

REAP Church Plant Training Course

Step 9 – Reach an area



Step 9 – Initiating outreach projects

There is a huge amount of good stuff out there on evangelism. We're even produced some material ourselves – see the "*Toblerone of evangelism*". There's also stuff from the REAP course last year on leading out of evangelism, and you're very welcome to look at that. This document isn't about those things, however. It's not as much a list of how-to's, as much as a series of feelings, and attitudes about the way you do evangelism.

It's based on the idea that God is constantly working, constantly changing the world around us. We've seen this clearly during COVID19. God has been at work in unexpected ways. There are things that we thought were secure and settled which have been disturbed, and people that we thought God couldn't touch who God has changed completely.

But here is our list of attitudes that we think lead to effective outreach.

1. Not everything has to be a project. A lot of the most effective and powerful outreach is done without projects at all. Projects can work, but many of the most effective ways of reaching people are simple, natural and spontaneous. One Sunday my brother and I (John) went out to the shop. We met a couple of language students from Latin America coming back from the laundry with bags full of dirty washing, because the laundry was closed. We invited them back to our house to do their laundry, and they became part of our church, and God moved in their lives. On another occasion, I met someone sitting in Longsight market and asked them if they wanted a cup of tea. We began talking, and again, he began coming to church. It's true that not everyone has the gall to chat to random people, but natural, friendly, spontaneous conversations are often more effective than the formal projects that we run. Projects take time, effort, and organisation. Smiling at people, saying hello and beginning a conversation don't take any of that.

2. The gospel has to do the work. We can fall into thinking that if we're nice enough, offer people community, then they will join the community, and somehow they will come to believe. And so we sometimes hold back from telling people the message. We can pull our punches, lack clarity, and don't present the truth. It's important to keep immersing ourselves in the

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truth that the gospel is power of God for the salvation of all who believe, not our own good qualities. We have sometimes lapsed into this – hiding the message and even feeling ashamed of it, in case it breaks up a friendship.

3. Keep the goal of the activity first and the activity second. Projects and activities have real power. They shape us as groups – they're real, concrete and visible. So there's real value in doing something and doing it together. The task makes our community and gives us a purpose. For that reason, it's easy to keep running projects without thinking too deeply. But the best projects have leaders who ask: "Are we doing what we came to do?" "What do we need to do differently?" This morning we gathered our Bible and English team and talked about three topics, our goals, roles, and prayer. Gather your team, think about your goals, and have the courage to change or drop activities if you need to.

4. Build people's gifts. When we build programmes, we can become hungry for manpower. We need people to do hours, we need people to fulfil tasks. And so we ask people to take on work, which sometimes doesn't fit their skills. When people operate outside their gifting it will often wear them out to some extent. You can only do this for so long before people drop out or lose their enthusiasm. When people operate inside their gifting, it builds them up and encourages them. Try to keep your project the right shape and size for your team's gifts and needs.

5. Everything you do is worship. When you're doing evangelism. Make sure that what you're doing is feasible, workable, and that you and your team take the time to pray. When projects gain a life of their own, we stop praying around them, and can somehow forget that they belong to the Lord, and He stops being the focus. If you're all too busy to pray for your project, you're too busy.

6. Be clear why you're there. If you're there to spread the good news of Jesus, let people know that. Sometimes we serve the gospel with sweeteners. We attract people for an English class or a youth club, and mix the gospel into it. That can build up resistance to the message, as they've actually come for something else. I'd prefer to have a bridge between

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something that is specifically message focused, like a Bible study and for example, an English class. They might be held in the same place, or the same team might run both, and so it's easy to go from the English class to the Bible study. We're not huge fans of inviting people for a social outreach activity and then building Christian components into the same activity; give people space to say, 'thank you, but no.'

7. Offer space to meet the church. Evangelism occurs when people hear the word of God, or meet a Christian community. So give a space where people can meet the community. Organise a walk and invite people from any social outreach projects that you're working on. If the church has a barbecue, again, invite people. People are far more likely to come to church if they meet Christians as friends, rather than simply within a project.

