



Adventures In Teaching The Gospel

Thursday February 24, 2022



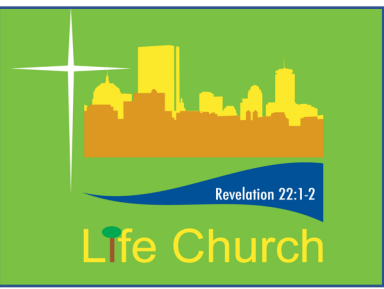
Full Disclosure

- Although I read a lot, I do not have any formal seminary training.
- I will be presenting our latest efforts in outreach, evangelism, and discipleship at Life Church.
- We launched our congregation in 2003 with the support of New Covenant Christian Church (now Jubilee Christian Church). We have varied in size from 20 early on, to a high of 60 - 70 around 2010. We are currently at about 20 people and are meeting via Zoom.
- We expect to return to in-person services by the end of March 2022.
- This is an experiment. We have not arrived!



Some Personal Notes

- I didn't grow up in church.
- My older sister shared the gospel with me when I was in high school.
- I began following Jesus as the result of a personal encounter with the Lord on April 1, 1979.
- When I went to church 2 weeks later, on Easter Sunday, I met a pastor, Bishop Gideon Thompson, who opened his study to me and mentored me. He created safe space for me to ask questions!



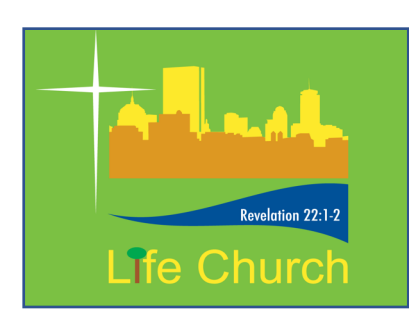
Initial Motivations

- N. T. Wright & The Big Picture; Bible Project - Heaven and Earth
- Persistent failures in the lives of many of the saints. Do they understand the Sermon on the Mount?
- Life Church Post-sermon small group breakout sessions; cell ministry.
- Ahmaud Arbery, George Floyd, Donald Trump



Goals vs. Systems

“We don’t rise to the level of our goals; we fall to the level of our systems” – James Clear



Our Seven “F”s Approach To Discipleship

Focus On the Message

Family Up

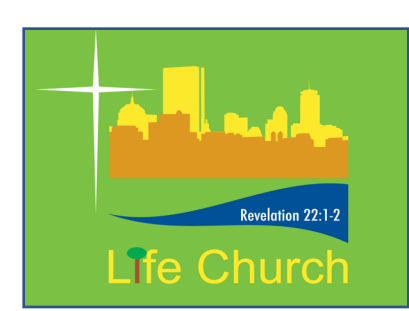
Flow In the Spirit

Face Your Problems

Farm Your Land

Find Your Purpose

Fulfill Your Mission



The Big Picture – 1 of 2

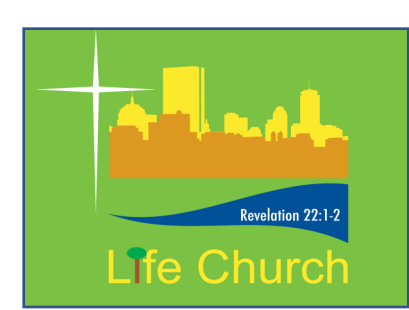
God created a good world and appointed us to represent him in it.

We rebelled. This subjected God's good world to chaos, destruction, and evil.

God begins his plan to reclaim us and our broken world.

God's plan has several phases, each of which helps to demonstrate how deep the problem of our rebellion is. This multi-phase plan ultimately makes it clear that only Jesus solves the problem.

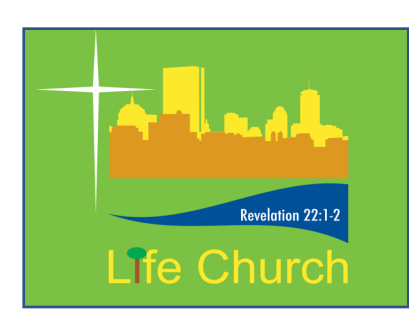
We need to understand this because God still intends to rule the earth through human beings – redeemed human beings – us!



