

# (The Aggressive Holy Spirit) the Mystery & Method of Kingdom Growth

by Jim Elliff

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*The kingdom of God grows through a mysterious process, but the method is simple: sow the seed on the soil, sharing the gospel with others.*

**Duration:** 51:07

**Scripture:** Joel 2:28-32, Matthew 6:33

**Topics:** "Kingdom Growth", "Evangelism"

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## Description

In this sermon, the speaker focuses on the importance of evangelism and encourages the audience to engage in sharing the word of God. He begins by sharing an anecdote about a man who was converted to Christianity through the persistent prayers of a fellow passenger on a train. The speaker then illustrates how a seemingly insignificant act of evangelism can have a profound impact on future generations. He emphasizes the power of the gospel and urges the audience to actively participate in spreading it, even if they may not see immediate results.

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## Transcript

I thought New York City was in New York, but I guess it may not be. It's its own place. All right.

Well, thank you, men, for a great job you've done in listening to the messages that I've been allowed to preach. It hasn't been a great week. It's really been wonderful to me.

I'm going to go back. I told Fred last night I'm going to go back and write down the names and addresses of several friends of mine who need to be getting on the list of the Bunyan Conference and try to encourage them to come. And I think it would be a great idea if we all pitched in and did that.

We could increase this mailing list considerably. I think that would help and expose more people to this kind of conference. It's unique in many ways.

So I want to encourage you to do that when you get back home. Now, I want to admit right off that my message today is a bit more anecdotal than I normally do, but I want to be very practical with you today and stimulate us in the issue of evangelism like I was supposed to do the last two sessions. So let's turn in our Bibles to the book of Mark, all right? Mark chapter 4. Mark chapter 4. I wonder if we could bow our heads again and pray and ask for the Lord's blessing on this and help.

Father, thank you again for this great privilege. What a joy this has been to be together and to hear the Word preached. There is no better thing, Lord, than this as far as we're concerned.

We appreciate the way you've stimulated us to action and encouraged us, helped us with problems, helped us discern things that we were confused about, gave us broader relationships, and we're just very grateful for the many things that you have done. And we pray now these last couple of sessions that they will be particularly meaningful to us for your sake. We ask you in Jesus' name, amen.

Now, in Mark 4, we are in Mark's collection of the parables that Jesus Christ gave. We had already looked at the parable of the soils, but in a moment we're going to look at the parable of the seed, found in verse 26 through verse 29. Now, you know that when you look at some of the parables, in particular I'm thinking of three of the parables here that Jesus gave, there's a very, I think, marked theme in at least three of them, which goes something like this.

The kingdom of God is a living thing that grows. The kingdom of God is a living thing that grows. And you remember the parable, of course, of the leaven and the parable of the mustard seed.

The smallest of all seeds becomes the greatest in the garden. And then this parable, which is the parable of the seed. So words like expansion and permeation and multiplication, those kinds of words are appropriate when we think about the nature of the kingdom of God.

So let's read this passage here and see what we find. Let's read it together in verse 26. And he was saying, the kingdom of God is like a man who casts seed upon the soil and goes to bed at night and gets up by day and the seed sprouts up and grows.

How? He himself does not know. The soil produces crops by itself. First the blade, then the head, then the mature grain in the head.

But when the crop permits, he immediately puts in the sickle because the harvest has come. Now we know that there is a lot of empirical data that the kingdom of God is alive and grows. If we just go back to the time of Christ and look at those 11 disciples and think about where we are now, even with all of the false converts mixed in, we still would have to say there are millions of people who are believers in Jesus Christ.

So there's lots of data for us just to look at. We just open our eyes and look. We know that this is exactly right.

This is the way it is happening. We also have a lot of information in the scripture from the outset there when Jesus Christ, before he ascended, told his disciples that the Holy Spirit would come upon them. They would be witnesses.

They would receive power when the Holy Spirit came upon them. They would be witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and the uttermost part of the earth. He wasn't giving them a command, really.

That's not a command to evangelize. It's a declaration. It's a declaration.

This is what will happen. And of course we see the unfolding of that in the book of Acts, so much so that the apostle Paul actually says the gospel has been preached to the known world. And then we see the continuance of that.

You get to the book of Revelation, chapter 5. You find people in heaven from every tribe and nation and tongue, a great missionary idea, isn't it, that God has people in every tribal group, and they will be in heaven. So we are somewhere, of course, in between that beginning prophecy about the work that would happen through the church and the final fulfillment. It's an interesting thing.

