

GOSPEL INTENTIONALITY

How to Live with Missional
Purpose in Everyday Life

LARRY MCCRARY AND CALEB CRIDER

FOREWORD BY ED STETZER



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EXPONENTIAL¹

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Gospel Intentionality: How to Live with Missional Purpose in Everyday Life
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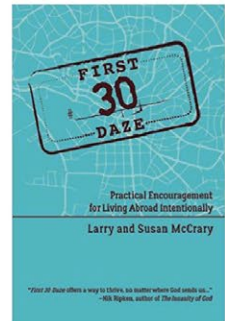
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Foreword

There seem to be a lot of missional thinkers out there; we need more missional doers. *Gospel Intentionality: How to Live with Missional Purpose in Everyday Life* will get you started with simple, Scripture-motivated activities that will help you think and act like a missionary in your daily routine.

Larry McCrary and Caleb Crider learned how to think missiologically while serving together on the international mission field. For the last several years, they've worked to apply those lessons here in North America and to train local churches to do the same. Together, we've led U.S. pastors on several training and vision trips, from Taiwan to Rome to Northern Ireland. What I appreciate most about these guys is their focus on the practical outworking of the missional mindset.

In *Gospel Intentionality*, Larry and Caleb break down simple things we can all put into practice as we shape our lives around God's mission. If you want to be a disciple maker, read this book, follow its advice, and watch what God does in and through you.

—Ed Stetzer, Ph.D., Wheaton College Graduate School

Introduction

I (Larry) wanted to write this book with Caleb because of our shared passion for living with missional purpose in everyday life. Our families met in 2002 when we both moved to Spain. Our family lived in Madrid, and Caleb and his wife were living in Barcelona. We both lived in large urban contexts and learned a lot over the next ten years in planting the gospel and making disciples in a cross-cultural context.

In 2009, we decided to start The Upstream Collective to help churches send out their members to their neighborhoods and to the nations (we sometimes call it “Upstream” for short). We knew that vocational missionaries had the benefit of being equipped cross-culturally for mission through their sending organization, but we both felt that all members of the church have a Great Commission responsibility and need to be equipped wherever they live, work, or play. We wrote a book called *Tradecraft* to help equip the church to think and act like a missionary.

Today, Caleb is the Instructional Designer for the training at International Mission Board (IMB), a large mission sending organization based out of Richmond, Virginia. My wife and I live in Madrid, Spain, where I consult, train, write, and lead The Upstream Collective. We recently moved back to Madrid after living in Louisville, Kentucky, for several years. In Kentucky,

I led Upstream and served as a sending elder at Sojourn East Church. My wife, Susan, is an educational consultant for Third Culture Kids (TCKs) and her work is based in Europe. We were able to move back to Europe so she could be close to the families that she helps. Moving back to Spain took on a new look as work in the area of organizational management.

Both Caleb and I have day jobs that require us to spend the majority of our time working for our respective organizations. We make sure to be very intentional in how we live our lives. Because of the fruit we've seen that intentionality make in our lives, we offer this encouragement to you: no matter your vocation—whether you are a worker in the marketplace, teacher, student, retiree, or a vocational pastor—we urge you to live with gospel intentionality.

If you've ever been on a mission trip, you're probably familiar with the post-trip blues: that strange sensation that comes with transition back to normal life after a difficult-but-fulfilling week of serving people in Jesus' name.

As a young youth intern, I (Caleb) helped lead our suburban youth group during an exhausting week serving the poor at an inner-city mission center. Our team of about thirty middle and high school students had spent months raising the money to travel out of state to distribute food, pick up garbage, and tell people about Jesus. For six days, we were at our best: little sleep, constant discomfort, but total willingness to do—without complaining!—anything and everything that needed to be done. We slept on the floor, ate whatever was available, and worked hard at whatever we were asked to do. We didn't argue or worry about our own needs. We prayed about everything,

sang in worship, shared our testimonies, and did all that we could to be a blessing to those around us.

Something about the way we lived on this trip (and others I would go on in the future) felt so right, like we were doing what we were *supposed to be doing* and being who we were *supposed to be*. But inevitably, the trip came to an end, and it was time to return home to our beds and our families and soccer practice and household chores. Back to real life.

Reflecting on our experience, those in our group said that our mission trip was a life-changing experience. Even still, we somehow easily slid back into being whoever we were before the trip. Life went on, and we felt the pull back to thinking about our bank accounts, our reputations, and everything that annoyed us.

Our hearts and minds had such a hard time transitioning back from “mission mode” to . . . well, “not-mission mode.” For several days after we returned, we hated these old lives we had left behind. We had taken for granted certain privileges and opportunities, not to mention the comfort and convenience we had thought everyone enjoyed—until the mission trip opened our eyes to others’ suffering and need. Now that we were back, we mourned the end of our week-long trip, when we got to live so much like Jesus lived.

When we first got back from our mission trip, we wanted to tell our friends and family all about our experience in detail: the people we met, the food we ate, the sights we saw, and how these had changed us. We wanted them to know that this week of living on mission was more real to us than weeks and weeks

of worship services and accountability groups and Bible study materials we had experienced before we went. We wanted to share with them all that we learned, but we quickly realized that we couldn't quite capture it. Sure, everyone asked about our trip, but there was no answer that would affect them the way we had been affected.

I struggled with this, but someone's words changed my entire outlook on mission: the words from the youth pastor under whom I was interning. I'll never forget what he said during our mission trip report service, when a church member asked him to share what we had learned during our week away. He said, "Life is a mission trip."

That sentence changed my life. What if the reason it felt so right being so "miserable" serving on a mission trip was because it was the mode we were supposed to be in all the time? What if who we were on mission was who we were really meant to be? What if Christ's call to salvation had also been a call to leave behind the comforts of home and the freedom to spend our time and money however we chose in order to serve others as a band of brothers and sisters, radically committed to doing whatever needed to be done in order to demonstrate and proclaim God's love?

Since then, I've traveled all over the world: I've seen extreme wealth and extreme poverty; I've talked with Buddhists, Hindus, and Muslims; I've seen the global shift toward cities; I've visited hundreds of churches across the country; and I've read the Bible. From all these experiences, more than ever before, I'm convinced that life is indeed a mission trip, as the youth minister said that Sunday. We are God's people, sent into

the world to proclaim his glory and multiply his image among all people. We've been sent with a purpose, whether or not we know it.

Every generation of Christians has to wrestle with the question of how to live the Christian life in their specific time and place. The Bible instructs us in how we, as God's people, should conduct ourselves in general, but there's still a lot left to figure out. We seek answers for questions like: How should we navigate the digital world? What should we believe about science? What does the church look like in global urban centers?