The Big Picture – 2 of 2

Phases of God's plan:

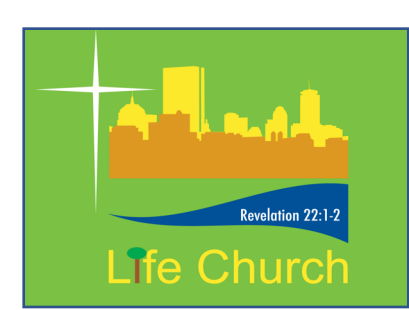
- Noah – pick a righteous man and start over with him and his family. - FAIL
- Abraham – pick another man who trusts God and start over with him and the son he had to trust God for. - FAIL
- Israel – rescue chosen descendants of Abraham and enter into a detailed personal covenant with them. – FAIL, FAIL, FAIL, FAIL
- Jesus – redeem Israel so they can be what God called them to be: a kingdom of priests through whom he can rescue and reclaim our broken world. - VICTORY



The Gospel: Matthew & Mark

From that time on Jesus began to preach, **“Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near.”** - Matthew 4:17

After John was put in prison, Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God. **“The time has come,”** he said. **“The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!”** – Mark 1:14-15 (NIV)



The Gospel: Luke

Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit, and news about him spread through the whole countryside. He taught in their synagogues, and everyone praised him.

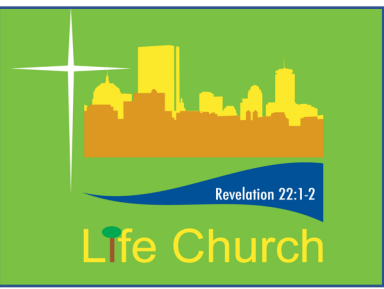
He went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom. And he stood up to read. The scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written: **“The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”**

Then he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him, and he began by saying to them, **“Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.”** - Luke 4:14-21



The Gospel: John

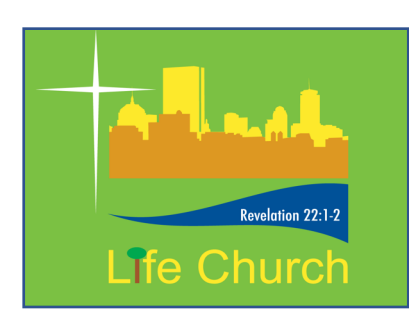
Then John gave this testimony: “I saw the Spirit come down from heaven as a dove and remain on him. I would not have known him, except that the one who sent me to baptize with water told me, ‘The man on whom you see the Spirit come down and remain is he who will baptize with the Holy Spirit.’ I have seen and I testify that this is the Son of God.” - John 1:32-34 (NIV)



The Kingdom of God Is Here

Longing for the Kingdom

- After exile Israel eventually returns to their promised land.
- They are no longer sovereign. They endure oppressive occupying conquerors.
- They remember Deuteronomy 30:1-10 however.



The Kingdom of God Is Here

- Deuteronomy 30:1-10 – Prosperity After Turning to the Lord

When all these blessings and curses I have set before you come upon you and you take them to heart wherever the LORD your God disperses you among the nations, and when you and your children return to the LORD your God and obey him with all your heart and with all your soul according to everything I command you today, then the LORD your God will restore your fortunes and have compassion on you and gather you again from all the nations where he scattered you. Even if you have been banished to the most distant land under the heavens, from there the LORD your God will gather you and bring you back. He will bring you to the land that belonged to your fathers, and you will take possession of it. He will make you more prosperous and numerous than your fathers. The LORD your God will circumcise your hearts and the hearts of your descendants, so that you may love him with all your heart and with all your soul, and live. The LORD your God will put all these curses on your enemies who hate and persecute you. You will again obey the LORD and follow all his commands I am giving you today. Then the LORD your God will make you most prosperous in all the work of your hands and in the fruit of your womb, the young of your livestock and the crops of your land. The LORD will again delight in you and make you prosperous, just as he delighted in your fathers, if you obey the LORD your God and keep his commands and decrees that are written in this Book of the Law and turn to the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul.



The Kingdom of God Is Here

The Jews of Jesus' day longed for the answer to their oppression promised in Deuteronomy 30:1-10.