You never see the disciples in the Bible kind of worried about the statistics. We use the statistics a lot of times to stir up people. We say, well, we've got 24,000 people groups, 12,000 have been evangelized, and we have a great need.

But they never seem to be fretting about that, do they? Rather, it appears to me that they see themselves in the vein of the prophetic fulfillment of what Jesus Christ declared would be true, that they get to be part of this great enterprise that will end well, right? And in my view, you can answer that. That's the devil calling. That's your wife.

Don't tell her. I said that. But we are there, aren't we? We're in the middle, and we're in an enterprise that is a winning enterprise.

And so we don't really need to fret. God is not one soul behind in what He is accomplishing. He's exactly on schedule.

But it's a thrill, isn't it, to be part of that? We don't work out of a sense of defeat about all of this. We work out of a sense of optimism. God is carrying out His great purpose.

He has told us ahead of time what it would be. He gives us a view from the end. We have every reason to be rejoicing that the work of God is being done.

In fact, we can see such marvelous results already, can't we, over these 2,000 years since Jesus Christ said those words. Now the question is, of course, how does it happen? And I believe that this parable gives us some answers to that, and I've got a couple of answers to that that are very simple answers. And the first one is this.

Look again at the parable. He was saying the kingdom of God is like a man. Here I think of the corporate man or the church who casts seed upon the soil, goes to bed at night and gets up by day, and the seed sprouts up and grows how he himself does not know.

So the first answer to the question, how does the kingdom of God grow, is this. It's a mystery. He doesn't know, and you don't have a clue.

You don't have a clue how it happens. This is a fascinating idea, really, that it just seems like it all happens by itself. That's what he says.

The farmer goes out and puts his seed out there, and before you know it you've got the blade and then the head and then the mature grain and the head, and it just seems to happen by itself. That's the terminology. You can't really figure it out.

Now I'm not a horticulturist, and I'm sure we've made advances in trying to understand these things, but it appears to me still to be quite a mystery, even in the realm of horticulture, that you could take a seed and it dies in the ground. It's just an amazing thing. You take corn, by the way.

I believe I heard the other day that you get 16,000. Well, I better not say this, but the results of putting corn in the ground is certainly greater than the investment, right? So you sow that seed and a huge number of seeds, a huge number of kernels of corn result from that one seed. It must be true that this is going on.

It's easy to see as we look at it. But how it happens, we really have to scratch our heads and say, you know, I don't really know how God is carrying all this out and getting it done, but it's obvious it's being done. Let me illustrate to you how that might happen.

Let's say that you teach a class of 10-year-old boys in the church that you're part of, and you have one kid that is incorrigible, and he never makes eye contact with you, and you try your best to get the gospel into that kid's heart, but he is just not paying any attention whatsoever. In fact, he's only there about two or three months, and then the kid leaves. He moves out of town with his family, and you never see him, and you never even think of him again.

He's gone out of your life. Now down the line, however, this boy goes to college, and while he's in college he gets depressed. Things are not going right.

His girlfriend shafted him, and money's not right, and this, that, and the other. The grades are not good, and he's depressed and down. But he remembers one night when he's thinking about it all that he knew somebody who seemed to understand life, and he knows it has to do with Christ, and maybe he remembers a verse of Scripture or an idea or a concept that was taught in that class, and God uses that little bit of seed in his life to bring him to the place where he actually puts his trust in Christ, because you never hear about it, but he put his trust in Christ.

He joins a Christian club, marries a Christian girl. They have children. They raise them up in the fear of God.

A whole generation of kids go on. Those kids walk with the Lord. All the kids in his family are solid and vibrant Christians.

They marry other believers. A third generation goes on. You're dead and gone a long time ago.

A fourth generation comes in there. Let's say we're four generations down the line, and there has been a great impact to the gospel generationally throughout this family. In this fourth generation, one of the young men who's now a businessman, married, a fine member of the church, out of this family, attends a mission conference, and he hears about somebody wanting to publish a book, let's say, that he thinks will be helpful for leaders in New Guinea someplace.

And so he listens to that, and he says, Well, you know, I've done very well financially in my business. I'm going to contribute to that. He goes up to the fellow and says, Look, can I put a couple of thousand dollars toward that book? And the man receives it graciously, of course, and he publishes the book, and it's stuck off in the libraries of little Bible institutes around New Guinea here and there.