When we see life is a mission, though, it changes how we see in general. Look around yourself: To whom have you been sent? What do you need to change about your lifestyle in order to represent Christ well where you live, work, and play? In this book, we will guide you as you answer those questions. We also desire that you will recapture the vital importance of your identity in Christ as a "sent one." We hope you will see throughout this book that no matter where you live, work, or play you have a role in planting the gospel. As you navigate through life with intentionality, you can make a difference for the kingdom.



Gospel Identity

Embracing Who We Are as Sent Ones

Churches spend a tremendous amount of energy on *doing missions*, which is great. But what about our identity? In all of our movement toward accomplishing God's mission work, we love to talk about the activity part of our mission. Whether it is when we come back from a short-term mission trip or when we see God move in tremendous ways in our church's local ministry, we just want to tell someone what we did! There is nothing wrong with this, and I think we all do it! We know from Paul's first missionary journey in Acts 14, when he and Barnabas came back from their trip, they gathered the church together and spoke about all the things God did while on their trip, so sharing about what we did on mission can be good and godly. Plus, people love to hear our stories. But sometimes we lose perspective on our identity.

Jesus addressed this dynamic with his disciples. We really like the story of when Jesus sent out the seventy-two in Luke 10 on a short-term mission trip. He sent them out to the places where

he was planning to go. He was strategic, sending them out in pairs and giving them instructions for the trip: he told them to speak peace and receive hospitality along the way. Now, imagine going on a mission trip and coming back and having Jesus Christ do the debrief of the trip. That would be pretty cool. The sent ones told the Sender all about their trip: “The seventy-two returned with joy, saying, ‘Lord, even the demons are subject to us in your name!’” (Luke 10:17, ESV). They were quite excited about what they had experienced. For those of you reading this who have been on mission trips, you often come back on a mission mountaintop. Jesus even affirmed what they experienced, when he said to them, “I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. Behold, I have given you authority to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing shall hurt you” (Luke 10:18-19).

But then Jesus took their focus off of what had happened on the trip and addressed something more important—their identity: “Nevertheless, do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven” (Luke 10:20). In our paraphrase, Jesus was telling them, *Your activity was significant, but what you really need to remember and rejoice in is that your identity is in me. Don’t rejoice in what happened but that you are mine.*

These words from Jesus remind us that our citizenship is primarily a matter of identity, not activity. While they are intrinsically connected, it’s important to distinguish between “being” and “doing.” The key to gospel intentionality is not to focus on the doing but on Christlike character expressed through the actions people see in us. Why? Because in Christ,

we have been made new. We're not the same people we were before he made us spiritually alive. Our lives are a picture of this transformation, and our actions should spring from Christ in us. It's the inner change, not the outward behavior, that the world needs to see in us.

So first and foremost, our identity is in Christ and in what he has done. We don't do ministry to others based on who we are, but based on who Jesus is. People can do very good things for various different reasons, but our motivation must ultimately be Jesus and his work for us. Our mission is not driven by the need (which is tremendous and all around us) nor by opportunity (for many of us here in the West, opportunity abounds!) but by the One who has sent us on a mission to glorify him by making disciples.

This isn't just a one-time occurrence in the Bible but also a consistent pattern of teaching throughout God's interaction with his people. Paul, writing to the church of Philippi, gives believers a similar word: "But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ" (Phil. 3:20, ESV). Paul picks up on the theme that Jesus used earlier in Luke 10:20, where Jesus told his disciples to rejoice because their names are written in heaven. It's like Paul is reminding them of the fact that because as children of God their names are written in heaven, they are therefore citizens of heaven. Their identity is tied not to their performance but to their relationship to Christ.

God transforms us and sends us—not just to *do* his will but also to *be* his people. It's not just the actions of Christ we've been sent to multiply but also the very image of God. We would do well to

always remember this. Our identity as saved ones and citizens is the starting point for living with gospel intentionality. But our identity is even richer than that! We are called sent ones, ambassadors, and salt and light.

Sent Ones

When Jesus appears to his disciples after his resurrection and enters the room where they are locked up in fear of further troubles, he shows them his hands and his side. He counters their fear by reminding them of their mission in terms of their identity as “sent ones.”

Jesus says to them again, “Peace be with you,” and he adds an important piece of instruction: “As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you” (John 20:21, ESV). He is reminding them of their identity as sent ones. They are not to just receive the Holy Spirit but also they have been called to be participants in what God is doing—and will do until the end. As true as this was for the disciples, it is equally true for us today. We are, as Christ’s disciples, God’s sent ones.

Christ’s Ambassadors

Living overseas in Spain, I (Larry) have had a real glimpse into the role of an ambassador. As foreign citizens, it was necessary to go the United States Embassy to get Power of Attorney for some legal work that we had in the United States. Susan and I needed to have a legal document notarized, so we had to do it in front of an official of the Embassy. The U.S. Consulate contains the office of the Ambassador, who acts as the legal representative for the U.S. in Spain. As the official

representative of the U.S. in that country, the Ambassador's office was able to give us the official stamp that we needed. They had the authority to act on behalf of the nation they represented.

The apostle Paul uses the word "ambassador" to describe Christ followers when he writes his letter to the church at Corinth: "Therefore, we are *ambassadors* for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God" (2 Cor. 5:2, ESV). This is really a statement of identity. We are representatives of our Lord Jesus Christ. God entrusted us to this ministry of reconciliation (2 Cor. 5:18–19). No matter where we live, we are ambassadors for Christ and we have been sent with a mission.

Salt and Light

Another way the Bible describes our identity as followers of Jesus is "salt and light": "You are the salt of the earth, but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled under people's feet" (Matt. 5:13, ESV). Salt not only has the ability to make something have more flavor but it can also be used as a preservative. In the ancient days, salt was a valuable commodity. People were even paid in salt. Jesus uses the word "salt" to describe us as followers. We help preserve what is good in our culture. We can bring the flavor of God's values to our everyday interactions.

Jesus also gives us the distinction of being light:

You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven. (Matt. 5:14–16 ESV)

I (Larry) remember running with a friend in the Black Forest of southern Germany one time. We went out for a run around dusk, made a wrong turn, and found ourselves quite a distance from where we needed to be. While we were returning home, it became dark. We didn't have flashlights, but my friend luckily had his smartphone and we used it to find our way home. It was natural of him to share his light with me. In fact, I'm sure it never crossed his mind to *not* share his light with me. He didn't run off and leave me; he ran stride by stride with me in the dark with the little bit of light emanating from the front screen of his phone (this was before the newer smartphones with flashlights on the back). As Christ followers we are the light of the world. Not only do we concern ourselves with our personal growth and holiness as believers but we also care about others finding the path from the brightness of our light.

In Christ We Are His Witnesses

Salt, light, ambassadors—these are all expressions of who we are as Christ followers. They express our identity as sent ones no matter our context. When Luke gave us the commission to go in Acts 1:8, we notice even here that Jesus uses the plural form of word “witness” as an identity marker. A witness surely

witnesses—the action of witnessing (the doing part)—but Jesus chooses the noun “witnesses” to show us how it’s a part of who we are as Christ followers. We are witnesses, which is a term of identity (the being part). Our identity leads to missional activity: “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth” (Acts 1:8, ESV).

