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# Preaching Notes

23 April - 21 May 2017

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North Herts Methodist Circuit



based on *Five Practices of Fruitful Congregations* by Richard Schnase

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*Katherine Harris*

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# Introduction

'My Father is glorified by this: that you bear much fruit, proving yourselves to be my disciples.' (John 15:8)

## preaching series

This Easter season (from 23rd April to 21st May), the North Herts Methodist Circuit will be undertaking a preaching series based on the practices found in Robert Schnase's book, *Five Practices of Fruitful Congregations*, culminating in a circuit-wide celebration on the afternoon of 21st May (3-6:30 pm).

The Five Practices of Radical Hospitality, Passionate Worship, Intentional Faith Development, Risk-Taking Mission and Service, and Extravagant Generosity are fundamental to disciple making. The adjectives are designed to provoke, invigorate and challenge us to go beyond the norms of comfortable church life and into unexpected, extraordinary, grace-filled expressions of God's love. The book is designed to give us a common language in which to assess, develop, deepen and extend our ongoing practices.

As Schnase reminds us (pages 27-28):

To become a vibrant, fruitful, growing congregation requires a change of attitude, practices, and values. Good intentions are not enough... We can do better... Little changes have big effects, and change can happen in a hurry... Attending to the smallest of details and practices changes the culture of the church.

While several of our congregations have already spent time looking at the themes contained within the book, the Circuit Leadership Team discerned that it would be good to reflect together as a Circuit on these practices. The hope is that it would encourage us to pursue excellence and fruitfulness within our churches and to enable us to share our successes and challenges as we pursue vibrant Christian discipleship together.

## this booklet

This particular preaching resource is not intended to be a substitute for reading *Five Practices of Fruitful Congregations*. At a minimum, please read the relevant chapter in the book when preparing to lead a service on a specific week. These notes are intended to assist preachers in thinking through the topic within the context of planning worship which honours God and illuminates God's desire for His people.

These notes are far from exhaustive, but they are hopefully a starting point and springboard for your own Spirit-led preparations. I hope you will find the key ideas, biblical reflections, examples and suggestions to be useful.

May God bless all you do in His Name and for His sake.

## additional resources

In addition to the Holy Bible, the following books have been used in preparing these preaching notes, particularly the 'key ideas' and 'imagine if...' sections which are generally quoted directly:

- *Five Practices of Fruitful Congregations*, Robert Schnase, 2007, Abingdon Press (Nashville, USA)
- *Cultivating Fruitfulness: Five Weeks of Prayer and Practice for Congregations*, Robert Schnase, 2008, Abingdon Press (Nashville, USA)
- *Five Practices of Fruitful Living: Leader Guide*, Robert Schnase with Sally D. Sharpe, 2010, Abingdon Press (Nashville, USA)

## related websites

Links to websites which relate specifically to one of the Five Practices can be found at the end of the section of this resource which pertains to that particular practice. The following websites contain some additional information about the Five Practices in general:

- [discussion guide](http://www.cokesbury.com/PDF/TeachableBooks/FivePracticesofFruitfulCongregations.pdf) www.cokesbury.com/PDF/TeachableBooks/FivePracticesofFruitfulCongregations.pdf
- [reflections inspired by the 5 Practices](http://www.methodist.org.uk/media/1781851/5_fruitful_practices_-_reflections_final.pdf) www.methodist.org.uk/media/1781851/5\_fruitful\_practices\_-\_reflections\_final.pdf
- [extract of the 5 Practices](http://www.robertschnase.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/Guide_Curran08_BURRKSBT.pdf) www.robertschnase.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/Guide\_Curran08\_BURRKSBT.pdf
- [brief interview with Robert Schnase](http://www.churchleadership.com/leading-ideas/an-interview-with-bishop-robert-schnase/) www.churchleadership.com/leading-ideas/an-interview-with-bishop-robert-schnase/
- [5 Practices books and media](http://www.cokesbury.com/forms/search.aspx?filterGroup=1&txtSearchQuery=Five Practices) www.cokesbury.com/forms/search.aspx?filterGroup=1&txtSearchQuery=Five Practices

## additional resources

The following books might be helpful in exploring spiritual formation and discipleship:

- *Discipleship... and the people called Methodists*, Martyn Atkins, 2010, Methodist Publishing House (London)
- *Holy Habits*, Andrew Roberts, 2016, Malcolm Down Publishing (Welwyn Garden City, UK)
- *The Radical Disciple: Wholehearted Christian Living*, John Scott, 2010, Inter-Varsity Press (Nottingham, UK)
- *Naked Spirituality: A Life with God in Twelve Simple Words*, Brian D McLaren, 2010, Hodder & Stoughten (London)
- *Abiding in Christ*, Andrew Murray, 2003, Bethany House Publishers (Minneapolis, USA)

Week 1

# Radical Hospitality

23 April 2017



This is how Robert Schnase describes the congregational practice of Radical Hospitality in *Cultivating Fruitfulness* (page 7):

*Christian hospitality* is the active desire to invite, welcome, receive, and care for those who are strangers so that they find a spiritual home and discover for themselves the unending richness of life in Christ.

