JM Jason Mayfield

SERMON OUTLINE FOR PASTORS

A STRATEGY FOR REACHING THE LOST

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

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

MAIN TEXT
Mark 1:9-17

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

FIRST PREACHED
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BY
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AT A GLANCE

THE MESSAGE

1. Relationships are the catalyst for salvation, both with family and with everybody else
2. With lost family: prioritize the secret place, stay faithful, be patient, be flexible
3. With everyone else: do not be obscure about your faith and do not be obnoxious about it, do not hide your faith and do not hype your faith
4. Invite people to church, because an invitation is the first step in personal evangelism and no one has to close the deal alone
5. Church is where the decision happens, and seven things have to be done well for that to work
6. Discipleship happens on purpose and by proximity, and the majority of it happens in the pulpit



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youtu.be/31rW6NXoPz4



READ THE ARTICLE

jasonmayfield.com/messages/a-strategy-for-reaching-the-lost

PREACHING NOTES

Before You Preach

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

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

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

Introduction

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

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

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

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

HOW PEOPLE COME TO CHRIST

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

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

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

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

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

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

CALLED TO MAKE DISCIPLES

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

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

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

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

1. Relationships Are the Catalyst for Salvation

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

THE FAMILY DYNAMIC

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

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

ii. Stay faithful.

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

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

iii. Be patient.

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

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

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

RELATIONSHIPS WITH EVERYONE ELSE

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

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

2. Invite People to Church

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

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

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

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

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

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

INVITING FAMILY

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

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

INVITING EVERYONE ELSE

Every opportunity you get.

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

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

3. Church: Where the Magic Happens

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

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

Ministry:

- **1. Preaching matters most.** Church growth research consistently places preaching as the top driver of retention and spiritual formation.
- **2. Quality worship is non-negotiable.** 92% of churched adults say worship is very important, and churches that invest in meaningful, high-quality worship report stronger growth and engagement.
- **3. Kids ministry builds church health and growth.** 62% of parents say children's ministry was a key factor in choosing a church. Families are moving to our area because of their kids; we have to get this right.

- **4. Hospitality makes it personal.** Guests often decide whether they'll come back based on how they were greeted, treated and seated. Nelson Searcy, in *Fusion*, says a church has about seven minutes to make a positive first impression. Everyone is involved in the process.

Marketing:

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

Property:

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

WHAT IT TAKES

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

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

4. Discipleship: Growing in Grace

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

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

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

DON'T GET DISTRACTED

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

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

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

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

Conclusion

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

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

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

OPTIONAL: SALVATION PRAYER

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

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



ABOUT

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