Our “Sent” Identity Is Corporate and Individual

Something unique happens in Acts 13 at the church of Antioch. It seems to be in Scripture that we see most “calling” experiences with individuals in different settings:

- God calling Abram (Genesis 12:1–3)
- God calling Moses (Exodus 3:10)
- Jesus calling Levi (Luke 5:27)
- Jesus inviting Zacchaeus to get down from the tree and come to dinner (Luke 19:5)
- Jesus calling Paul to be a chosen instrument to take the gospel to the Gentiles (Acts 9:5–6)

We find many other examples in Scripture of how God calls an individual to do something. But among those at the church of Antioch in Acts 13, we see a different description that’s worth noting. This calling seems to be given not to an individual but to the whole church in Antioch: “While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, ‘Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.’ Then after fasting and praying they laid their hands on them and sent them off” (Acts 13:2–3, ESV). As the church was

praying and fasting, the church heard from the Spirit clearly to set aside certain individuals for the mission at hand.

Then, they went back to the praying and fasting they were doing before they laid hands on them and sent them off.

Whether this was a Sunday-morning worship service or an intentional season of prayer and fasting, we do not know. What we do know is that they were praying and fasting and hearing from the Spirit, as they continued to pray and fast. Then, they commissioned Saul and Barnabas to what we now know as Paul's first missionary journey.

An important aspect of this call experience was that the calling they received was within the context of the church. Because of our highly individualistic society, we think of God's calling being between us and him personally. We do not disclaim legitimate accounts of that type of calling. But we also believe that calling often comes within the church and our corporate call as God's people.

Our Corporate Call Experience

As your church devotes itself to prayer, fellowship, the teaching of the Word, and the breaking of bread, you will hear from the Spirit. As your church thinks beyond the important and regular gathering of worship into the community and to the nations, God will no doubt prompt the church to make disciples who make disciples in your context and beyond. Sometimes this will mean staying in your own community, and other times it may mean traveling on a short-term trip. It could even mean that you take your job overseas or study abroad and live intentionally for a season or longer. While other times it may

be that God is asking you to become a full-time church planter or a missionary. All of these are important tasks God may be prompting you to do, but remember that these tasks, first and foremost, stem from who we are—in our identity—in Christ and as sent ones. When you have a clear sense of an action needed to perform a specific task or mission, this is your call experience.

As part of a biblical community you also have an identity as part of a church. It is part of the DNA of a church. God has called the church to be a people who are not only recipients of the gospel but also proclaimers of the message—wherever they live, work, and play, or even move to. As a community, we are light-givers; we are salt; and we are ambassadors. We are witnesses—together. The apostle Peter describes our corporate call experience as the “priesthood” of all believers, not our individual calling only: “But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light” (1 Pet. 2:9, ESV). Read what Timothy George writes about the corporate nature of this verse:

In my own Baptist family, for instance, it became common in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries to speak of the “priesthood of the believer.” The reformers, however, spoke instead of the “priesthood of all believers” (plural). For them it was never a matter of a lonely, isolated seeker of truth, but rather of a band of faithful believers. The priesthood of all believers is a call to ministry and service; it is a barometer of the quality of the life of God’s people in

the body of Christ and of the coherence of our witness in the world, the world for which Christ died.¹

So we not only have an individual “sent” identity but we also have a missional identity as a church.

We have learned from the churches with whom we work at The Upstream Collective that there is a difference in the way a church postures in this. If a church sees mission as simply one of the activities in which it takes a part, they will most likely lean more into sending out missionaries to the nations. Again, we are totally for missionaries going to the nations! Churches that embrace their missional identity will send marketplace workers, retirees, students, teachers, and full-time missionaries to places near and far. Because they understand their sentness, “regular Christians” will position themselves to make disciples and plant churches among neighbors who don’t know Jesus and among distant people with little access to the gospel. The possibilities are literally limitless because “sent” is our identity as the church.

We like what our friend Ed Stetzer writes about the church collectively and individually:

In sum, the missional mode of sentness speaks of the church (and individuals) having a missional posture. Thus, missional effectiveness requires churches to teach, train, and equip believers towards a faithful presence where

1. Timothy George, “The Priesthood of All Believers,” *First Things*, Oct. 31, 2016, <https://www.firstthings.com/web-exclusives/2016/10/the-priesthood-of-all-believers>.

planted so that they may be used as God's temple to reflect His radiant glory in all areas of life as He works through them to bless others spiritually, socially, and culturally.²

So imagine a church that embraces its sent identity in their community, city, nation, and world, sending out its members to live as salt, light, witnesses, and ambassadors who have a ministry of reconciliation to people without Christ. It affects everything we do: how we relate to our spouse, children, friends, co-workers, and people we meet in the everyday rhythms of life. In this chapter, we've addressed the vital importance of our rich identity in Christ. But identity always moves to action. So now, we move into the action of life where we live, work, and play. These everyday rhythms provide the context into which we live as we embrace the everyday-gospel lifestyle.

2. Ed Stetzer, "Towards Missional Effectiveness: The Mark of Sentness (Part 5)," EdStetzer.com, April 8, 2019, <https://edstetzer.com/2019/04/towards-missional-effectiveness-the-mark-of-sentness-part-5/>.



Gospel Lifestyle

Living as Sent Ones Where We Live, Work, and Play

Life is a series of decisions we make as we navigate our time in the world. Every day, we're faced with thousands of choices, most of them small and seemingly insignificant: *Do I wake up with my alarm, or hit the snooze button and sleep in? What should I wear? Do I eat eggs or cereal for breakfast? Drive, or take the bus? Should I stop for coffee on my way to work? Do I talk to my co-workers, or just let them work?* These questions lead to decisions.

Our philosophy of life—our perspective on what our purpose is, who we are, why we're here, and what's important—affects the decisions we make and how we feel about those decisions. As God's people, God's mission should inform every choice we make. Because we've been sent, our lifestyle matters.

People need to see in us an example of what their life might be like if they were in Christ. There isn't a special formula for

how to accomplish this, but we must pursue a way of living that demonstrates to others that there is something different about the way we go about our everyday lives. I (Larry) think back to difficult seasons of my life, and I know that during the tough times, I had this solid foundation of Christ and a complete and utter dependence on him. We typically do okay when we are in the difficult situations because we know we cannot do it. It is the everyday grind, however, that sometimes leads me into a certain self-sufficiency that creates a brute independence within me. Jesus when teaching the disciples to pray says “give us this day, our daily bread” (Matt. 6:11, ESV). It is our day-in and day-out dependence on God that translates to people seeing how we live our lives in normal situations and asking, “What is it that makes them this way?”³

If we see our identity as those sent on mission to live with intentionality in proclaiming the Good News to those we know (and to those we don’t know!), we must have an utter dependence on God in all that we do.