*Radical* describes that which is drastically different from ordinary practices, outside the normal, that which exceeds expectations and goes the second mile.

Practicing *Radical Hospitality* means we offer the absolute utmost of ourselves, our creativity, and our abilities to offer the gracious invitation and welcome of Christ to others. We pray, plan, and work to invite others and help them feel welcome and to support them in their spiritual journeys.

## key ideas

- Beyond intention, hospitality practices the gracious love of Christ, respects the dignity of others, and expresses *God's* invitation to others, not our own. (*Five Practices of Fruitful Congregations*, p. 12)
- All churches offer some form of hospitality, but Radical Hospitality describes churches that strive without ceasing to exceed expectations to accommodate and include others. A congregation marked by such hospitality adopts an invitational posture that changes everything it does. (p. 21)
- Hospitality is what generosity looks like in a relationship. Radical hospitality includes those who are excluded by others.
- Radical Hospitality involves seeing a need and taking the initiative to reach out and help! (p. 23)
- ...everyone assumes someone else is doing what needs to be done. That's why so many visitors feel alone and shunned, even in a crowd of friendly people. This won't change until each person takes responsibility for practicing Radical Hospitality as obedience to the ministry of Christ. Church members have to mature from 'they ought' to 'I will.' (p. 29)

- Radical Hospitality involves being receptive to God's love and intentionally making room for God in our lives. It is the key to all the practices that lead to fruitful living.
- Congregations are schools for love.
- People are 'spiritually yearning, but institutionally averse.' (Tom Bandy)
- Most new members will not feel like they really belong to the church until they find meaningful connections in small groups beyond the worship experience. (p. 67)

## imagine if...

- our greeters escort people into church rather than merely hand out papers and hymn books at the door
- every member of the congregation looks out for visitors, helping them to feel at ease by remembering their names and introducing them to the preacher/minister... as well as to others in our church fellowship
- we chatted to someone new or on their own during coffee (including couples standing by themselves) rather than try to 'catch someone' so we can conduct church business
- there were car parking spaces especially marked for 'visitors' near the church entrance
- we looked at each room/corridor in our building through the eyes of ...a toddler ...a child ...a teenager ...a new parent with an infant ...a wheelchair user ...a person with learning difficulties ...someone sleeping rough ...someone with dementia
- every room in our church building could become our favourite space
- people welcomed 'interruptions' as opportunities to meet with God and with others
- a person felt welcomed, loved and accepted regardless of their age, ethnicity, sexuality, gender, social status, family, eccentricities, history, personal cleanliness, etc.

...that's what Radical Hospitality looks like



## start by changing just one thing

Rule of 3: For the first three minutes after worship ends, talk only to persons you don't know (or at least don't know very well). It takes visitors about three minutes to exit the church after worship, so make sure you make contact before they leave.

## biblical basis

Hospitality has always been an important aspect of living as God's people, and the Old Testament has many examples of this. But *radical* hospitality is different – we are offering *God's* hospitality, not our own. Schnase reminds us (page 13):

At every turn, the disciples seem ready to draw boundaries and distinctions that keep people at a distance from Jesus. They have a thousand reasons to ignore, avoid, and sometimes thwart the approach of people, reminding Jesus that some of these people are too young, too sick, too sinful, too old, too Roman, too blind, too Gentile to deserve his attention. Jesus teaches, 'Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me' (Matthew 18:5). In every instance, Jesus radically challenges the disciples' expectations by overstepping the boundaries to invite people in. Hospitality has us seeing people as Jesus sees them and seeing Jesus in the people God brings before us.

Jesus continually crosses cultural barriers as he brings the ultimate expression of God's grace to those who were otherwise excluded. As Schnase reminds us elsewhere, Jesus embraced the untouchables, welcomed outcasts, modelled servanthood by washing the disciples' feet, interceded against violence and injustice on behalf of a woman accused of adultery, never gave up on the hopeless or the powerful, and even extended discipleship to women. Jesus ultimately revealed the depth of God's love through his death on the cross.

