If you notice Jesus' life, He simply reaches out to the people around Him. He never organizes a rally or an event so that people can hear the Gospel. The question, then, becomes where are we engaging the world? Christ's example is clear, and so are His words. He says in Matthew 28:19-20

<sup>19</sup>“Therefore, go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. <sup>20</sup>Teach these new disciples to obey all the commands I have given you. And be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”

This verse is not meant only for pastors and missionaries. It is directed to all believers as we realize that we all have our own personal mission field. The first step in becoming culturally engaged is to ask the following questions.

Q: What are the opportunities that I already have to relate with non-Christians?

Q: Where can I strategically place myself to develop relationships with non-Christians?

## **FOUR ARENAS BEING MISSIONALLY ENGAGED**

Finally, it is helpful to think through the following four arenas of your life as opportunities for you to engage the culture around you.

### **1. Conduct (Being) –**

#### **1 Peter 3:15-16**

<sup>15</sup>“Instead, you must worship Christ as Lord of your life. And if someone asks about your Christian hope, always be ready to explain it. <sup>16</sup>But do this in a gentle and respectful way. Keep your conscience clear. Then if people speak against you, they will be ashamed when they see what a good life you live because you belong to Christ”

As a Christian, our lives should be representative of the righteousness of Christ. As we are being conformed to His likeness, we are being called to a lifestyle, or a standard of conduct, that is different from that of the world. Our conduct and behavior gives testimony to the holy work of Christ in our life.

## **2. Works (Doing) –**

### **Matthew 5:16**

<sup>16</sup>“In the same way, let your good deeds shine out for all to see, so that everyone will praise your heavenly Father.”

In each new situation we should ask, “What can we do in this situation that draws attention to God so that He can be honored?” We can authenticate the reality of the truth of Scripture by caring for the needs of individuals. When the truth of the gospel is combined with the proof of love for God and for man, then the message of salvation becomes more than something religious; it becomes extremely relevant.

## **3. Money (Giving) –**

### **Luke 16:9**

<sup>9</sup>“Here’s the lesson: Use your worldly resources to benefit others and make friends. Then, when your earthly possessions are gone, they will welcome you to an eternal home.”

You can use your money (wealth of unrighteousness) to strategically help change lives and reach other parts of the world for Christ. Money is only temporal, but a wise investment can produce eternal results as individuals come to trust Christ and later will welcome you into heaven.

## **4. Tongue (Sharing) –**

### **Acts 1:8**

<sup>8</sup>“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you. And you will be my witnesses, telling people about me everywhere—in Jerusalem, throughout Judea, in Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”

Each individual has the responsibility of sharing their faith in the context of relationships with non-Christians. The church is not the best answer for a non-Christian friend, because of the credibility issue we addressed earlier. You have credibility with your friends because you have the testimony of a changed life.

Q: Which of these four arenas do you feel like you are actively engaging the culture? Which arena needs the most work?

“You don’t judge an army by how many people come and sit in the mess hall. Instead, the impact of an army is based on how many trained soldiers are out in the field, protecting, defending, or fighting the enemy.”

## **Final Thoughts**

- We need to take a fresh look at our leader, Jesus Christ, and the efforts He made to spend time with non-believers.
- We need to re-embrace Jesus' original vision for the church as salt and light and measure our progress as a church against that vision.
- We need to seek significant non-Christian relationships, serve these individuals in practical ways, and then share our story with them.

## **Personal Application: Are you Missionally Engaged?**

1. When was the last time you shared your faith with someone? Have you ever?

2. What areas of your life are you consistently around non-Christians? Do you have any significant relationships with non-Christians?

3. What non-Christians are you currently praying for and pursuing?

4. Do you retreat from the culture or do you seek to engage and penetrate it? How?

## **Examples of personal goals to help you become Missionally Engaged**

1. Pray every day that God would make you sensitive to the daily opportunities you have to connect with non-Christians.
2. Make a list of non-Christians that you will commit to get to know and pray for their salvation.
3. Think through how you came to know Christ and the individuals that God used to draw yourself to Him.
4. Memorize a few key verses of Scripture so you can share the Gospel when you have an opportunity.
5. Introduce yourself to your neighbors.

6. Pray for your neighbors as you drive or walk around the neighborhood.
7. Invite a non-Christian neighbor or co-worker over to dinner once a month.
8. Initiate a social activity (go to dinner, a ballgame, movie, etc.) with a non-Christian friend.
9. Stay up on current events so you can engage non-Christians in meaningful conversations.
10. Educate yourself on something that interests a non-Christian friend in order to stimulate conversation (i.e., a certain sports team, a particular hobby, books they like to read, etc.).
11. Pick one activity (a club, team, project, etc.) to participate in each year specifically for the purpose of meeting non-Christians.
12. When people voice concerns in their life, ask them if you can pray for them, making sure to follow up on their concerns.
13. Summarize your testimony to one or two minutes so you can share it in casual conversations.
14. Read magazines that give insight into our culture.