One of the easiest ways to determine whether we are living intentionally is to look at the criteria we use to make major life choices. When we’re faced with big decisions, what do we take into account? In our list of pros and cons, which factors hold the most weight for us? Most Christians don’t receive sufficient instruction from their churches about how to approach big decisions like going to college, getting married, buying a home, choosing a career path, parenting—and many other decisions

3. Paul David Tripp, *New Morning Mercies*, May 8 (Nashville: Crossway Books, 2014).

like these. Perhaps it's because we don't always see the value in these decisions for the mission of God's church. But for God's people on mission, these "everyday" things matter!

Kingdom Values: Living with the Mission in Mind

The world tells us to make decisions around our preferences, safety, comfort, and convenience. We're encouraged to think about our own status in society and to amass as much stuff as we can get. Students are expected to go to the best school they can get into (whether or not they can afford it!). We're encouraged to buy the biggest house for the lowest price in the nicest neighborhood. Society tells us to marry someone to whom we're sexually attracted. There's a social ladder to climb, hobbies to enjoy, and many ways to avoid boredom. Most of the time, though, Christians don't think any differently than the world about these items. *But the decisions we make in our everyday life matter!*

For God's people, mission should be the filter through which we make major life decisions. Compared to the world's approach to decision making, kingdom values are often the opposite. Take the following examples of the world's approach and let's see how they line up with the gospel:

Safety. Just before sending out his disciples on a short-term mission trip, Jesus reminded them that he was sending them, "Like lambs among wolves" (Luke 10:3). Our mission is spiritually and physically dangerous. Our safety is not our highest priority.

Instead of thinking primarily about our own personal safety and wellbeing, gospel intentionality would lead us to look at obedience and following Jesus, wherever he leads, knowing that he promises to be with us.

Of course, Christians should try to be safe. But sometimes, we need to prioritize the wellbeing of others over our own personal safety. This is why missionaries will move to difficult and dangerous places at great personal risk in order to take the gospel to those who haven't heard it. This is why God's people move into rough neighborhoods to be agents of hope when it seems like everyone else moved out long ago.

Comfort. In Matthew 16:24–25 Jesus makes it clear that following him will not be comfortable: “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it” (ESV). Instead of thinking primarily about our comfort, gospel intentionality leads us to making choices that help us embrace the awkward and difficult path of self-denial, where we think of others first, not ourselves first.

The world bombards us with messages that elevate our comfort over everything else. We're encouraged to spend inordinate amounts of money to maintain a constant state of comfort, whether it's our shoes, our cars, or our beds. But the mission to which we've been called—making disciples across cultural barriers large and small—is necessarily uncomfortable. Often when we read the Great Commission found in Matthew 28, we become fixated on “making disciples,” but the passage actually says “make disciples of the nations,” which gives every believer

a Great Commission responsibility. This is true whether we live abroad or stay in our neighborhoods. Our obedience in God’s mission requires physical, social, and emotional discomfort. But he’s worth it!

Convenience. Jesus instructs us to go above and beyond what we are required to do when he says, “And if anyone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles” (Matt. 5:41, ESV). Instead of thinking primarily about our convenience and schedule, gospel intentionality leads us to create enough margin in our lives that we have room for the unexpected.

At the heart of our society’s fixation on convenience is pride. The world says we shouldn’t have to go out of our way for anything. Being bored, having to talk to strangers, waiting for delivery, getting out of our cars—these are all inconveniences that our culture says we shouldn’t have to endure! But the very call of Christ is inconvenient. We put extra effort into life in order to seek those in need and interject ourselves into the lives of others in order to bring the gospel to the world around us.

Value. Over those who might have donated more to the Temple, Jesus praises the widow who gave all she had and trusted God’s provision: “Truly, I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all of them. For they all contributed out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty put in all she had to live on” (Luke 21:3-4, ESV).

Instead of thinking primarily about getting the most “bang for our buck”—getting the most stuff or the best service for as little money as possible—God’s people must look at things from a more eternal perspective. We invest time and money

into people and places that may not obviously provide much value to us. After all, we're not stewarding resources that actually belong to us; instead, we have been entrusted to make investments into the kingdom with time, resources, and gifts that have been loaned to us by God himself.

Social status. Contrary to the way the world may see it, Jesus teaches us that his kingdom works in an upside-down way: "The last will be first, and the first last" (Matt. 20:16, 26-27, ESV). Instead of thinking primarily about our social status, gospel intentionality leads us to be more concerned about serving than about what others think of us.

Christians cannot live like the world lives. In Christ, we content ourselves in obscurity, give generously, consider others over ourselves, expect suffering, and rejoice in persecution. We do this because we are not our own; we are his. How we live matters because the world is watching us. What they know about Jesus is what they see in those who claim to be his followers. We don't think like the world tells us to think; we look to Christ, who often leads us to make decisions that don't necessarily make sense to our neighbors.

It's important to note that it's not only big decisions that affect our mission; the small decisions of everyday rhythms add up to either put us on the front lines of God's mission or to separate and isolate us so much that we have little to no access to those to whom we've been sent. The smaller, everyday things, like becoming a "regular" at a restaurant, developing intentional shopping routines, and nurturing relationships can all serve to put us in the position to share the gospel frequently where we live, play, and work.

“Mapping” the Mission

Before we describe how to live the gospel lifestyle in these areas of our lives, let’s talk about mapping, which is something we’ve both learned is essential for effectively living on mission. Recently my wife, Susan, and I (Larry) moved to Madrid, Spain. We live downtown in a large urban area. We have lived in this city before, so a great danger for us has been to assume we know everything, to pretend we’re locals. So much has changed over the last few years, even though most things initially appear the same. Our key to effectively reentering this culture has been to focus on intentionality—where we live, work, and play. I’m proud of the book Caleb and I wrote, [*Tradecraft: For the Church on Mission*](#), because we had fun writing it and many people have found it helpful.⁴ This book includes a chapter on “Mapping” where you live, which is designed to help you discover, record, and organize physical, social, and spiritual insight about your ministry environment.

One thing I’ve learned about mapping my city is to pay attention to everything. I constantly make notes on my phone, in my journals, and even on maps in order to remember important aspects about the area that I want to engage. In doing this, I am able to remember names better, remember where I have had important conversations, and remember places where people gather, to name just a few. I am constantly trying to learn as

4. Caleb Crider, Larry McCrary, Rodney Calfee, and Wade Stephens, *Tradecraft for the Church on Mission* (Louisville, KY: Upstream Collective, 2017).

much as I can about the people and places in my neighborhood. I ask questions of locals to learn about the culture. I read local papers and attend local events in my area to be able to dig deeper into the understanding of the people who live in our section of the city.