### *Bible passages*

- 1 John 4:7-21 (especially verse 19) – *God's love and ours* • 'We love because he first loved us.' (v. 19)
- Romans 15:7 – 'Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God.'
- John 13:1-16 – *Jesus washes his disciples feet*
- Luke 7:36-50 – *Jesus anointed by a sinful woman*
- Matthew 25:31-46 (especially verses 35, 40) – *parable of the sheep and the goats* • 'Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.' (v. 40)
- Matthew 18:1-5 – *the greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven* • 'And whoever welcomes one such child in my name, welcomes me.' (v. 5)
- Matthew 22:1-14 (especially verses 8-10) – *parable of the wedding banquet*
- Romans 12:9-21 – *love in action*
- Romans 5:6-11 – *Christ reconciled us to God while we were still sinners and God's enemies*



## hymns and songs

- *A new commandment I give unto you*
- *Bind us together, Lord*
- *Brother, Sister, let me serve you*
- *Christ's is the world in which we move (A Touching Place)*
- *If We Are the Body* – by Casting Crowns
- *Let us build a house where love can dwell (All Are Welcome)*
- *Jesu, Jesu, fill us with Your love*

## questions for reflection

- What would greater receptivity to God and openness to others look like for you? ...for your congregation?
- How willing are you to change your own attitudes and expectations so that your worship services and ministries could attract others, especially younger people?
- Edwards Deming observed that 'a system produces what it is designed to produce.' What results are your congregation getting in terms of welcoming newcomers and helping them to belong?
- What one activity could you do, which, if done with excellence and consistency, would have the greatest impact on fostering a culture of Radical Hospitality in your congregation?

## additional resources

A variety of sample sermons on Radical Hospitality can be found using your favourite internet search engine. In addition, the following links contain websites with some more ideas and information about Radical Hospitality:

- [worship resources](http://www.worship.calvin.edu/resources/resource-library/worship-resources-for-radical-hospitality/) www.worship.calvin.edu/resources/resource-library/worship-resources-for-radical-hospitality/
- [animated video \(length - 8:49\)](http://www.m.youtube.com/watch?v=fJ-ztamQa5Q&ebc=ANyPxKqEzrNmd-X6LUibRvnDuwwXzkg8-mdhCavP85UfKI0dyknhn9FV5UhvQpPYgcO12FY0hG5q) www.m.youtube.com/watch?v=fJ-ztamQa5Q&ebc=ANyPxKqEzrNmd-X6LUibRvnDuwwXzkg8-mdhCavP85UfKI0dyknhn9FV5UhvQpPYgcO12FY0hG5q
- [ministry matters](http://www.ministrymatters.com/all/entry/518/radical-hospitality-the-first-practice-of-fruitful-congregations) www.ministrymatters.com/all/entry/518/radical-hospitality-the-first-practice-of-fruitful-congregations
- [radical hospitality for the rest of us](http://www.radicalhospitalityfortherestofus.com) www.radicalhospitalityfortherestofus.com
- [from friendly to radical](http://www.umcom.org/learn/is-it-time-to-move-from-friendly-to-radical-hospitality) www.umcom.org/learn/is-it-time-to-move-from-friendly-to-radical-hospitality

- [embracing the other](http://www.ecfvp.org/vestrypapers/christian-hospitality-2/radical-welcome-embracing-the-other/) www.ecfvp.org/vestrypapers/christian-hospitality-2/radical-welcome-embracing-the-other/
- [welcoming the stranger](http://www.welcomingthestranger.com/sites/default/files/page/files/Welcoming_the_Stranger_Learning_Group_Ed2_0.pdf) www.welcomingthestranger.com/sites/default/files/page/files/Welcoming\_the\_Stranger\_Learning\_Group\_Ed2\_0.pdf
- [4 week sermon series on radical hospitality](http://www.moumethodist.org/radicalhospitalitysermonseries) www.moumethodist.org/radicalhospitalitysermonseries

Week 2

# Passionate Worship

30 April 2017

On page 25 of *Cultivating Fruitfulness*, Robert Schnase describes the practice of Passionate Worship in congregations in this way:



Worship describes those times we gather deliberately seeking to encounter God in Christ. God uses worship to transform lives, heal wounded souls, renew hope, shape decisions, provoke change, inspire compassion, and bind people to one another.