- They had various opinions about what the Kingdom would look like.
- They had various opinions about how the Kingdom would arrive.
- They all understood why they longed for it.
- Just like:
 - Reparations
 - Black Lives Matter



The Kingdom of God Is Here

A house with many rooms:

- “The Math Gene” by Keith Devlin
- My house has many rooms, but the living room, kitchen, bathroom, dining room all have the same address – it’s one house!
- The Kingdom in the New Testament is a house with many rooms, but they’re all part of one unified concept:
 - Kingdom
 - Christ
 - Messiah
 - Son of God
 - etc.



Make Disciples

Jesus' method was to make disciples – trained men and women who would multiply themselves while faithfully following his teaching.

- Vaccines don't save lives – vaccinations do!
- The gospel must be successfully implanted in disciples in order to have the proper impact in the world.
- We must approach discipleship concretely rather than abstractly.



Ladder of Abstraction

Popularized by S. I. Hayakawa in “Language in Thought and Action (1938-1941)

We go up the ladder of abstraction to compel agreement:

- Pro Abortion - - - - > Pro Choice
- Anti Abortion - - - - > Pro Life

We go down the ladder of abstraction to get things done:

- Manage your wealth: “Bessie the Cow” vs. “Tommy the Tractor”





Ladder of Abstraction

Concrete Language

Physical Fitness:

- You can't achieve it using only words such as: fitness, health, flexibility, strength.
- You must use words such as: reps, squats, presses, push-ups, speed, incline, etc.

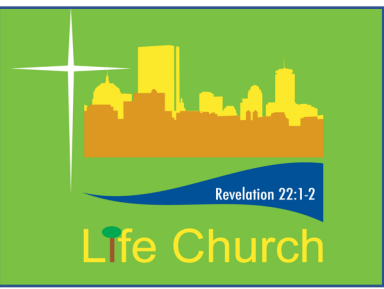


Ladder of Abstraction

Concrete Language

Education

- You can't achieve it using only words such as: education, knowledge, learning, understanding.
- You must use words such as: spell, add, multiply, conjugate, microscope, experiment, essay, verb, noun, translate, 1492, 1620, 1776, George Washington, Harriet Tubman, Frederick Douglas, Abraham Lincoln, Martin Luther King.



Is Our Discipleship Concrete?

Jesus used metaphors about concrete activities:

- catching fish,
- harvesting wheat,
- etc.

Would you rather have a metaphorical sweet potato pie or a real one?



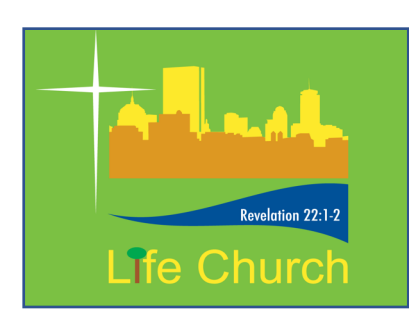
Is Our Discipleship Concrete?

We must each be able to answer the question:

“What is a disciple and how will I know when I’ve made one?”

Life events that are well defined and have well understood processes:

- Making breakfast
- Doing laundry
- Getting a drivers license
- Buying a car
- Buying a house



How Did They Disciple?

Then Jesus came to them and said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.” - Matthew 28:18-20 (NIV)

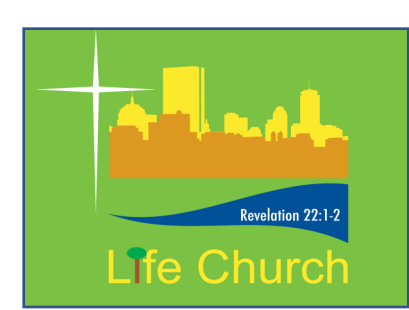
- Jesus took roughly 3 years to produce his disciples.
- Jesus has all authority in heaven and on earth.
- His disciples are commanded to make disciples as they go.
- They are to teach their disciples everything Jesus taught them during those 3 years.
- We are responsible for everything Jesus taught during his 3 years of ministry.
- We are to teach disciples everything Jesus taught during his 3 years of ministry.