And it sits on the shelf in one library for 40 years, and nobody touches it. Dust is built up on it. Finally, a young man who's away from his family walks into that library searching for a good book to read, and he sees that book, and he pulls it off the shelf for the first time in 40 years, blows the dust off of it, checks it out, and that book revolutionizes his life.

And he becomes the instrument, through the stimulus of that book, he becomes the instrument to open up a whole new tribal group to the gospel. Now, you didn't know when you were teaching that Sunday school class that you were doing global evangelization, did you? But you were. But how it happens, you have no idea, right? If I can just use my family a little bit.

My grandfather, we have his written testimony. My great-grandfather in the 1800s was converted on a train outside of Little Rock. He had gone to Indian Territory from Tennessee.

He and his bride, they had two kids. One of them died. Had a little girl left.

The woman got sick. She got so sick that she wanted to leave Oklahoma or Indian Territory and go back home and be cared for. Needed to go back home and be cared for by her mother.

But on the train outside of Little Rock, she passed away. And before she passed away, she was a believer in Christ, but her husband was not. Before she passed away, she pled with her husband that he would put his trust in Jesus Christ and he would rear this little girl in the Lord.

The man got on his knees, and he prayed for a long time while the train was rolling down the track. When he got up, he was a believer in Christ. The next Sunday, he was there in the church with the girl in his arms, giving the testimony that we have, and eventually he married a second time.

He had children. About half of them died, but two of the boys that were left, one my grandfather and then another great-uncle, they became preachers of the gospel. My great-grandfather had those children.

Then my grandfather had two children, just was able to have two. A girl who became a fine Christian and lived for the Lord all of her life. And then my father, who became a minister of the gospel.

My father had four children. All three of the boys are in the ministry, preaching. And my sister, my only sister, married a preacher.

Now in the fourth generation, almost every boy, at least, is in the ministry. Some missionary, some preaching in churches or whatever. Now, that's a strange kind of family to be in, and I'm telling you we have some interesting theological discussions.

I'm kind of a nothing in the family, but my brothers have been rather prominent, and they've preached all over the world, and I've had the privilege of preaching many places in the world. Do you think that little sick lady on the train had any concept how many tens of thousands of people would hear the gospel generationally through her family? Do you think she knew that? She didn't have a clue, did she? She didn't know anything. She didn't even know if her husband would become a Christian.

You see, the Bible teaches us, or Christ teaches us really, that He will build the church, and He's putting it together. And I can guarantee you it's a mystery. And we delight, don't we, in hearing about that, and it's a great hope and encouragement to us.

Now, there's another answer, however, in this text of Scripture. Look at this parable. It says, He was saying, The kingdom of God is like a man who casts seed upon the soil.

Well, there's something else in there. It's not only a mystery, there's not only a mystery to this thing, there is a method to it. And what is the method? Well, the method is profoundly simple.

You sow the seed on the soil. It's a sower, to put it like a preacher should put it, it's a sower sowing seed on the soil. That's it.

There is a method, and evangelism and the growth of the kingdom will not happen without the method being carried out. Just turn to Acts chapter 2 for a moment, if you don't mind. By the way, let me just say this while you're turning.

I think one of the things that we have done wrongly in evangelicalism, in my view, oh, it's not totally wrong, it has mixed, maybe it's mixed in a way, but one of the things I believe that has frustrated a lot of believers and made a lot of true Christians anxious about this area of evangelism, I'll bet it's just mentioning the word evangelism to most pastors even makes them break out in a cold sweat because most of us feel like we're not doing a very good job at this. Would you agree with that? And I don't have any pastors who have told me, Jim, we have a great church, we just have a weakness in the area of evangelism. They usually always say that.

And most believers feel that a lot. And I think one of the reasons we got into this mess, perhaps, is our mentality about packaging the gospel. What we've done is we have said that the gospel is a set of propositions with transition statements and scriptures attached, and that creates kind of a fear in the believer.

He memorizes the plan and does his best to get it down. We'll have our courses in evangelism and so forth, and occasionally that's effective, but in the long run what happens is it creates a fear in him because he realizes somebody might just ask a question in the middle of this presentation, and I really don't know what to say. If a guy gets me off track, how am I going to get back? Because evangelizing has to do with sharing all these things and getting all the transitions and scripture verses in and then asking the big question at the end.

And we package that. You see how that can create actually a frustration. It works negatively for you, I think, in the final analysis.

