



Resource

Equipping church leaders | Summer 2017

Gospel Seeds

Growing an evangelistic church

*A heart
for lost people*
Q&A with Pat Pajak

**3 flavors
of evangelism**
by Doug Munton



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The Life-giving Gospel

What happened when a dying church turned its focus from survival strategies to personal evangelism.

CASE STUDY | MARK WARNOCK

Editor's Note: Mark Warnock served IBSA churches as associate pastor leading worship and discipleship for 17 years, all the while growing in his passion to share the gospel. After 11 years at First Baptist Church of Columbia, he returned to South Florida to be nearer to family. There God opened doors for Mark to join the ministry team led by Pastor Jimmy Scroggins, creator of the new "3 Circles: Life Conversation Guide" witnessing tool. We asked Mark to share the impact of such a tool—and a clear focus on evangelism—on a struggling church.

In 2007, it looked like First Baptist Church of West Palm Beach was going down. Despite a great history of grand achievements, the church had found itself leaderless for five long years, beset by scandal and financial turmoil. The church was losing people and money with no end in sight, and business meetings had become so toxic and counterproductive that they stopped having them.

In 2013, however, the baptism rate abruptly tripled. Today, renamed Family Church, we have grown to eight campuses across Palm Beach County, with several more congregations developing in four languages: English, Spanish, Russian, and Portuguese. We are also developing international mission partnerships, including an effort to reach the largest unreached people group in the Americas. Last year, *Outreach Magazine* named us the ninth-fastest growing church in the United States.

How did this happen?



There isn't space to tell the entire story, but it includes the sacrifice and prayers of a committed core of the congregation, a God-sent lead pastor with the strength and skill to see the future and make many hard decisions to get us there, and a leadership team willing to abandon past models, experiment with new ones, and to keep learning.

At the center, however, was a deliberate return to an apostolic mindset.

Think like an apostle

The apostles faced a situation where hardly anyone believed or even knew about the gospel, so wide and reckless sowing of the gospel was top priority. They did not yet have the people and resources to put their primary focus upon existing believers. Their eyes were continually upon those who

had yet to hear. Having an apostolic mindset involves taking personal responsibility for seeing that every person in your region hears the gospel. At Family Church, we want every resident of South Florida to have repeated, one-on-one opportunities to hear and respond to the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Our church began with this kind of mindset. In 1901, our church started as a small group with a big vision: to reach West Palm Beach with the gospel, though there were less than 1,000 people living here at the time.

Over the years and seasons, we grew in numbers and influence, reaching generations, building facilities, and even starting a Christian college. Eventually, we began to rely on our leaders, buildings, and programs to do our outreach for us, and for a long time, it

worked. By the early 2000s, however, the church was off mission, inwardly focused, and no longer making a significant impact on lostness in our area.

When my pastor, Jimmy Scroggins, moved from Kentucky to Florida to be the lead pastor at First Baptist Church of West Palm Beach in 2008, he quickly learned that South Florida is far from God. He and his wife announced that they would lead a preparing for marriage class, expecting to get some young, Christian couples in their 20s. What he got instead was couples in their 30s and 40s who were living together and already had kids, some together, some from previous relationships. Many were not believers. One couple was a pregnant woman who spoke only English, and her boyfriend who spoke only Spanish.

This group was representative of our area. South Florida, despite having many historic churches, is 96% unchurched, and has the highest percentage of people in the U. S. who have never in their lives attended church. It is very common to meet people who have never read the Bible or heard the gospel. Divorce rates are high, and brokenness is everywhere to be found.

Our leaders quickly saw that a program-driven model would not work in this culture. The time had come for a new approach. Taking a 116-year-old legacy church back to an apostolic mindset, however, was no easy task.

Probably the most important strategic shift came when we connected with leaders who were working in rapidly multiplying gospel movements all over the world. Troy Cooper, a church planting missionary living in our area, introduced us to No Place Left (noplacelleft.com), an informal coalition of people and ministries pursuing gospel movements around

the world. We discovered that for decades, mission strategists have been thinking about and testing approaches to rapid multiplication. In overseas contexts, there have been many movements where hundreds of thousands of people came to faith in Jesus and thousands of churches were formed in a short period of time. They introduced us to books like *T4T: A Discipleship Revolution* by Steve Smith and Ying Kai, *What Jesus Started* by Steve Addison, and *Church Planting by the Book* by Elbert Smith.



FAMILY WAY – This very traditional church has given birth to a very contemporary evangelism movement.

Their hearts and ours were asking the same question: why can't there be a gospel movement in the United States? We began to learn from them, and think through how to apply movement methodology to our own context.

Here are a few things we learned:

How movements begin

New gospel movements begin with wide and reckless sowing of the gospel among unreached people. Every new convert is empowered as an ambassador, and sent immediately to share using a simple, reproducible gospel tool. When immediate training and commis-

sioning is followed by rapid obedience, often the result is explosive multiplication of new believers. But for this to happen, evangelism has to be focused outside the church, rather than inside.