How Did They Disciple?

“Now I know that none of you among whom I have gone about preaching the kingdom will ever see me again. Therefore, I declare to you today that I am innocent of the blood of all men. For I have not hesitated to proclaim to you the whole will of God. Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood. I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock. Even from your own number men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them. So be on your guard! Remember that for three years I never stopped warning each of you night and day with tears. – Acts 20:25-31 (NIV)

- Paul spent 3 years with the Ephesian elders.
- During this period of time he proclaimed to them the whole will of God.
- We ought to do the same!



How Did They Disciple?

They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. – Acts 2:42 (NIV)

- What was the Apostles' teaching?
 - My old evangelical way of thinking: systematic theology.
 - My new way of thinking: the life story of Jesus.
- The life story of Jesus came before systematic theology.
- The life story of Jesus came before the creeds. The creeds focus on the controversial portions of Jesus life – virgin birth, crucifixion, death, burial, resurrection.
- The epistles were written to churches that were founded on the life story of Jesus.



Whom Will We Disciple?

We disciple those who have been converted by the power of the Holy Spirit in response to the gospel message.

There is no point in trying to disciple someone in whom the Holy Spirit has not taken up residence.



Modeling Conversion

Let's use Peter's Pentecost sermon as a model:

“Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ.”

When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, “Brothers, what shall we do?”

Peter replied, “Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off — for all whom the Lord our God will call.”

With many other words he warned them; and he pleaded with them, “Save yourselves from this corrupt generation.” Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day.

They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. - Acts 2:36-42 (NIV)

- Peter: “God has made this Jesus . . . both Lord and Christ.”
- People: “What shall we do?”
- Peter: “Repent and be baptized . . .”
- Outcome: Those who accepted the message responded (were baptized) and 3,000 were added to their number.
- Outcome: They devoted themselves to the Apostles' teaching . . .



Modeling Conversion

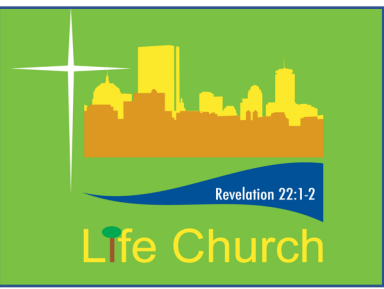
Genuine Christians follow Jesus in a publicly verifiable way.

What is the normal path to conversion (i.e. becoming a follower)?

- Gospel proclamation (e.g. “The Kingdom of God is here”)
- Saving faith (includes the “superpower” ability to pay attention to Jesus)
- Acts of commitment (e.g. baptism, “Jesus is Lord”, joining family of believers)
- Discipleship

Some thoughts about “traditional methods”:

- Romans Road Map
- Four Spiritual Laws
- ABC



Modeling Conversion

Some Thoughts About Heaven

- In the entire Book of Acts **no one ever** tells people to believe in Jesus so that they can go to heaven.
- For 1st century Jews “forgiveness of sins” means getting out of the “penalty box” – not “going to heaven”.
- Philippi was a Roman colony. When Paul wrote, in Philippians 3:20 “our citizenship is in heaven” he was writing to colonists whose job was to make Philippi like Rome rather than looking for opportunities to relocate to Rome.
- In 1 Thessalonians 4:17 we are “caught up to meet the Lord in the air” in order to escort him into the city like the King that he is. This is the way citizens would welcome their king and this is the way the saints welcomed Paul in Acts 28.
- The Son of Man “coming on the clouds of heaven” is a reference to Daniel 7 in which “one like a Son of Man” ascends (not descends) into the presence of the Ancient of Days and receives authority, power, and worship.



Terminology

Consider these terms from “[Following Jesus: Introduction](https://lfechurchboston.org/activities/classes-programs/following-jesus/introduction/)” Lesson 2
(<https://lfechurchboston.org/activities/classes-programs/following-jesus/introduction/>)

Believer – someone who believes in or has faith in Jesus and therefore follows him. In the Bible, the term “believer” refers to much more than simply agreeing with an idea. It implies a level of commitment such that, when given a chance, you will act on the belief. For example, you demonstrate your belief that a chair will support your weight by sitting in it; you demonstrate your belief that an airplane will take you safely to your destination by flying in it.

