

The Stand out church!

I have had a dream now for over 15 years for a stand out kind of church. A relentless church. A city on a hill kind of church! When I arrived here in Norwich I sensed the Lord give me an architect's vision of the church He desired for us to have in Norwich.

I remember in the first few months of being in Norwich I contacted long term friend Gary Clarke from Hillsong London and asked to meet him. I arrived to their 5th Sunday night service at Blackfriars. It blew my mind. This was it! This was the kind of church I saw in my heart. That night 20 or so people made a commitment to follow Jesus and that sealed the deal for me.

On the floor of the auditorium I saw a piece of paper that simply listed the 5 ingredients of the culture of Hillsong church. That piece of paper revolutionised my spirit. I discovered that night that a church leader is also called to be a cultural architect and atmosphere creator! I was up for the job! Those 5 concepts defined our church and its culture to this day.

- Motivated by the cause of Christ
- Servanthood
- Generosity
- Learning to flow together
- Pursuit of excellence

Have you ever had a dream? It's like a fire in your heart. But reality creeps in and seeks to eat that dream. Have you ever had a dream and then realised there's a lot of hard work in front of you? Have you ever had a dream and then find yourself up against a wall that seems like an impenetrable barrier to you and you completing your dream?? Have you realised that dreams are just dream unless you do something to make them a reality? A dream doesn't become reality through magic; it takes sweat, determination and hard work.

One of our defining mottos here at Proclaimers is that "We are called to everything we can so that God is free to do what only He can do." There is no "one key" to unlock your dream. There is no shortcut to fulfilling your aspirations. Follow your passion, be prepared to work hard and sacrifice, and, above all, and don't let anyone limit your dreams. Jesus had a dream for His church too!

Jesus said in **Matthew 5: 13 – 16** TPT, "Your lives are like salt among the people. But if you, like salt, become bland, how can your 'saltiness' be restored? Flavourless salt is good for nothing and will be thrown out and trampled on by others. Your lives light up the world. Let others see your light from a distance, for how can you hide a city that stands on a hilltop? And who would light a lamp and then hide it in an obscure place? Instead, it's placed where everyone in the house can benefit from its light. So don't hide your light! Let it shine brightly before others, so that the commendable things you do will shine as light upon them, and then they will give their praise to your Father in heaven."

This is a powerful description of the church as a people who gather each week in a city. They are people who are like salt and light in a flavourless and dark world. This is a church that stands out in society and in our city for everyone to see.

A church that when it gathers together on Sundays has an impact on the world and shakes the kingdom of darkness. A church like this will rattle the cages of demons and unnerve every evil spirit within miles! This kind of standout church hits both taste buds and gives eye gate vision to a world searching for a spiritual answer to a world that doesn't make sense. A church like this will point the way to The Way Jesus Christ.

Jesus said, “Your lives are like salt!” You give flavour to the people in your world. Your very presences adds flavour. People get the opportunity to taste you! Not an unusual metaphor from scripture.

Psalm 34:8 says, “Taste and see that the Lord is good.”

Jesus takes this concept further by saying we are like salt amongst the people we live around. To people whose taste buds only taste the flavour of stress, pressure, strain, anxiety, tension, trauma and worry we actually provide a different and delicious flavour.

To those whose taste buds are accustomed to the vanity of chasing after wealth, stressed by needing to outperform the competition, stretched by the rivalry of families fighting each other – navigating between disappointment and rejection – we actually come out as tasting pretty good.

But what happens when we become bland? What happens when we become tasteless, insipid or unsavoury? The answer is we just become like the dull and bland flavours that exist around us. We offer no comparison to the flavours of the world around us. We miss out on bring out the God flavours around us. We no longer stand out. We’re no longer obvious. We are no longer prominent or conspicuous. We are no longer noticed. When that happened were no different to others and we get trampled on. The Bible says we are ambassadors of Christ not secret agents for Jesus.

People make room for flavour. People make room in their priorities for flavour. People will go out and eat at an expensive restaurant if they know they will be dazzled by the unique flavours. People will walk for miles to taste that! The old saying is true, “Get on fire for Jesus because people will come from miles around to watch you burn.”

Salt in Jewish culture equates with wisdom. I find this remarkable how it now fits in to Jesus metaphor. Our wisdom becomes like a unique and sought after flavour to a world where salt has lost its flavour to become foolishness.

People are feed up on foolishness.
They are bloated by the irrationality of the world they live in.
People have been overstuffed with silliness and idiocy.

They yearn for a different flavour – one that will be marinated in wisdom, rubbed with insight and seasoned with understanding. This is how we garner the attention a world bored by mediocrity; speak wisdom.

But Jesus isn’t finished with His metaphors. He says, “Your lives light up the world.” Yes YOU! Little old you – you are a light that lights up other people’s world. You have Jesus, the Light of the World, living in you which makes you a light to your world as well. People will be drawn to your light, welcome them in! People see your light!