The word passionate expresses an intense desire, an ardent spirit, strong feelings, and the sense of heightened importance. It describes an emotional connection that goes beyond intellectual consent bringing eagerness, anticipation, expectance, deep commitment, and belief.

Passionate Worship, whether traditional or contemporary, means an extraordinary eagerness to offer the best in worship, honoring God with excellence and with an unusual clarity about the purpose of connecting people to God. It is worship that is not dry, routine, or boring, keeping the form while lacking the spirit. It is not performance; it is devotion and celebration expressing our love of God.

## key ideas

- Worship expresses our love for God in response to God's great love for us.
- ...worship is the means God uses to accomplish God's purposes in the human heart and in the community of Christ. God is active in worship even when we are not. (*Five Practices of Fruitful Living*, p. 51)
- Passionate Worship connects people to God and with one another, opens lives to the experience of God's grace, and to the hearing and doing of God's Word, and forms people into the Body of Christ... A passionate spiritual community is alive with the love of God, displaying an eagerness for God's Word. (*Five Practices of Fruitful Congregations*, p. 39)
- Worship changes people and changes the way they experience their whole lives. (p. 40)
- In churches that practice Passionate Worship, the music is at least good, usually excellent, but never mediocre. Music speaks directly to the soul, setting the tone and the emotional texture of the service... Music moves

people, unifies congregations, strengthens the sense of belonging, provokes reflection, inspires joy, and lifts the spirit. (pp. 49-50)

- Worship is something alive that requires continuing care, cultivation, and effort to keep it fresh. (pp. 48-49)
- Passionate Worship is contextual, an expression of the unique culture of a congregation. (p. 42)
- Churches that exhibit passion for worship prepare their services not only with long-term, spiritually mature members in mind but also with attentiveness to visitors, young people, and those with little worship experience in mind. (p. 52)
- But the responsibility for worship rests with more than those who lead the services. Everyone has a role in fostering Passionate Worship. (p. 53)
- Our experience of worship begins with the attitude, the spiritual eagerness, and passion we bring with us. (p. 55)

### imagine if...

- people prepared their hearts and minds for worship by praying and reading Scripture beforehand
- people gathered for worship with a palpable air of expectancy, remaining actively engaged and personally connected throughout the service (no matter their age or experience)
- everyone gave of their best, rather than observing and evaluating the worship experience as an entertainment event
- worshippers were given 'multifaceted pathways to the truth of Christ' – rather than just listening to words, a variety of the five senses are engaged throughout worship
- worship provided an interpretative lens through which people view the world – events, relationships and issues are seen through God's eyes
- people were taught to pray rather than just encouraged to pray
- people experienced the life-changing presence of God in the presence of others and left feeling challenged, sustained, and led by the Spirit of God
- people were willing to receive what God offers, allowing the Holy Spirit to transform them into His kingdom bearers
- all the other hours of the week are changed because of experiencing God's presence in worship

...that's what Passionate Worship looks like.



## start by changing just one thing

Start by preparing your own heart, mind and soul for worship. What might you do 'for the love of God' to make each worship service more special to you? ...for others?

### biblical basis

Worship has always defined God's people. As Schnase reminds us on page 35, 'Worship was the reason given repeatedly for why God liberated the Hebrew people from slavery in Egypt. "Let my people go, so that they may worship me" (Exodus 8:1).' Throughout the Old Testament, God is repeatedly calling the Israelites back to Himself, away from their neighbours' idols, pleading with them, as would a lover, to remain faithful to YHWH alone.

God is still seeking our whole-hearted devotion. Jesus reminds that God seeks those who will worship Him in spirit and in truth. (John 4:23-24) Our whole being (heart, soul, mind and strength) – all that we are and all that we have – is given to God in love. This is the type worship which God desires.

### Bible passages

- John 4:19-24 – *worship in spirit and truth*
- Mark 12:28-34 – *the Greatest Commandment* • see also Matthew 22:34-40, Luke 10:25-28
- Revelation 4:1-5:14 – *worship in heaven*
- Matthew 2:1-12 – *the magi come to worship the infant Jesus*
- Mark 14:1-9 – *Jesus anointed by a woman at Bethany* • see also Matthew 26:6-13, Luke 7:36-50, John 12:1-8
- 2 Samuel 6:9-22a (especially verses 14-15, 21-22a) – *King David dances in celebration before the Ark of the LORD*
- Psalm 84:1-2, 10 – *longing for the LORD*
- Psalm 118:24 – *'This is the day that the LORD has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it.'*
- 1 John 4:7-21 (especially verse 19) – *God's love and ours* • *'We love because he first loved us.'* (v. 19)
- Luke 21:1-4 – *the widow's mite* • see also Mark 12:41-44
- Psalm 100:1-2 – *'Make a joyful noise to the LORD, all the earth. Worship the LORD with gladness; come into his presence with singing.'*