Really, it is far better to talk about evangelism the way Jesus does, and that is to sow the seed. In other words, with the personality that you have, in the ways that you could possibly do it, in any possible little or big way, depending upon the opportunity, get excited about just planting the seed, throwing the seed out there in any possible way you can. God is building His church, but He says there is a method.

The seed has to get out there. We have to throw it out there, so cast the seed. Cast it every place you go.

Well, we are finding in our church that this is a very exciting thing, and it is the most evangelistic church I have ever been in, but I think one of the reasons is because we are emphasizing this way of evangelism rather than the packaged way, and people feel much more liberty, and we get very excited about the slightest thing. People say, Oh, I had just an opportunity to say a little word here, or I was able to put this piece of literature in somebody's hand, and I think they are going to read it. Well, great, you are evangelizing.

You are doing what we are supposed to be doing in evangelization. There is everything to be excited about, nothing to be ashamed of in that. In other words, you see the encouragement level is far greater, and you need that, by the way, in the area of evangelism.

I think that is a real piece of wisdom for pastors to think about this issue. I really believe I have told you something important right there, and I really believe that will help your folks. You probably have to get over some of that old mentality to get to that place, but if you can get there, I think it is going to help you in a great way.

Now, let's look here at the passage in Acts 2, and I just want to walk through a couple of places in Acts with you a moment to show you something about the kind of mentality we ought to have about the method of sowing the seed. Look at the prophecy of Joel. Of course, at Pentecost, Peter is using the prophecy of Joel, and he is explaining what has just happened, and in particular, he is explaining, if you notice in verse 12, it says, They continued in amazement and great perplexity, saying to one another, What does this mean? This particularly follows, I think, the idea of the tongues that he has just talked about.

Luke has just talked about in the chapter before this. So Peter answers. He raises up his voice in verse 14.

He declares to them, Men of Judea and all of you who live in Jerusalem, let this be known to you and give heed to my words, for these men are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is only the third hour of the day. I always thought that was a strange way to put it, as if they would be later. Surely that is not right.

But it must be more Presbyterian than I thought. But this is what was spoken through the prophet Joel. Here he gives these.

We have five verses here of this prophecy of Joel. Now if you can think of the prophecy of Joel here like this, it will help us in evangelism. Think of the first two verses as a description about what has just commenced.

Think of the second two verses, 19 and 20, as what will happen at the end of this period of time and the day of the Lord is coming, or before the great and glorious day of the Lord. And then think of that verse 21 as a summary verse about this whole period of time. Now this is just my take on it.

You may have a disagreement about it, but this is the way I see it. And to me, I'm always right. All right, look at what he says.

It shall be in the last days, God says, that I will pour forth of my Spirit upon all mankind. Of course, we know that that means not everybody, every person. That means all kinds of people as is illustrated by the passage before it with all the people, the Medes, the Persians from Crete and so forth, the Arabs, the Jews that he's mentioned just before.

All kinds of people. I will pour forth of my Spirit upon all kinds of people, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy. You young men shall see visions.

Your old men shall dream dreams. That did happen. And then verse 18, he gets back to the subject.

Even upon my bond slaves, both men and women, I will in those days pour forth of my Spirit, and he adds, and they shall prophesy. And then at the end of the age, he says, Look, I will grant wonders in the sky above and signs in the earth beneath, blood and fire and vapor of smoke. The sun will be turned to darkness, the moon into blood, before the great and glorious day of the Lord shall come.

Now, I'll leave it to you to figure out whether those are actual cosmic signs or that it's apocalyptic language about political events and changes. There are different ways to look at that passage that conservatives

consider. And then we have this great verse at the end.

And it shall be that everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved. By the way, that is not about praying. It's not about praying a prayer to be a Christian.

Calling on the name of the Lord is evoking the name of the Lord or calling upon the merits of Christ on your behalf before the Father. It's tantamount to the idea of faith or believing in the Lord. So it shall be that everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.

Now, here, as you know, there's been a cataclysmic change in the world because what's happening in this passage is that Peter is declaring a huge difference from the Old Covenant. In the Old Testament, the Jews, though they were to be an object lesson to the world, were not evangelistic. Really, were they? And the focus of God's attention was on the Jews, it seemed.

It certainly didn't seem. It was true. And then when we come to this place now in the history of the world, everything explodes in every direction because now the gospel is going to be preached to all kinds of people and God's Spirit is going to come upon all kinds of people and those people themselves will be the propagators of the gospel.

Both men and women, my bond slaves, shall prophesy. And everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord. That's a new statement, you see.