I had the chance to practice these exploration skills one time when I was actually in a country in the Middle East to teach them to others. A huge storm blew through, and I was stranded for a day without my host in a place where it does not normally snow. No one could get to me, and I had the day to myself. I could either sit in my hotel room or go out into the neighborhood, where I did not know the language or the layout of the area. To be totally honest, I needed coffee, so that was also a motivating factor. Even though I was intimidated by this new and foreign place, I went out anyway. I started close to my hotel, and throughout the day, I would make little journeys farther and farther away. Each time, I asked the Lord to put me in contact with people with whom I could communicate. I prayed peace upon every place I entered. I found the people very encouraging and hospitable. As the day went on, I learned more and more, but one thing stuck with me, and I wrote it in my journal as I reflected on that day: “I do not need to travel 2,500 miles away from my home to do this.”

There were people in my own neighborhood back home in Louisville, Kentucky, that I needed to meet. I needed to put into practice these very skills wherever I found myself, not just on a trip during which I was teaching about it. This realization totally changed the way I viewed my life. Instead of always seeking the address of a far-away place, I knew that the gospel

was needed wherever people were present. Wherever I am located—whether for a day or for a season—the intentional choices that I make can bring light to a dark world.

We have learned it does not matter the ZIP code we live in; we can always be intentional about our witness to the gospel of Jesus. It does not matter what vocation we fulfill; we are all called to be salt and light in all things. It does not matter what recreational activities that we are involved in because we can all be ambassadors for Christ in all things we do. We talk about this in terms of where we “live, work, and play,” and what follows is a brief description of gospel intentionality for each of those areas of life.

Intentionality in Where We Live

As I (Larry) mentioned above, I have a day job in the consulting sector, where I have to make special efforts to meet new neighbors. Since we do not have a car (which is intentional for us), we walk or take public transit everywhere. When it comes to shopping, we only buy what we can carry. That means we had to choose to live where we could easily access these stores, gyms, parks, and other places. Plus, we find that we do not eat as much since we don't want to haul the heavy groceries. That is a win in its own right!

A temptation for us is to just order groceries online and have them delivered to our apartment, but we want to be out among the people. Each time we go out, we try to intentionally engage in conversation with the people we encounter. That means we have found different places around our apartment to shop:

- Bread Store. There's a bakery just around the corner. Of course, we could buy bread at the supermarket when we buy all our other groceries, but our bakery provides us the opportunity to talk to the baker or the shop attendant or both. And the bread is delicious!
- Coffee Shops. I brew coffee at home, but by frequenting local coffee shops, I've been able to get to know the baristas, roasters, and owners of several local coffee shops. I love coffee, especially trying different coffees from around the world. With my coffee experience, it's a natural way for me to strike up a conversation.
- Flower Shop. I'm not a big flower buyer, but my wife seems to appreciate receiving them! Though I am a slow learner, I have finally caught on to the fact that buying flowers for my wife even when it is not a special occasion is a good idea. I try to talk to the florist about flowers and how to care for them.
- Meat Market. There is a butcher shop near our house. While it's much easier for me to go into the supermarket and buy pre-packaged meat—and to be honest, I do that sometimes!—I can cultivate a relationship with the butcher when I go in and explain what I need.
- Fruit and Vegetable Store. I love fruit, and like with the flowers, my wife loves nothing more than fresh blueberries and raspberries. Being able to pick these out enables conversations with the attendant at the fruit stand.

This describes our urban context. We enjoy the benefit of living in a very “walkable” area with thousands of people within a reasonable distance.

How about you? What does your context look like? You may live in a rural area or a suburban area or some other sort of city context. Do you think intentionally about the errands you need to run? Do you go to the bank and interact personally with someone? Or do you do all of your banking online? What about your children's sporting or art activities? Are you able to talk it up with other parents? If you feel overwhelmed thinking about what your life would look like if you did everything relationally, that's not what we're saying. Perhaps God will call you to a radical lifestyle, but we're asking these questions to challenge you to think this way about *some aspects of your life*.

When we start making intentional everyday choices, we can interact with more people. This comes with certain costs. It will most likely cost more to shop local; it takes more time to do this too because I have to go to several places each day. But the opportunities far outweigh the cost for me. Without these daily intentional decisions, I would not have nearly the number of relationships I have where I live. Where we live often overlaps with where we work, which is just as important to consider.

Intentionality in Where We Work

My wife and I (Larry) both work in the marketplace: my wife helps families find the best schooling options for their children, and I coach people to live cross-culturally. Our work involves travel, so we are often out of town. We both have training events that we put together. We also do a lot of online meetings, and of course, email—*lots* of email. These tasks keep our days full. But we also want to be involved in the work environments of our city.

We actually *could* do our jobs solely from our apartment. In some ways, that would be much easier. We try to work in communal office spaces as much as possible, though. That means we are always on the lookout for more public spaces to do our work so we can be around others and participate in the business community. Most often, that basically means frequenting many of the same coffee shops to do our work. We also decided to rent a desk in a large co-working space in order to be a part of a creative and entrepreneurial community.

I love talking with American Christians back home in the United States. It helps me better understand the cultural climate of the churches that Upstream partners with. Usually, people will tell us what they do for a living. Right away, we can usually tell whether people like their jobs, because they'll respond with statements like, "Thank God it's Friday," "Back to the grindstone," or "I can't complain." We love to ask these folks, "How did you decide to take the job you're working?"

Their answers show the lack of intentionality that's common among those outside of Christ: "The pay is pretty good," they say, as though money was the most important factor in their career choice. When we hear, "I've been with this company for years now," that tells us that they're comfortable, lazy, fearful, or all of the above. "What else am I going to do for a living?" reveals how little creativity people might put into decisions about the workplace. All these responses betray a lack of intentionality in our work. As Christians we are called to redeem this lack of intentionality by thinking clearly and purposefully about where we work. When we do, we'll add value and shine brightly as salt and light.

Intentionality in Where We Play

My wife and I enjoy recreation. We can all enjoy recreation for obvious reasons: it's fun, healthy, and offers a good reason to just be out and be active. We think having hobbies is important for our souls and physical wellbeing. Certain popular activities here, like rock climbing, cycling, and soccer, aren't natural fits for us. But there are other things that we love to do. The key has been finding where those things align within this culture.

For example, in our free time, we love to run, work out, drink coffee, eat, appreciate art, and explore history. Perhaps you can relate to some of these activities. Or you have some of our own favorites. Where do you “play” when you have down time? Have you ever thought about how the places you “play” can be an intentional choice that you make that can have gospel opportunities? As a couple, my wife and I have been working to join the appropriate spaces where our neighbors do these things. When we find such spaces and jump in, our souls are refreshed even while we are naturally connecting with our neighbors. This simply wouldn't happen without intentionality.