### hymns and songs

- As the deer pants for the water
- Be still, for the presence of the Lord

- Come, now is the time to worship
- Father God, I wonder how I managed to exist
- Jesus, be the centre
- Lord, You have my heart
- Only by grace can we enter
- Quiet my mind, Lord
- To be in Your presence
- When the music fades (Heart of Worship)

### questions for reflection

- How does each element of worship connect people to God and to each other?
- What perspective would long-term members, newcomers, children, and parents with young children have on our worship?
- Am I allowing God's Spirit to form me, change me, transform me through worship, or am I evaluating the quality of the entertainment/experience?

### additional resources

A variety of sample sermons on Passionate Worship can be found using your favourite internet search engine. In addition, the following links contain websites with some more ideas and information about Passionate Worship:

- [ministry matters](http://www.ministrymatters.com/all/entry/3249/sermon-series-vital-elements-of-worship) www.ministrymatters.com/all/entry/3249/sermon-series-vital-elements-of-worship
- [experiential worship](http://www.experientialworship.com/home.html) www.experientialworship.com/home.html
- [multisensory worship ideas](http://www.rwjms.rutgers.edu/boggscenter/projects/documents/MultisensoryWorshipIdeas.pdf) www.rwjms.rutgers.edu/boggscenter/projects/documents/MultisensoryWorshipIdeas.pdf
- [engage worship](http://www.engageworship.com) www.engageworship.com
- [new worship songs](http://www.worshiptogether.com/songs) www.worshiptogether.com/songs
- [all-age resources](http://www.allageresources.com) www.allageresources.com
- [children's messages](http://www.dskidsermons.com) www.dskidsermons.com

Week 3

# Intentional Faith Development

7 May 2017



Robert Schnase describes the practice of Intentional Faith Development in congregations (*Cultivating Fruitfulness*, page 43) as follows:

Intentional Faith Development refers to all the ministries that help us grow in faith outside of weekly worship: Bible studies, Sunday school, small groups, and retreats where we learn in the community of other Christians. By these practices we mature in faith; we grow in grace and in the knowledge and love of God. We pray that we are closer to Christ today than we were five years ago, and that by the grace of God, we may be closer to Christ five years from now than we are today.

Intentional refers to the deliberate effort, purposeful action, and high priority. Growing in grace does not come without purposeful commitment to learning the faith and cultivating our love for God.

## key ideas

- Community provides the catalyst for growth in Christ. (*Five Practices of Fruitful Living*, p. 72)
- We learn in community because others keep us faithful to the task of growth in Christ. And we cannot learn spiritual qualities such as forgiveness, grace, love, justice, and humility by ourselves, but only by practicing our faith with others. (*Cultivating Fruitfulness*, p. 46)
- ...the transformation of human hearts and minds is God's work through the Holy Spirit, and intentionally learning in community is our way of placing ourselves in the hands of God so that God can sculpt our souls and recreate us in the image of Christ. (*Five Practices of Fruitful Congregations*, p. 78)
- Bible study is not just about self-improvement but about setting ourselves where God can shape us, intentionally opening ourselves to God's Word and call... The practice of learning in community gives disciples a network of support, encouragement, and direction as we seek to grow in Christ. (p. 65)
- According to Bonhoeffer, every Christian needs another Christian when she or he becomes uncertain and discouraged. The Christ in one's own heart is weaker than the Christ in the word of a brother or sister (*Life Together*, Harper & Row, 1954, p. 20). (p. 68)

- Bible study changes churches. When church leaders take their own spiritual growth seriously and immerse themselves in the study of Scripture, in prayer, and in fellowship, they understand the purpose of the church and the point of ministry differently. Peter Drucker has said that ‘the purpose of leadership in the church is not to make the church more business-like, but to make the church more church-like.’ (p. 73)
- ...churches that value Intentional Faith Development... express as much concern for their members growing in the fullness of faith as in crossing the threshold at the beginning of faith... themes of maturing in faith recur in the core values of the congregation. (p. 74)
- ...every learning group has fellowship components and every fellowship ministry has elements and practices that lead to faith formation. (p. 75)
- [First,] don’t give up. Try different times, places, leaders, and formats, but keep trying. Second, the secret is relationships, relationships, relationships. (p. 71)
- ...maturation in Christ is always about content and relationship. Ideas change people, and people change people; and God uses both together to work on our behalf and to shape our lives in the image of Christ. Transformation comes through learning in community. (p. 77)