That is of course if you’re not hiding your light. The 4 major functions of light is to have an impact on our surroundings by bringing intensity or focus, to revealing colour, to give direction and to highlight movement.

If we hide our light under a bucket we deny people the opportunity to see Jesus, we deny the opportunity to reveal Him as all the colours of the rainbow. We deny people the guidance and direction they are so feebly seeking. If we deny people the opportunity to see the light we deny them the miracle of seeing God move graciously and humbly in their lives. We are the light of the world – don’t hide it.

Jesus said the religious rules of His day were like blind guides. In **Matthew 15: 14** He said this, "Stay away from them, for they're nothing more than blind guides. Do you know what happens when a blind man pretends to guide another blind man? *They both stumble into a ditch!*"

Don't hid your light out of embarrassment, or through superficiality in our relationships. Don't hid your light for fear of being ribbed or persecuted for your beliefs. Jesus said to let our light shine! We're not blind. We have sight. We have the knowledge of God's word. Shine Jesus shine! Let His light pierce the darkness!

When we intersect with other people we provide light. In being light we provide clear focus. A lot of people are stumbling around with no idea of what to do. They've become blinded to truth and common sense. They don't know what to focus on first. As a light to the world we help people to see things they couldn't see before. As we advise and consult with the people in our world we provide direction and can highlight what they need to do.

Let others see your light from a distance, where everyone in the house can benefit from it. Let it shine brightly before others, so that the commendable things you do will shine as light upon them, and then they will give their praise to your Father in heaven.

To be that standout kind of church there are 3 things to consider.

- Conversation
- Demonstration
- Invitation

1. **Conversation** – is so important. Just start speaking with people. Start conversations. There are people we see every day – developing conversation is crucial. I mean it's what people do – they talk to each other. Practice talking to others. Learn how to introduce yourself.

How can we reach people if we haven't started a conversation? Relationship is vital if we are going to share the powerful message of salvation. How do we share of faith with people we don't even know nor have earned the right to speak?

Colossians 4:6, "Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone."

Isaac.

2. **Demonstration** – one of the main reasons people don't share Jesus is they fear they will be held accountable to their convictions. It's one thing to confess Jesus on a Sunday but an entirely different thing to live for Him during the week.

Brennan Manning once said, "The greatest single cause of atheism in the world today is Christians, who acknowledge Jesus with their lips and walk out the door and deny Him by their lifestyle. That is what an unbelieving world simply finds unbelievable."

Let your light shine by living the Jesus way. Let others see your life coming at them from a distance. Live in such a way that others will want to get to know you and talk with you. Live in such a way that others will look at you with a bit of envy at the way you handle yourself in difficult situations.

Matthew 5:16, “let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.”

Joel & Amy

3. **Invitation:** The main reason people don't come to church is they've never been invited by you. Many people think we're like a private club. They feel they won't be welcomed if they just rocked up. Some will feel like a party crasher. Just walking in.

People need an invitation. They need to hear your voice inviting them to this incredible gathering. They want a web page to refer to. They would like a card with information on it to help them navigate the process. They want to know what to expect. What they need to dress like. Who's welcome and who's not welcome.

Jesus invited so many people to just hang out with Him. He asked people to come eat with Him. Jesus was really open to all kinds of people. He invited the best religious folk for dinner and he invited the worst of the worst to eat with as well. He cared little for His reputation.

If I was to isolate the main cause a church doesn't grow it would be this one. We at some point in our lives simply stop inviting people to our church to experience God in action. The reason is simply too – we've stopped making conversation with those who are outside of grace.

When you have been a Christian for more than 2 years it's like you've exhausted all of your friends with invitations and in turn have made awesome wonderful Christian friends and feel very satisfied with them so much so we stop inviting people to our church because we don't have any more non-Christian friends to invite.

Luke 14:12 – 14, “When you throw a banquet, don't just invite your friends, relatives, or rich neighbours—for it is likely they will return the favour. It is better to invite those who never get an invitation. Invite the poor to your banquet, along with the outcast, the handicapped, and the blind—those who could never repay you the favour. Then you will experience a great blessing in this life, and at the resurrection of the godly you will receive a full reward.”

So if you asked me what do I want you to do after listening to this message? Easy!

1. Start talking to people
2. Live in such a manner that your life speaks louder than your words
3. Invite people – invite them to your homes for dinner, invite them for coffee, invite them for lunch and invite them to church.

Jesus speaks today with an invitation to all.

Revelation 22:17, “The Spirit and the bride say, “Come!” And let the one who hears say, “Come!” Let the one who is thirsty come; and let the one who wishes take the free gift of the water of life.

What would happen if we just did this? How does a conversation develop? How do we build relationships with people? What would happen as we demonstrate our faith in tangible ways? What would happen if we just simply invited people? You'll have to wait and see.