That's a new idea in a way, isn't it? In a sense, everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. This is the declaration he's making here that is an explanation for what's happening. And it's an explanation for their tongues here in this passage because he's describing, when he uses the word prophecy here, that's a loaded word, especially in our day, isn't it? The word prophecy.

But he mentions it twice and it's really this, I think, very heavy theme in this Joel passage here. He mentions it twice because I believe he's explaining. You see, on one side of the Pentecost event, Jesus gives the prophecy where he says, you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you and you shall be my what? My witnesses.

And then on the other side of it, he gives the explanation from Joel. This is what this means. It is about prophecy.

Okay, now, the idea of prophecy here, as I'm sure many of you know, it's a looser use of, more general use of the idea of prophecy. It's almost the same as saying they shall evangelize. They shall speak forth the things of God, you see, both men and women.

You say, Jim, do you believe in women preachers? Yeah, yeah, I do. I don't believe in women pastors. But women preachers like this? Yeah, yeah, I believe.

Men and women, my bond slaves, shall prophesy. They shall speak out the things of God. And it is the characteristic of this new age, really.

It is a new thing about this new age, I believe, that we live in before the great and glorious day of the Lord that men and women shall proclaim and speak out the things of Jesus Christ. In that sense, yes, I believe it's true. I believe men and women can preach like that.

Amen? Good, I was hoping you were with me because some of you were looking kind of strange and pale there for a moment. Now, my grandmother was one of the greatest women preachers I ever knew in this respect. She would have never been a pastor of a church.

That would have been repulsive to her. She thought it was not biblical. But she was a great gospel presenter.

And she was a little different now than I believe in some of the decisionism that she had. But I have to say, there are many, many people who come to Christ through her life. I never went to her house.

She didn't have a list on the wall with the butcher and the gal with the filling station and the name of this person, that person, the mailman. She had that list up there. She would pray for them.

She would talk to them boldly about Christ. She was really a remarkable lady. And one time, there's a little legendary story that gets bigger every year about my grandmother.

But years ago, they lived. They never had any money much. My granddad was a pastor.

And they lived by the tracks. One day, when hobos used to ride the trains, a hobo got off the train there in that little southern Arkansas town and knocked on the screen door in the summer and wanted some food. She came to the door.

My granddad was gone. And so she was obliging. She wanted to give him some food.

She says, You wait right here, and I'll go get something for you. And she went back into the kitchen. She opened the ice box.

Do you use that term? She opened the ice box, and she got out a big piece. She got out her cheese. She took a big butcher knife, and she went to the counter and sliced off a big chunk of cheese.

And she had the cheese in one hand, the butcher knife in the other hand. She was walking across the kitchen into the living room thinking to herself, How am I going to witness to this man? And when she got to the door, she shook that knife. She said, Are you prepared to meet the Lord? And they said he outran the train.

I don't know if that's true or not. The last part may not be true. But at any rate.

But she, in a way, was a preacher of the gospel. Do you remember the passage? Look over in Acts chapter 8 for a moment. Look at Acts chapter 8. I think this is the kind of preaching we need to recover in a way, don't we? In Acts chapter 8, look at this great passage.

You know, after the stoning of Stephen, when the apostles stayed in Jerusalem, right? And in verse 1, the people were scattered throughout the region. But the apostles, except the apostles it says in verse 1 at the end of that verse. Because of this persecution.

So these are just the regular people. Not the super people, the apostles. But look at verse 4. Therefore those who had been scattered went about preaching the word.

In my view, it's probably men and women. And they were going about preaching the word. Everybody was preaching the word.

You see, this is the kind of preaching, I believe, really needs to be recovered. Especially among our churches who have, I think, a purer view of the gospel itself. We need to recover this.

In Acts chapter 6, do you remember that? And you don't need to turn to it because I think you'll remember that. When the apostles, who were the first leaders of the Jerusalem church as well. But when things got really busy with all the people in town because of Pentecost had been converted and were staying over for training and whatever.

And they were hanging out there still until the persecution of Stephen. You may remember that there was a lot going on in terms of the feeding scheme that was being carried out. And the apostles were heavily involved in that.

So they asked the church to choose six men. We typically think of these as the prototype of deacons. Six men, full of faith in the Holy Spirit and so forth, full of wisdom.

And the reason for this was that the apostles might give themselves to the ministry of the word and to prayer. Now probably when it says prayer there, he's talking about personal prayer. But it could be like Acts chapter 2 where the article is used, the prayers.