### imagine if...

- the church looked for ways to shape faith at every age and at every stage (from visitors and newcomers to life-long members), eliminating gaps and unmet needs and catering for a variety of learning styles
- learning together (in community) became widely known, highly valued, and broadly practiced within our congregation
- the church advertised and invited the general public to attend events containing topics of special interest to them
- the church focused on the schedules and interests of the people they seek to serve, even if it doesn't fit the usual weekly pattern of 'the way things are done'
- our congregations used new technologies to support growing in faith and love, making sermons, entire worship services, special lessons, and presentations downloadable so that members, friends and guests can access them at any time
- those with no interest in the topic, time, or setting are not allowed to veto ideas
- we developed leaders by inviting, supporting, and training people to nurture small groups, teach Bible studies, and coordinate prayer and spiritual formation ministries



- our ongoing spiritual renewal and growth becomes our way of life as we serve Christ by loving our neighbour
- we were not afraid to fail

...that's what Intentional Faith Development looks like.



### start by changing just one thing

Pray the question: 'What would you have *me* do, Lord?' Then listen for the whispered reply from the Holy Spirit... and act on it.

### biblical basis

As Schnase reminds us in *Cultivating Fruitfulness* (page 45):

Learning in community replicates the way Jesus deliberately taught his disciples. His followers grew in their understanding of God's will for their lives as they listened to Jesus' stories, instructions, and lessons while gathering around dinner tables, on hillsides, and at the Temple.

The New Testament church promoted discipleship in much the same way (see Acts 2:42). And throughout the ages, discipleship still is nurtured best in community – it is *caught* in our relationships with each other as much as it is *taught*.

### *Bible passages*

- Deuteronomy 6:4-9 – *call for wholehearted commitment to God*
- Acts 2:42-47 (especially verse 42) – *the believers form a community*
- Ephesians 4:21-24 – *put on your new nature*
- 2 Corinthians 5:17 – *anyone who belongs to Christ has become a new person*
- Hebrews 10:23-25 – *hold tightly to the hope we affirm*
- 2 Peter 1:3-11 – *growing in faith*
- Colossians 3:1-17 – *living the new life*
- James 5:13-16 – *power of prayer*
- 1 Peter 1:13-15 – *call to holy living*
- 1 Timothy 6:3-5 – *true teaching promotes a godly life*
- Ephesians 4:11-15 – *becoming mature in the Lord*
- Philippians 4:4-9, 13 – *rejoice in the Lord*
- Ephesians 3:14-21 – *Paul's prayer for spiritual growth*

## hymns and songs

- Be Thou my vision, O Lord of my heart
- Give me the faith which can remove
- He who would valiant be (To Be a Pilgrim)
- Make me a channel of Your peace
- May the mind of Christ my Saviour
- Seek ye first the kingdom of God
- Speak, O Lord, as we come to You
- Teach me to dance to the beat of Your heart
- Tell me the old, old story
- Thy Word is a lamp unto my feet

## questions for reflection

- What would you most like to learn about the faith? How could you encourages others to join with you in this experience?
- What would a more dedicated, intentional faith life look like for you? ...for your congregation?
- For any given ministry, ask yourself whether if it is sufficient, full, helpful and effective. How can it be done better?

## additional resources

A variety of sample sermons on Intentional Faith Development can be found using your favourite internet search engine. In addition, the following links contain websites with some more ideas and information about Intentional Faith Development:

- [what spiritual growth looks like](http://www.relevantmagazine.com/god/practical-faith/what-does-spiritual-growth-actually-look) www.relevantmagazine.com/god/practical-faith/what-does-spiritual-growth-actually-look
- [deepening discipleship](http://www.methodist.org.uk/deepening-discipleship) www.methodist.org.uk/deepening-discipleship
- [engaging with Scripture](http://www.methodist.org.uk/deepening-discipleship/scriptural-discipleship/resources) www.methodist.org.uk/deepening-discipleship/scriptural-discipleship/resources
- [whole life discipleship & LICC \(3 min video\)](http://www.licc.org.uk/about-licc/video-introduction) http://www.licc.org.uk/about-licc/video-introduction
- [establishing standards](http://www.gbod.org.s3.amazonaws.com/legacy/kintera/entry_4026/19/Standards10-12-11.pdf) www.gbod.org.s3.amazonaws.com/legacy/kintera/entry\_4026/19/Standards10-12-11.pdf
- [spiritual formation](http://www.renovare.org) www.renovare.org
- [article by Dallas Willard](http://www.dwillard.org/articles/artview.asp?artID=58) www.dwillard.org/articles/artview.asp?artID=58