We find that by “joining in” the existing groups, organizations, events, and activities, we are able to focus on the renewal of ourselves and relational aspect of our activity instead of trying to organize an event or group by creating it. Anything you create you must maintain. Much easier to just join something that is existing. This way, we can come alongside nonbelievers, who have their own motivations, and share how Christ is the motivation for all that we do.

Several years ago, I (Caleb) was part of a team that sought to establish a gospel presence in a Western European city. Being that we were surrounded by artists and creative entrepreneurs, we thought opening our own coffee shop and gallery space would be an ideal way to engage with our community. So we set to work making plans, casting vision, and raising the many dollars we needed to get started.

In order to demonstrate to our financial investors that our plan would be an effective way to develop and strengthen our connections to the community, we decided to prove the concept by spending more time in local coffee shops that filled a similar niche to the one we wanted to engage. We spent lots of time in one particular coffee shop located in a bustling pedestrian zone in the center of town. We held every meeting there, rented out a section for family parties, and drank lots of coffee. We collaborated with the owners of the coffee shop to display local artists' work on the walls and to hold a big opening night reception at the beginning of the limited-time display. The artist community came out and celebrated with us, and we had many opportunities to share the gospel with them.

Eventually, we had raised enough money to secure the lease on a storefront and begin renovation on our own coffee shop. But by that point, we realized that we didn't actually need to open our own coffee shop at all! Local shops rented and maintained their own space, made and served coffee, and cleaned up afterward. We didn't necessarily want those overhead hours if we didn't need them. We also saw how our work could bring in customers and help establish a local coffee shop's reputation in its neighborhood. Rather than invest all the necessarily time,

money, and resources to start our own business, we could just continue on with our “meantime” model of building mutually-beneficial relationships with these local business owners. Our goal (building community) complemented their goal (selling coffee) in a way that freed us up to focus on what we did best. Solid partnerships provided all the benefits of having our own coffee shop but without the overhead, cost, and risk of starting a business (as much as we were willing to do whatever it took).

Of course, there was risk involved in this new model too. By partnering with us, the local coffee shops risked being associated with our agenda to make disciples in our city. We had to be careful not to take advantage of our hosts, or to negatively impact their business. But in the end, we learned a lesson: sometimes, it’s better to join existing efforts in the city than to try to start your own.

Hopefully these examples of how to live intentionally where we live, work, and play have given food for thought as you think through your specific context.

Practical Ideas for Intentional Relationships

As you learn to be intentional with the gospel, we know the importance of practical ideas. So we have listed the most essential ideas we’ve found to be helpful. Remember that while focusing on intentionality and “being vs. doing,” we can all run the risk of having a strictly theoretical conversation that becomes more about what we *intend* to do rather than what we *actually* do. But our intentions are worthless if they don’t result in action!

Principles of Intentionality

We're going to start with principles and then move into practices. Keep these principles in mind as we consider practical ways to build disciple-making relationships:⁵

Pray, then watch. Culture is a powerful (and dangerous!) thing. We must approach it with great care. Be sure to spend much time in prayer before you venture out to study culture. Ask God to allow you to see things from his perspective. Ask him to reveal biases and sin in your own life that may hinder your ability to understand and relate to people.

Don't go alone. In order to support his people as you experience the real danger of living in the world, God has placed you and every other Christian into a church. Our spiritual community provides help, encouragement, and accountability as we wade into culture to make disciples. Whether you're sharing the gospel with people on the street or conducting online demographics research, never do it alone.

Humbly observe. Watching people for an afternoon doesn't mean you understand them. Try avoiding assumptions as you go to a public place and watch people go about their business. Take note of what you see: How do people carry themselves? How do they relate to one another? What seems to be important to them? What obvious signs of sin and idolatry can you see?

5. Caleb Crider, *Know Your Culture: 6 Keys to Good Cultural Exegesis*, <https://www.imb.org/2017/08/29/know-your-culture-6-keys-to-good-cultural-exegesis/>.

Ask questions. In order to understand people, we need to talk to them. Ask them about what they believe and why they believe it. People tend to enjoy being asked about themselves, so asking open-ended questions generally yields great discussions, in our experience. When you combine what people say with what you observe them doing, you can really get a good sense of who they are.

Take notes. Studying something as complex and dynamic as culture can be overwhelming. Use a notebook, laptop, or mobile device to record your observations. Sometimes, it isn't until you review your notes that you start to see connections, opportunities, and challenges for gospel ministry. Sharing your notes can be a great way to collaborate with others in the study of culture, by the way!

“Join in” . . . carefully. The saying “When in Rome, do as the Romans do” only partially applies to God’s people on mission. We must take great care not to participate in sin, which would undermine our great message. But we should adapt to the cultures in which we find ourselves. Things like using local language, removing our shoes at the door to someone’s home (or kissing anyone we’re introduced to!)—whatever your people accept as normal so long as it doesn’t cause you to sin—will pave the way for gospel conversations that point people to Jesus.

With these principles in mind, here are a few simple ways to move a relationship into the deeper, more personal sort of connection that allows you to share the gospel in a way that also demonstrates the Good News.

Practices of Intentionality

1. Recognizing the “second setting.” I (Larry) have fond memories of dropping off our children at school every morning (although they’re grown now). We could do this because although we lived in an urban environment, our house was within walking distance from the school that our children attended. Either my wife or I would do the walk. We used this time to pray with and for them as we approached the school. Once we arrived, our children would take off and find their friends, but the parents often just stood around and chatted until the bell rung and the children went inside to class. All the parents’ daily lives intersected in this one place, just outside the school. As missionaries, we find it helpful to think of this place as the “first setting” for those relationships. If parents were going to interact at all, it would be here. After the kids found their ways to class, all the parents would go their separate ways.

Not knowing anyone when we first moved there, we often skipped the social interaction with other parents and just headed off on our way for the day. My wife would typically use that time right after the drop off to go run errands. One day, though, Susan happened to run into one of the mothers of a child in the same school at the grocery store. As they passed each other in the aisle, they recognized each other from dropping off their children. Susan noticed something different about the way this other parent responded to her now that they were in a different context; the other mom had never talked to her at the schoolground but here at the grocery store, she was very open to striking up a conversation. They had something in common in this “second setting.” While their kids went to

the same school, which was the first setting for the relational encounter, this second setting was different. My wife—being the outgoing person she is—decided she would take the opportunity in this “second setting” to actually invite the mom to coffee on another day. This gave her a great opportunity to talk more deeply with the woman and get to know her better. They became friends, and she was able to share the gospel with her.

We noticed this pattern often in a variety of settings both outside our home country and in the states. The second setting gives us something in common with a person that we may not know well. Something about seeing someone in a different context than usual seems to take the relationship to new depths. As we live intentionally, we have tried to make the most of the second setting encounters as divine appointments from the Lord, thus inviting them into a deeper spiritual conversation.