And it might be kind of a synecdoche for worship. But regardless of what that means, let's think about the first idea. The ministry of the word.

What does that mean? Now immediately when we hear the apostles gave themselves to the ministry of the word, what do we think? We think as we apply it to ourselves, I've got to hole up in my study for a lot more hours than I've been studying before. I want you to understand the balance I'm going to give this. But just think about this.

That's what we think normally, right? I've got to get down. I've got to spend an hour for every minute that I stand up in the pulpit so I can knock it out of the ballpark on Sunday morning. I've got to work harder.

I've got to work much harder at dividing the word of truth, studying the word, knowing what's in it. But what do you think that meant to those apostles? I don't think it meant that at all. In fact, when you look at their lives you wonder, did they ever have any time to study? You know what it meant to them? It was the serving of the word.

It was the ministry of the word. In my view, as I look at the Scripture, I think this bears this out. They were so active in being with people.

When they'd meet believers, they would try to present them complete in Christ and grow them up in the Lord. When they'd meet nonbelievers, they'd tell them the gospel. They were busy day in and day out among people serving, serving out the word.

They had been caught up in serving tables, but they needed to be busy about serving the word. They needed to give that out, you see, wherever they went. Now they had, of course, the perfect society or a better society for it in the sense that, if you've ever been to third-world-type countries, you know it's just people are more communal, everybody's milling around, and you have opportunities that are great.

And I realize we're isolationists here and insular, and our lifestyles are more difficult. But this has made a dramatic impact on me, this idea, that they were actually serving the word. They were out among people.

They were actively giving the word out among people. Now don't mistake the other fact that we find in the pastoral epistles that we do need to be diligent about the study of the word. If you're a pastor of the church, you've got to shuck the corn and get it ready.

You've got to do the work that you need to do. But there's something missing in most lives of pastors that I know and other leaders. They don't really get out among the people very much.

They're not really out. I'm not talking about scheduling meetings in people's homes. I'm just talking about getting out among people.

One time I did a--well, I'll get to that in a minute. I'll be practical with you in a minute. But keep that idea in your mind.

The early preachers, Jesus himself and the apostles, never stood behind a podium like this to my knowledge. They never had rows of chairs or pews out there in front of them. That's not what they thought of when they thought of preaching the word.

The Apostle Paul, if he went from one city to another city, and it took him four days to walk between those two cities, and somebody said, Well, what did you do during that time? He'd say, I was preaching the word. I believe there were weeks that went by probably where Paul never talked to more than a handful of people at a time. But he was preaching the word all the time.

He was preaching the word, preaching the word all the time. Do you see that? One time a new seminary, a new preaching professor of Southwestern asked me, What would you do with a group of guys that you're going to teach down there about preaching? I said, Well, there are different types of preaching I understand. And you've got men who've learned to be pastors of churches.

But I think I'd say to them right from the outset, If you're not preaching several times a week already, you probably don't even need to be here. You know, there is preaching that is to go on all the time. You understand what I'm saying? Are you doing that? That's the question.

Are you really doing that? And are you being a model to the rest of your church about that kind of thing? Look at Acts chapter 8 real quickly. Then I want to try real fast to do some practical things with you. Look at chapter 8. Do you remember the Ethiopian who received Christ? And Philip went out there and he ran up to him.

Let me get right to the point. He ran up and joined the chariot in verse 29. The man is reading a passage out of Isaiah.

In verse 34, you remember Philip gets up in the chariot with him. And the eunuch answered, verse 34, Philip and said, Please tell me of whom does the prophet say this? Of himself or someone else? And Philip opened his mouth, and beginning from the Scripture, he preached Jesus to him. Now, you say, well, that really can't be preaching actually because Philip is a deacon.

And he's not a preacher. And preachers preach, and deacons deke, and there the twain shall meet. Right? And if you can get over that idea, you say, well, surely this is not preaching actually because he's sitting down, and you don't preach sitting down.

You have to stand up to preach. And if you can get over that, you say, well, it couldn't be preaching because he's in a moving vehicle. Nobody preaches in a moving vehicle.

And if you can get over that, you say, well, he couldn't be preaching because he only was speaking to one man. But he was preaching, wasn't he? He was preaching. Do you do that kind of preaching? I believe that's the kind of preaching, a kind of preaching that we desperately need to recover among ourselves.

Now, let me just be practical with you a few moments to end this time. One of the things I did a few years ago was go through the Gospel of Luke, and I wrote down in my little commonplace book every observation I could find through the book of Luke about Jesus' peripatetic movements. I just wanted to see where he was going, what he was doing, and I just write down.