- [free Bible app](http://www.youversion.com) www.youversion.com
- [discipleship and Methodists](http://www.methodist.org.uk/static/deepeningdiscipleship/discipleshipandmethodistsmatkins.pdf) www.methodist.org.uk/static/deepeningdiscipleship/discipleshipandmethodistsmatkins.pdf

Week 4

# Risk-Taking Mission and Service

14 May 2017



Here is Robert Schnase's description of the congregational practice of Risk-Taking Mission and Service in *Cultivating Fruitfulness* (page 61):

Mission and Service refers to the projects, efforts, and work people do to make a positive difference in the lives of others for the purposes of Christ, whether or not they will ever become part of the community of faith. Mission and Service includes activities such as clean up and reconstruction after disasters, after-school programs for at-risk children, food banks, and soup kitchens.

Risk-taking pushes us out of our comfort zone, stretching us beyond service to people we already know, exposing us to people, situations, and needs that we would never ordinarily encounter apart from our deliberate intention to serve Christ.

Risk-Taking Mission and Service involves the efforts to alleviate suffering and injustice to improve the conditions of others in the name of Christ.

## key ideas

- Risk-Taking Mission and Service is one of the fundamental activities of church life that is so critical that failure to practice it in some form results in a deterioration of the church's vitality and ability to make disciples of Jesus Christ. When churches turn inward, using all resources for their own survival and caring only for their own people, then spiritual vitality wanes. (*Five Practices of Fruitful Congregations*, p. 83)
- The life of service flows naturally and inescapably from the teachings of Jesus Christ, and no congregation or disciple can avoid the direct gift and demand of God's call to love and serve others. A church without service dies like a tree with neither roots nor fruit, without nourishment or purpose. (p. 87)
- The stretch of Christian discipleship is to love those for whom it is not automatic, easy, common, or accepted. To love those who do not think like us or live like us, and to express respect, compassion, and mercy to those we do not know and who may never be able to repay us — this is the love Christ pulls out of us. (p. 88)

- Risk-Taking Mission and Service involves work that stretches people, causing them to do something for the good of others that they would never have considered doing if it were not for their relationship with Christ and their desire to serve him. (p. 88)
- Risk-taking also draws our attention to the truth that many of our most urgent ministries have an uncertain, unpredictable quality. We cannot know whether or not our efforts will make the difference we hope. Much of our hardest work may have little visible impact or may seem to end in utter failure. (pp. 88-89)
- The sharp edge of new and bold ministry often begins with the leadership of a few people, brings others into supportive roles, and then engages the whole congregation. (p. 91)
- ...do mission with people of other cultures and not ministry to them – service is not a one-way street, as if we hold all the answers and have all the resources and are helping people who have nothing (p. 96)
- ...helping people in Christ's name is not merely the prerogative of adults but is a regular part of the formation of children and youth (pp. 97-98)
- Christ moves us closer to suffering, not farther away. We cannot walk around obvious suffering, ignoring it and denying it... We can't moan about how somebody ought to do something. We cannot merely lift those who suffer in prayer, asking God to do for us what God created us to do for God. (p. 100)
- We become competent and effective in mission and service through sustained effort – through consistent, repeated, and focused action. Risk-Taking Mission and Service changes lives – both of those who offer service and of those who receive it – and transforms the world.
- The practice of Risk-Taking Mission and Service pushes us out of our comfort zone and into places we would never go on our own, which involves learning to overcome fear.
- People who practice Risk-Taking Mission and Service also discern God's call to involve themselves in social change, political activity, and community causes.

### imagine if...

- congregations readily gave permission to those who have the energy for and interest in new initiatives, reducing the number of hurdles and layers of administrative red tape
- we measured the impact of our ministries in lives changed rather than in money spent or number of people involved

- our congregations formed partnerships with sister churches in other parts of the world, supporting and encouraging international exchanges and ministries
- we took on the hard tasks and found a way through collaborating and mobilising others
- people came first, so even at the risk of disapproval by some, we mobilise against racism, injustice, oppression, intolerance and abuse
- we formed strategic alliances with other churches, other denominations, other religions, businesses, non-profit groups and governmental agencies to bring the greatest possible resources to bear in addressing a particular human need
- we heard in the human need of our neighbours the distinct call of God, and against all odds, we figure out a response and offer ourselves even at personal cost
- we focused on the people being served and expected nothing in return – no recognition nor even words of gratitude

...that's what Risk-Taking Mission and Service looks like.