[John 4:39-41; Acts 2:44-47; Acts 4:31-32; Galatians 6:9-10; James 2:1](#)

Born again – those who believe in Jesus are born again from God’s Spirit. You must be born again to see or enter the Kingdom of God.

[John 3:1-21; 1Peter 1:22-23](#)

Brother – those who follow Jesus are part of a new family and become brothers and sisters to one another.

Matthew 12:46-50; Matthew 23:8; Acts 6:3; Acts 9:28-30; Acts 11:1; Acts 11:29; Acts 15

Christian – means “belonging to Christ” “The disciples were called Christians first at Antioch” – [Acts 11:19-26](#)



Terminology

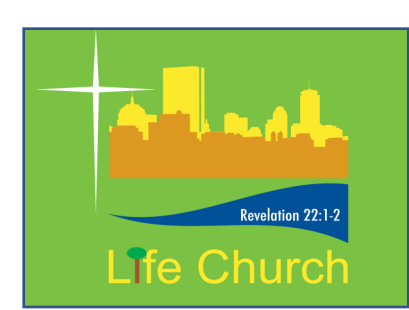
- **Disciples** – those who are trained by the one they are following.
[Matthew 5:1-2; Acts 6:1-7; Acts 9:1-31; Acts 11:19-26; Acts 18:23](#)
- **Follower of Jesus** – Someone who follows and organizes his/her life around the life of Jesus as revealed in the Bible, especially the four gospels (i.e. Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John) and as revealed by the Holy Spirit.
[Matthew 4:19; Matthew 8:19-22; Matthew 9:9; Matthew 10:37-39; Matthew 16:24-26; Matthew 19:21-22; Matthew 19:27-30; John 1:43; John 12:26; John 21:19-22](#)
- **Saints** – those who are “sanctified”, or set apart for God’s use.
[Romans 1:1-8; Ephesians 1:1-2; Philippians 1:1-2](#)
- **Saved** – those who by following Jesus have been rescued from this world and from God’s wrath.
[Luke 8:12; Luke 8:4-15; John 10:1-9; Acts 2:17-21; Acts 4:8-12; Romans 10:1-13](#)



Picturing Salvation

This is what salvation looks like.

- People who
 - have been captivated by Jesus.
 - follow him in order to learn from him.
 - abandon their past teachers in favor of learning directly from Jesus.
- Jesus
 - Welcomes them regardless of their past social status or degree of spiritual achievement.
 - Considers them to be disciples from the beginning.
 - Treats them with an expectation of success.
- Their attention is focused on Jesus and they are not at all anxious about whether they are “in” or “out”.

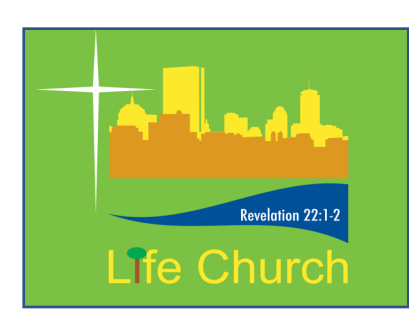


Picturing Salvation

With salvation we receive a “superpower” - the ability to distinguish between Jesus and other sources and to pay attention to Jesus.

“I tell you the truth, the man who does not enter the sheep pen by the gate, but climbs in by some other way, is a thief and a robber. The man who enters by the gate is the shepherd of his sheep. The watchman opens the gate for him, and the sheep listen to his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has brought out all his own, he goes on ahead of them, and his sheep follow him because they know his voice. But they will never follow a stranger; in fact, they will run away from him because they do not recognize a stranger’s voice.” - John 10:1-5 (NIV)

- This is the flip side of the “faith” that is the evidence of salvation.
- What we do with this “superpower” will determine the course of our spiritual life.



How Will We Disciple?

Jesus said to them, “I tell you the truth, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you.” – John 6:53

- We must “feed” on Jesus’ life story!