We’ve found the “second setting principle” works with all sorts of relationships. The guy behind the counter serving coffee at our favorite coffee shop related to us in only the most professional ways until we connected with him while jogging at the park. In that second setting, he acted like we were old friends. Even our neighbors seemed relationally distant until we crossed paths at the mall, where we had a great discussion about all the challenges they’re facing in their family life. We offered, and they asked us to pray for them in public!

If we can be intentional to connect with people not only in the initial, first setting but also in a second setting, we may see deeper connections that build trust and familiarity. The result

is greater opportunities to talk about things that really matter, like the gospel.

2. Invite someone out for coffee. As you think about the conversations that you are having in your daily life, consider how you might move those conversations from superficial niceties to something deeper, more personal, and more gospel-oriented.

We find the challenge is trying to get from the first setting that we have with them to a deeper, more personal conversation that would last longer than a trip to our local market. We find a great place that works for us is having a conversation over a cup of coffee. As we get to know people and genuinely want to be friends with them and care for them relationally, we try to find a not-so-weird way to invite them into our lives, and usually that is a cup of coffee.

As we've mentioned, my wife and I (Larry) love coffee and we have our first cup of coffee first thing in the morning, but we try to be super intentional about inviting people to our next cup of coffee during the day. We have found in our city that people normally break for coffee between nine and eleven in the morning. This is a great time in their day for us to meet and it gives us the chance to have a much-needed additional cup of coffee that day. We know that during the work week it is difficult to invite people into your home during the day, but meeting them over coffee or for a meal is much more attainable for their daily routine. More importantly, something as neutral as drinking coffee gives us a chance to relate and get into deeper conversations and ask good questions. We try to include Jesus in our lives as part of our conversations early in the relationship.

3. Practicing hospitality. When we talk about hospitality, we often think of inviting people over to our house or apartment. For some of us, this makes us think about how our home needs to be clean, well-stocked, and perfect for entertaining. My challenge with this is that this view does not give me much space to feel hospitable because it takes so much effort to prepare. So we try to just be ready to invite people not only to our small apartment but even more so invite people into our lives.

Where I (Larry) live, it is not very common to invite someone to your place early in a friendship. We love having people to our house but in our current culture, this is not practiced until much later in the relationship. In our urban setting, life is lived outside, in restaurants, and in bars. It is far more common and natural to invite people for a coffee or appetizer at a local establishment than to invite them to my house. Because it fits with the rhythms of the community in which we live, we often invite people out for a snack or coffee.

In your setting, it may be common practice to invite people to your place and practice hospitality in that way. We have friends in Tennessee who have built an “outdoor living room” in their back yard—complete with a mini-kitchen, comfortable sofas, speakers for music, and a fire pit—just for the purpose of entertaining friends! I sometimes wish we could do more of that. The point is finding the place that works within your own cultural setting and being hospitable.

The benefit of living and working in an urban area is the ability to take advantage of the work rhythms and thus break rhythms. People love to go get coffee at certain times during the

day. Scheduling something during a natural break and going to them to make it convenient goes a long way. As I mentioned before, I am a coffee drinker, but when I go with someone to a tea shop, I have had to learn to appreciate a good cup of hot tea.

My wife and I have found with couples that we are not often able to make it onto their calendar for Friday nights or Saturday or Sunday during the daytime. These are reserved for their closer friends and family. But they may be more open to a Monday or Tuesday night. We try not to compete with their existing calendar but to compliment it. If they are night people, we schedule at night and sometimes super late. I struggle with being up late. I seem to lose coherency the later it gets, but I have learned it is not always about my preferences but about making the most of the opportunities the Lord has given me. We pray daily for opportunities that we may have to share our life and the gospel with those we encounter. We pray to be sensitive to the Spirit's leading and obedient to his promptings. How do we determine how God is leading us? We will help answer that in the next chapter.



Gospel Obedience

Living into Our Commission to Go

God's love compels us to press beyond our comfort zone to go into new places, where the gospel has not yet been carried. The commissioning passages of Scripture command that we go and make disciples of the nations. We have been sent. The first question is, to whom are we sent? Then what does obedience look like in our daily lives?

When you see yourself having an identity as a “sent one,” the answer to these questions is rather all-inclusive. We are sent, really, to all people, but sometimes God calls us to a specific people and place. As you live your life incarnationally in your neighborhood, at your work place, at the gym, and elsewhere in your everyday life, you will have opportunities to be a blessing to those with whom you interact, and you will have the opportunity to share with them your gospel story.

There are also times, however, when you may sense the Lord leading you to go to a specific place or people. Consider Acts

16, where Paul has the desire to go to Asia. In fact, he tries to go, but the Spirit of the Lord says, “No!” Then, he does what many of us would do: he simply tries again. He’s motivated by a heart that wants to take the gospel where it is not yet known. He thinks he should go to Asia, so he tries again, but he gets another “no” from God. During the night, he has a dream of a man in Macedonia, who tells him to come there. He gets up and concludes that the Holy Spirit was not directing him to Asia but to Macedonia, so they go to Macedonia.

Continuing with Paul’s story, we see him and his co-workers in Philippi, where they obey God and proclaim the Good News there. As a result of their obedience, Lydia and her household come to faith. We then read about a slave girl who had been possessed by a demon becoming a free follower of Christ. This, incidentally, did not make her owners happy. This activity led to them being put in jail, where we then read that the jailer comes to faith. What an interesting core group of believers for the church at Philippi! What is intriguing also about this story is the timing: it comes just after an obedience encounter between Paul and our Lord—one where he had a divine dream and he responded.

Being a sent one is both where you are and where you might be called to be. It is not an either-or proposition but a both-and opportunity. Oftentimes, we as the church have just emphasized those who are called to be missionaries or church planters in another place, but we also need to recognize that it is the everyday choices we make that can lead us to gospel encounters with those around us. We have to strive to make intentional choices in sharing the gospel.

Proximity and Presence Are Not Sufficient

We want to emphasize the importance of intentionality as we move toward the close of this book—because proximity and presence alone are not enough for salvation.

Proximity of the gospel is not enough for salvation.

I (Larry) live in Madrid, where there is the presence of many beautiful church buildings. When you walk around the city, you cannot help but notice the cathedrals and churches. As an outsider to Europe I'm fascinated with its buildings. I walk by them and cannot help but observe the intricacies of their magnificent architectures. When I do this, I cannot help but notice how big God is and how small I am. It gives me a sense of the awesomeness and majesty of God. I am not sure, though, that people who live in my city and who have seen those buildings from the day they were born are drawn to them as I am. I sometimes wonder if they even notice them. Even though they often live within walking distance of a church building, they may have never heard the gospel in a personal way.