He went over here, and then he went over here. I got to the end of that thing, and I made about a page of observations from my main observation. I wrote 14 pages of the movements of Jesus.

Then I wrote a few summary statements. Then I summarized the summary, and here's what I came up with. Jesus Christ hung out.

There doesn't seem to be any rhyme or reason to what he was doing. He'd go over here, and then he'd move over here, and then he'd come back over here, and then he'd walk down over to this place, and he'd be with these people, and then somebody would call him, and he'd go over here. He just moved around.

Basically what Jesus Christ was doing, and I'm sure obviously by design, divine authority, and the perfect way to do it, but he was basically, from our view, from the best we can tell, he was just hanging out among people, finding those opportunities. It appears that the Apostle Paul did similarly to that. He hung out.

He found groups of people, and he was always then in that context talking to people about Jesus Christ. When I discovered that, again, that's an oversimplification, I guess, but when I discovered that, I immediately tried to put it in action. This opened my eyes in a big way, and I immediately headed to the coffee shop, which are built by the devil for the church.

They are. You know, everything's really about it. If you read the Bible, you realize everything's about the church, isn't it? Really, it all centers.

So, yeah, that's all out there. It's part of the plan, and they're made so that people can sit around and talk. That's what they like to do.

People are rather chatty in coffee shops. The first day I went, I had 14 conversations with people, many of them building with some spiritual input. And I thought to myself when I got back to my office, if I'd sat in my office today, I wouldn't have done this.

And this was extremely important. And I decided then to do my best. And I had another job to fulfill.

I'm a pretty busy guy. You're a very busy person. I had other things to do, but I found that I could do some things in the coffee shop.

That's number one. So I took my laptop there, and I took my books there, and I wasn't ashamed to read my Bible there. But when I was there, whatever time I could spend every day, every other day if possible, my antennas would be up, and I'd be looking for the opportunities.

I felt that I was on mission while I was there. I mean, I wrote one or two of those books in coffee shops, but while I was there, I was on mission. My antennas were up.

You see, I was looking, listening, building relationships, having conversation, giving out literature, knowing everybody behind the counter by name so that they said, Hi, Jim, becoming sort of the pastor to some people who don't have a pastor, just hanging out. I found out I got five or six of those coffee shops now that I haunt around in our area. It really changed.

I'm serious about this. I like coffee. I know.

You don't like coffee. But, you know, I'm serious when I say I believe it is a biblical thing to do for us to get among people in some way. Another thing that happened, reading the Bible, of course, is a dangerous thing, but I went through Acts, and I asked myself the question.

I recently wrote an article on this if you want to find it on our site. I asked myself the question, How did the apostles get a crowd for the gospel? It's a good question to ask because it's driven the seeker movement and the signs and wonders movement, even the bus movement. It's been a driving question for a long time.

How do you get a crowd for the gospel? Everybody believes the gospel needs to be preached. How do you get a crowd to hear the gospel? I went through the book of Acts, and I found out three things happened. One were mob scenes.

They took advantage of riots and mob scenes. I thought that's not a strategy I really want to get involved in. That happened 10 or 11 times or something.

Then apostolic signs and wonders, and that was something I couldn't pull off, especially at 7 o'clock on Friday night or whatever. So I see that principally as apostolic confirmation of their ministry and that sort of thing. So that happened a number of times, but there was one clear strategy in the book of Acts for preaching the gospel.

I don't know if you've ever thought about it. I don't think to my knowledge I've ever thought about it before that seriously, and it was this. About 12 or 13 times, depending on how you count it, the apostle Paul and some others, but the apostle Paul went to the synagogues.

Now he didn't go there to worship. He went there for the purpose of the gospel. Several things happened.

You can almost count on what's going to happen every time Paul goes to the synagogue. He has an opportunity. It's a setting where people can talk out loud and say some things and make contributions.

He would reason with them according to the scriptures. Back to Acts 17, it says, So this was the way he went from the very beginning right straight through his life. Even when he'd wipe off the dust from his feet and say, I'm through with you Jews, he'd go into the next town and go into the synagogue again.

Even in Athens where he was so troubled, he walked through the city and saw all those idols, and he was grieved in his heart. It's the way I feel when I go in Christian bookstores usually. I'm just really grieved.

And when he would do that, what's the first thing that he did? He didn't go up on Mars Hill. The first thing he did was go to the synagogue. He was an apostle to the Gentiles.