Our study (and our own experience) showed us that as gospel movements grow, some of the churches formed become focused on having pastors and teachers of such giftedness that they attract larger and larger congregations. Slowly, ordinary Christians, instead of sharing the gospel with their friends themselves, began to invite them to church to hear the gospel. Evangelism moved from the marketplace into the church, from outside to inside. What was once the task and privilege of every believer became the responsibility of a gifted few. It's no surprise that as this change happened, the church institutionalized and turned inward as its growth tapered off.

The shoe fit: our church was as inward and institutional as it could be. We desperately needed to recover the energy and passion of a brand new movement, with ordinary Christians themselves sharing the gospel.

God is reconciling

A pivotal passage of Scripture for us was 2 Corinthians 5:14-21, which teaches that God is reconciling the world to himself. He is the one doing it. He is more committed to reach our lost neighbors than we are, and we can bank on his commitment to the task. This passage also teaches that everyone who is made new by the gospel is an ambassador for him. The identity of ambassador is for everyone, not just a select few.

These truths seem elementary, but when we began to take them seriously, they proved revolutionary.

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3 circles, 1 simple conversation

The *3 Circles: Life Conversation Guide* is built around three simple concepts: God's desire, our brokenness, and the effect of the gospel. Pastor Jimmy Scroggins wanted a plan for sharing the gospel that was simple enough that anyone could do it anywhere. So simple, in fact, that it could be drawn on a napkin.

In response to the needs of lost people in his marriage class, Scroggins came up with the three circles.

God's desire: God wants a relationship with everyone. That was his intention since creation. God planned that everything would work perfectly. But our sin distorted the original design. The consequence of our sin is separation from God.

Brokenness: Sin leads to a place of brokenness. We tend to go in many directions, looking for a way out. We need a remedy—some good news.

Gospel: Jesus came to rescue us. But simply hearing this Good News is not enough. We must ask God to forgive us—turning from sin to trust only Jesus. God's Spirit empowers us to recover his design and assures us of his presence in this life and for all eternity.

That's the short version, easily sketched and discussed. For more info, visit lifeonmissionbook.com/conversation-guide.

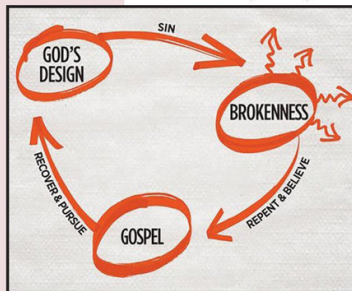
The IBSA Zone Consultants can train pastors and churches to use the 3 Circles to share their faith. Contact PatPajak@IBSA.com.

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A simple gospel tool

Out of his experience with the marriage class, Pastor Jimmy developed the "3 Circles: Life Conversation Guide." This simple gospel-sharing tool leverages people's experience of brokenness to explain God's original design, and how Christ can forgive our sins and put us on a path to recover God's design for us. It connects naturally with people who have no church background, because everyone experiences the pain of brokenness in one way or another.

Its simplicity is key to its effectiveness.



It's easy to understand. It's easy to share—it can be drawn on a napkin at a restaurant or in the sand at the beach. It's also easy to learn, so that even brand

new believers can share it with friends and family who are far from God.

The North American Mission Board has developed resources around the 3 Circles tool, one of which is a free 3 Circles app, which is useful when there's no pen or paper nearby. Virtually all our leaders have this app on their phones. (Search for "Life Conversation Guide" in the App Store or Google Play store)


Jimmy Scroggins and Steve Wright wrote the book *Turning Everyday Conversations into Gospel Conversations* (B&H Books, 2016), which explains the evangelism strategy in detail: how to turn a conversation to the gospel, what to say, and how to handle different ways people respond.

Relentless commitment to train

In Fall 2013, the church began training every leader and every member of our church to use the 3 Circles tool. For a season, this became the relentless public focus of our church. We still had other programming going, but we determined in every conversation with a leader to speak about the 3 Circles tool, to train all our leaders and encourage them to share.

It's important to understand how much we hammered our people with it. One of my colleagues remarked that our senior leaders had the ability "to beat a dead horse with a dead horse." Nothing less than that determination, however, would have moved our people

The results were astonishing. Though we only began our training in August, our baptism number for the year rocketed from 82 the previous year to 240. In 2014, our baptisms surged further to 336, and have held steady around that number since, entirely due to ordinary Christians sharing the gospel with their friends and neighbors.

As encouraging as this is, we know that 300+ new believers per year is only a tiny drop in the bucket of lostness all around us. We are continuing to train as we grow and plant new congregations, in hopes that disciples and churches will multiply rapidly through our region and beyond. 



Mark Warnock is one of the pastors at Family Church in West Palm Beach, Florida. For more information on Family Church's efforts in evangelism and church planting, go

to www.familychurchnetwork.com.