David longed for water and said, “Oh, that someone would get me a drink of water from the well near the gate of Bethlehem!” So the three mighty men broke through the Philistine lines, drew water from the well near the gate of Bethlehem and carried it back to David. But he refused to drink it; instead, he poured it out before the LORD. “Far be it from me, O LORD, to do this!” he said. “Is it not the blood of men who went at the risk of their lives?” And David would not drink it. – 2 Samuel 23:15-17a (NIV)

- David refused to drink the “blood” of the men who risked their lives for him.
- We must drink the “blood” of Jesus’ sacrifice for us!



How Will We Disciple?

Feeding on the Life Story of Jesus

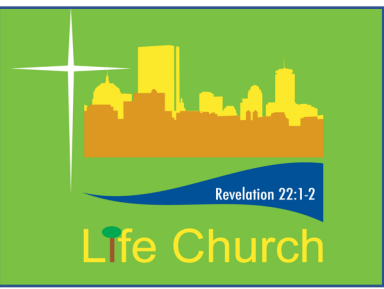
- The apostles had spent 3 years with the most amazing man they had ever met. Those are the stories they told the new believers.
- These Jesus stories went viral, achieved fixed form, and were eventually written down.
- Just like:
 - Stories of how you met your spouse.
 - Nursery rhymes
 - Playground songs: (Miss Mary Mack, etc.)



How Will We Disciple?

Our Method:

- We are using the Gospel of Matthew as our discipleship method.
- We are training believers to sit down with another believer and take him/her through the Gospel of Matthew.
- We have provided a set of pages on our web site that frame our approach to discipleship in general and to the Bible in particular.
- We will take a look at those web pages as we wrap up:
 - <https://lfechurchboston.org/followingjesus>



How Will We Disciple?

Discipling Black folks in America:

- Can our discipleship handle the real world?
 - Ahmaud Arbery & Matthew 5:38-42 – Turning the other cheek.
 - George Floyd & Matthew 5:43-48 – Loving your enemies
 - Donald Trump & Evangelicals
- Do we dare ignore our history – what God has done through us?
 - Boycott – The Film
 - Selma – The Film



Putting It All Together

Our Basic Ingredients:

- A method of discipleship that is easy to implement and teach.
- An environment that promotes discipleship: small groups.
- A method of evangelism that all believers can learn and practice.
- A system that gives believers a stream of new people with whom they can develop relationships.



Putting It All Together

Small Groups

- In Acts 2 the new believers met from house to house (small group) and in the temple courts (large group).
- John Wesley got extremely good results by using small groups.
- We call our small groups life groups. We are currently on Zoom and we have 2 life groups that meet in breakout sessions after the Sunday sermon.
- We are focusing on our life groups as the engine for discipleship.
- We are crafting our sermons to nurture the life groups.



Putting It All Together

Relational Evangelism

- In “I Once Was Lost”, Doug Schaupp & Don Everts of InterVarsity note that believers often pass through 5 thresholds on the way to salvation:
 - Trust
 - Curiosity
 - Openness to Change
 - Seeking
 - Following
- You can learn more about this at <http://evangelism.intervarsity.org/>



Putting It All Together

A stream of new people to whom we can reach out:

- John Wesley noted that, during revivals, new Christians remain “contagious” for about 2 years. After that point they exhaust their networks of unsaved friends and prefer to spend their time with the saved friends.
- We want to overcome this by creating opportunities for believers to meet a consistent set of people with whom they have some common interests.
- We don’t want to actually invite people to church until they’ve reached threshold 4 (Seeking).



Putting It All Together

A stream of new people to whom we can reach out:

- We need an alternative to church to allow people at the first 3 thresholds to get to know other believers. We use those who are good at organizing social events to keep creating opportunities for believers to meet a consistent set of people with whom they have some common interests.
 - Games Night
 - Change the World Night
 - Justice Work and Community Engagement

“The trick to education is to teach people in such a way that they don’t realize they’re learning until it’s too late.” Prof. Harold “Doc” Edgerton – MIT

We’re trying to keep the saints mixing with a pool of non-Christians in such a way that they don’t realize they’re developing friendships until it’s too late.



Get a Grip on the Kingdom of God!

Get Trained!

Get Trained In Discipleship

Get Trained To Explain the Gospel

Get Trained To Share Your Personal Testimony

Get Trained To Do Relational Evangelism

It All Starts With An Experience That Leads To A Lasting Commitment