This reveals an important truth about the gospel and our need to be intentional: While these churches share close proximity to the people, they do not necessarily reach them. It is not enough to have simple access—or live in close proximity—to gospel places, such as a church building. It takes gospel intentionality. It takes intentionality in our:

- Conversations
- Relationships
- Sharing the gospel
- Asking for a response

It is recognizing that God has placed you wherever you are at this moment in time to be a proclaimer of his message. As a Christ follower, you have received the gospel, and as a Christ follower, you have been given the ministry of reconciliation. Obedience is a daily observance in the Christian's life—it is recognizing who you are in Christ and what he has done for you and being able to transmit your story in a relevant way to those around you. It is not simply about being a Christian and hanging out with your friends on a regular basis. Somehow the not-yet-believer has to hear the gospel and respond to it too.

Presence of the gospel is not enough for salvation.

Discipleship happens in the context of relationship. Can someone come to faith in isolation? Maybe. But God designed humans for interaction, and following Jesus happens in community. We see this with Paul's life, as he relates to the churches to whom he is connected. He cares for them deeply. From all that we read from his letters in the New Testament, relationships are important in his ministry because it is the believers' interactions with one another, among other things, that demonstrate God's kingdom here on earth for others to see.

Sharing the gospel happens through intentional relationships—that lead to salvation.

Read how Paul describes this to the church at Philippi:

I thank my God every time I remember you. In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now, being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you

will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.
(Phil. 1:3–6, ESV)

We also see the importance of community when Paul writes to the church in Thessalonica:

We give thanks to God always for all of you, constantly mentioning you in our prayers, remembering before our God and Father your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ. For we know, brothers loved by God, that he has chosen you, because our gospel came to you not only in word, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction.
(2 Thess. 1:2–6, ESV)

Paul writes this also to the same church:

So, being affectionately desirous of you, we were ready to share with you not only the gospel of God but also our own selves, because you had become very dear to us.
(1 Thess. 2:8, ESV)

The gospel was never meant to be shared outside of relationship. You may have never talked to a person before, but God could give you an open door to talk to them and tell them the gospel story. In this case, perhaps he will open their heart and they will receive the gospel. This is the gospel-in-relationship that we share with people. There is a unique bond between you and that person. Sure, you may not even live in the same city as that person, but chances are you feel that same connection that they feel and you work hard to be sure they are connected to another believer. Why? Because following Jesus—from evangelism

through discipleship—happens in the context of community and relationships.

Paul loved the people of Thessalonica. He describes his feelings for them as being “affectionately desirous.” He longed to see them know Christ. He cared so much for them that he not only shared the gospel but he also shared with them his life.

I (Larry) have come to see that my self-centric lifestyle tendencies often conflict with this. In order to feel productive, I typically cram too much activity into a normal day. And it’s not just my schedule but also my attitude that can leave little room for others.

For example, this affects how I handle interruptions to my day. Sometimes, I’m really a task-oriented person with a people-oriented veneer. I like to write out what I aim to do each day (maybe you can relate). I’m the kind of person who will go back and add things to my to-do list after I’ve done them just so I can mark them as completed. It makes me feel good inside. I’ve learned to include time in my calendar to explore parts of my neighborhood, meet new people, and build relationships with friends. I literally write these things in to my to-do list and try to stick to it. Creating that sort of structure in my daily life helps me increase my capacity for the things I value most. The danger in this approach to life is that I sometimes don’t handle interruptions well.

Ironically, people tend to mess up my plans even when people are written into my schedule! As I look back over my life, I know I have failed to create enough margin in my life for the unplanned. Living with gospel intentionality can actually cause

a lot of interruptions in our day. We simply do not have the margin in our lives.

I look ahead to what is next on my calendar; I look behind to what I have done; and I forget that I actually reside in the present. As I try to be intentional with the gospel, I am working at also giving myself enough margin in my day for sharing the gospel and my life with others. I often find that a lack of margin in my life is one of the biggest enemies of obeying God's leading during my day.

Obedience is abiding with Christ daily and in all things. It is reading and studying his Word. It is praying and being an active listener in my prayer time. It is being in community with a local body of believers getting guidance and direction. It is being sensitive to the circumstances and surroundings around us constantly and then following through in obedience to his leading and for his glory.

Conclusion

By now, you've got our point: that Christ's love compels us to live with intentionality as we share the gospel in the world. Jesus called us *out of* the world, only to send us back *into* it as his agents of reconciliation (2 Cor. 5:11-21). In order to do this, let's not forget what the gospel is:

“In its simplest form,” says pastor Matt Chandler, “the gospel is God’s reconciling work in Christ—that through the life, death, and resurrection of Christ, God is making all things new both personally for those who repent and believe, and cosmically as He redeems culture and creation from its subjection to futility.”⁶

This foundational truth of the gospel motivates a thoughtful, deliberate, grace-filled, kingdom-oriented lifestyle for all of God’s people. Let’s remember what we’ve covered in this book as we continue to learn how to live with gospel intentionality:

1. Identity. The gospel transforms who we are and makes us new people. In Christ, you have a “sent identity” no matter your address or vocation. When we forget who we are and start thinking and acting like the world, we become very bad

6. Matt Chandler, Eric Geiger, and Josh Patterson, *Creature of the Word: The Jesus-Centered Church* (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2014).

representatives of Christ. But when we remember our identity in Christ, we gain the ability to effectively reach people with the gospel.

2. Lifestyle. The best way to start living out our gospel identity is to consider our identity as God's sent-one in every decision we make throughout the day. In this way, we make it our lifestyle. If we had not been sent to make disciples, it might be okay for us to pursue our own safety, comfort, and convenience. We would probably be free to pursue our own wealth or social status. But we have been sent. Our thought process now has one overarching consideration that may trump all the other factors in the decisions we make: How can I best represent the King who sent me?

3. Obedience. Ultimately, gospel intentionality is expressed in our obedience to the call to "go." We obey the teachings of Christ because he has been given all authority and because he has sent us. We honor God by doing what he has sent us to do. Obedience has a powerful effect on how we feel about God. When we do what he tells us to do, we begin to see the loving kindness he has for us. Furthermore, by proclaiming Christ in the world, we demonstrate that loving kindness to others.

What we have written here comes from our real-life experiences, which we describe in more detail in the book *Tradecraft: For the Church on Mission*. Included in that book is how we have learned these key missionary skills, which are available to all believers and can help you in your missional journey. We pray this eBook will help give you a solid biblical foundation for your journey toward gospel intentionality.

God has commissioned us as a community of faith to live this intentional lifestyle! We should remember well what Jesus said to the disciples—which applies today as much as it did back then:

As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you.
(John 20:21, ESV)

And finally, remember that we are not sent alone but with Christ:

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, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.

You are not alone. Live your life with gospel intentionality.

About the Authors

LARRY McCrARY and **CALEB CRIDER** founded [The Upstream Collective](#) in 2008 while serving overseas and desiring to help churches to send their members to the nations and into their neighborhood. Together they wrote [Tradecraft for the Church on the Mission](#), which is widely used in churches and church planting organizations.



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