8. Ask the question: do you believe? Sometimes we find it tough to ask directly – do you believe the good news? We'll look at ways of making it easier in a little bit, but at some point we need to find out what's going on in someone's heart. One lady from a Muslim heritage had to actually come and ask me to pray a prayer of repentance and faith. I had been too slow to ask that question. This can seem intimidating, as it's direct and possibly alienating, but the right time to ask this question is not 'never'. It's good to keep your eyes open for what the Lord is doing. Having said that, we sometimes need a bit of a boost to help people make that final step.

9. Do stuff that encourages people towards a decision. Sometimes it can seem hard to ask a friend who's been coming to church to take the final step towards Christ. So getting a speaker in to do the work can be really effective. The speaker doesn't know the person and has no relationship with them to lose. So bring the speaker in, invite your friend, and see what happens. The same is true of an Alpha or Christianity Explored Course. There's a discipline in going through the course and asking the question – do you want to pray, do you believe, do you want to receive the Holy Spirit? It can seem more natural and less threatening when it's part of a course.

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10. On the same lines, use baptism, or confirmation if you're Anglican. Make time in the baptism service for testimonies and stories that speak of change. Those testimonies and baptisms invite people to react, to make the same step. A non-Christian watching a believer's baptism will naturally ask themselves 'should I do that'. It's easy to say to someone 'could that be you one day?' In some ways communion can do the same thing. When we explain what communion is, and say 'please don't take communion if you don't believe in Christ, if you don't want to follow him' creates the opportunity to challenge people naturally about faith in Christ.

11. Work with new Christians. Give special attention to new Christians. Invest in baptism preparation, invest in groups that work for new Christians. Churches naturally create internal cultures, and those cultures naturally gather around the leadership, and the leadership have usually been Christians for a long time. That means that the people who have been Christians the longest can set the culture and tone of the church. Make sure that you and your team value and build up the newest Christians in your church.

12. Preach the gospel. It's very easy to reach out to de-churched people. These are people who have belonged to another church, and so, positively, they understand they what a church does, but on the other hand, they can be consumers of church. New Christians, on the other hand have met God. They often love and are deeply loyal to God, but also to people who helped them to find Christ. That means that we can and should focus on making new disciples of Christ, rather than attracting people who have come from other churches. It's not only obedience to the Great Commission, it breeds encouragement and growth in the church.

13. Listen to the Holy Spirit. In our evangelism we copy Jesus; by only doing what the Father does. (John 5:19) The Holy Spirit is God within us and so we ask the Spirit what to do. You might be led to pray for supernatural healing, you might receive a scripture and prophetic word for someone; as you preach the gospel it may be confirmed by signs and wonders (Mark 15:20). Walk in step with the Spirit. Why not try spending an hour or two simply asking the Holy Spirit where He wants you to go and who He wants you to speak to?

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14. God's Sovereignty in evangelism. "No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws them.." said Jesus (John 6:44). This means that the person in front of you might not be being drawn to Jesus, it also means they might be being drawn to Jesus. Ask the Holy Spirit. If they are being drawn, feed them the gospel. If not, simply love and serve them. I (Ben) have given God lots of names of folks who He probably ought to be drawing to Jesus, and obviously there's nothing wrong with praying for folks to be saved, but ask Him who He is drawing at the moment and for you to be used.

15. Look for spiritually hungry people. God is constantly at work, seeking out the lost. His Spirit is constantly at work, generating hunger for his presence. From 2015 we ran a ministry and Rusholme that made the church very easy to find. And many, many people found it. But some of those were not hungry for God. They came slowly to dominate some parts of our meeting, and even began to block the way for those who were. It seems odd to say that a Bible study became dominated by those who didn't believe the Bible, but as the meeting went on, this is what we faced. We should have filtered invitation, and governed the space so that it attracted possibly fewer people, but those who did come were more strongly seeking Christ.

16. Get out on the street: AKA, just do it. In the inner city in particular, cold calling is underrated. People move through the area quickly. I (Ben) would suggest leaflet drops are important not because they tell people about an event you're running, but because they give you permission to push something through a letterbox and even knock on a front door. Delivering leaflets is a great excuse to chat to local people about the church.

And finally. I (John) worked for years with local organisations in Africa – my job was to evaluate them and fund them. It wasn't the ones with the best strategy who succeeded. It was the ones who worked in the field, got good information from the field stopped, thought, and adapted what they did to what they saw on the ground. Every church will work out its own way of initiating and running its outreach. What will make the difference is doing the work, stopping, praying, thinking and changing what you do.