That's where he found his Gentiles, right? His proselytizing Gentiles, God-fearers or whatever, in the synagogues. And this was his clear, absolute clear strategy in the Bible. Well, now I cannot make a direct connect between what I'm going to do and what I found in that.

Also in the life of Jesus, by the way. But I begin to think, where can I find such a context? Where I can find people interested in God who talk about God and give an opportunity for you to talk about God. Is there such a setting for me? And immediately it sprung into my mind the liberal churches.

And, of course, they don't deserve the word church really. So these religious meetings, these liberal religious meetings. And I began to go then to liberal churches.

And I would go into the Sunday schools, perfectly open. I'm clearly open with them about being a member of another church, happily involved in another church, but I'm just curious about what's happening spiritually in our community and wonder if I could participate for a while and be among you. I found the most amazing potential for evangelism in those meetings.

I didn't need any transitions. That's the one hour they talk about God every week. And I would come in and be the only one with a Bible.

And just lovingly wait for the right opportunities. You have to be careful not to jump at everything because there are so many wrong things that are said. But just waiting for the right opportunities reflected on the nature of God or the gospel.

And asking a lot of questions, building relationships, taking guys out to lunch, just getting involved with these people, clearly a part of another church, but just getting involved. I did that even when I had... Our church meets in the evenings now, but I did that even when we were meeting in the mornings. And now we have eight guys in our church who go into liberal churches.

Two of them teach permanently in Methodist churches. I just taught wasted faith in a UCC church. The opportunities are amazing.

I mean, it's the best of opportunities, really, that I can think of, of anything that we have been done. And every Sunday evening when we get together and have our open session where people are sharing about what's happening, it's loaded with talk about evangelism, what happens. We know those groups through that individual, and we pray for them, and this relationship is developing.

I'm going to take this guy, and we're going to meet about this, and so forth. And it's the most exciting thing that we have probably ever done in terms of evangelism. I recommend it as a possibility for you.

All I'm simply saying is this, that at the end of the day, there is this great principle which we should keep in mind, that when a lighted Christian gets in a dark place, he makes a difference. He makes a difference, right? And if men, those of you who pastor and lead, we're always concerned, how are we going to do evangelism? Let me tell you something. Here's the one thing that I would do.

I would develop, if I'm going to have a strategy about anything, here would be my strategy. I'm going to go through our membership and talk to family by family, person by person, and I'm going to help them find a context where they can shine in a dark place and make a difference. If it means joining the Harley Club, that's okay with me.

But, amen, right. Wherever it might be. If it means going to a college and taking a philosophy class in the community college, great.

Teach the class for Pete's sake. They let you teach classes in a lot of these community colleges. But finding a place where you can make a difference and where you can contribute and get to know people and build relationships, that's going to make a very significant difference.

I believe it's a biblical pattern for us to do that. So you need a strategy? Think about that. Think about that.

Think about moving your entire church in that direction and see what will happen. There's so many things I could say about this. Let me end with this one thought and we're finished.

A farmer has a vast field. He takes a seed and he goes out to acre number 43 and he digs a little hole and plants that seed. Then he goes way across his field to acre number 362 and he digs a little hole and plants another seed.

And he goes home. Months pass and before long the whole community is abuzz. The John Deere tractors are coming up and down the dusty roads back and forth.

People are harvesting their goods. They're taking big trucks of stuff out to the co-op and so forth. Things are happening.

The whole community is in abuzz. But this man is sitting by his fence looking at his fields, hanging his head. Somebody comes up and says, well, what's wrong? He says, I don't understand it.

I don't know. I don't understand it. I'm a Calvinistic farmer.

And, of course, you know what's wrong, right? You know what's wrong. It doesn't make any difference if you're Calvinistic or anything on this point. If you don't put the seed out there, so lots of seed, you're not going to have a harvest.

Your church won't see a great return. And I know that it's absolutely true that in many cases, in your whole church, a whole week goes by and maybe nobody has sown any seed at all. Maybe you've not sown it.

Maybe you've been faithful, digging in the Bible and working on it, but you've not sown any seed any place in the fields. Don't expect to have a harvest if you don't sow the seed. Let's bow our heads and pray.

Thank you, Lord, for this reminder. Stimulate us, move us, Lord. Get us to the place where we are strategizing biblically about the gospel and help us in the power of your Holy Spirit to sow lots of seed in our communities.

Pray this, Lord, in Christ's name. Amen.

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