### start by changing just one thing

Cultivate a permission-giving, rather than an approval-seeking, environment. Start by saying 'Yes!' Then pray for God to show you how to proceed with His plan and resources.

### biblical basis

True disciples have always been 'doers of the word, and not merely hearers' (James 1:22), and compassionate service has marked the church from the very beginning. As Schnase reminds us (pages 85-86):

Nearly every page of Scripture shows people serving God by serving others. The earliest written Scriptures record a consistent emphasis upon justice, compassion, respect, and love for the neighbour... In teaching and action [Jesus] shows that God's way includes costly demonstrations of unexpected love to the least likely.

### *Bible passages*

- Matthew 25:14-46 (especially verses 35 and 40) – *parable of final judgement*
- Matthew 16:24-25 – *take up your cross and follow Jesus* • see also Luke 9:23-24
- Micah 6:8 – *what the Lord requires*
- Matthew 20:25-28 – *Jesus came to serve*

- 1 Peter 4:10-11 – *use God's gifts to serve one another*
- Acts 9:36-42 – *Dorcas (Tabitha) is renowned for her good deeds*
- Luke 6:27-38 – *love for enemies*
- Luke 10:25-37 – *parable of the Good Samaritan*
- Hebrews 13:1-3 – *keep loving each other*
- Romans 12:6-21 – *don't just pretend to love others*
- 1 Corinthians 13:1-7 – *love is the greatest*

## hymns and songs

- Beauty for brokenness
- Brother, Sister, let me serve you
- I want to serve the purpose of God
- Longing for light, we wait in darkness (Christ be our light!)
- We'll walk the land with hearts on fire
- Will you come and follow Me (The Summons)

## questions for reflection

- What is the most unexpected place to which your faith in Christ has taken you in order to make a difference in someone's life?
- What church outreach programs make the greatest impact on the lives of people in your community who are not a part of your church?
- How do you suppose your congregation is perceived by those in the community who have the least power – the poor, the unemployed, the stranger, the hungry, the homeless, the abused, the addicted, the immigrant, the victim of violence?

## additional resources

A variety of sample sermons on Risk-Taking Mission and Service can be found using your favourite internet search engine. In addition, the following links contain websites with some more ideas and information about Risk-Taking Mission and Service:

- [the downside of risk taking](http://www.methodistthinker.com/2009/02/11/downside-of-risk-taking-mission-and-service/) www.methodistthinker.com/2009/02/11/downside-of-risk-taking-mission-and-service/
- [fresh expressions](http://www.freshexpressions.org.uk/guide/essential) www.freshexpressions.org.uk/guide/essential
- [prison ministry](http://www.kairosprisonministry.org) www.kairosprisonministry.org
- [children in poverty](http://www.compassion.com) www.compassion.com

- [world church relationships](http://www.methodist.org.uk/mission/world-church) www.methodist.org.uk/mission/world-church
- [Methodist Church & mission](http://www.methodist.org.uk/mission) www.methodist.org.uk/mission
- [UK homelessness](http://www.poverty.org.uk/81/index.shtml) www.poverty.org.uk/81/index.shtml



Week 5

# Extravagant Generosity

21 May 2017

This is how Robert Schnase describes the congregational practice of Extravagant Generosity on page 79 of *Cultivating Fruitfulness*:



*Generosity* describes the Christian's unselfish willingness to give in order to make a positive difference for the purposes of Christ.

*Extravagant Generosity* describes practices of sharing and giving that exceed all expectations and extend to unexpected measures.

Fruitful congregations thrive because of extraordinary sharing, willing sacrifice, and joyous giving out of love for God and neighbor. Such churches focus on the abundance of God's grace and emphasize the Christian's need to give rather than the church's need for money. In the spirit and manner of Christ, congregations that practice *Extravagant Generosity* explicitly talk about money in the Christian's walk of faith. They are driven to be generous by a high sense of mission and a keen desire to please God by making a positive difference in the world.

## key ideas

- People talk about putting God first and having God at the center of their lives, but in actual practice most of a person's decisions are made without reference to God's will or priorities, and God is really peripheral instead of central. Instead of giving God the leftovers at the end of the month, tithing is a spiritual discipline that puts God first. (*Five Practices of Fruitful Congregations*, p. 105)
- ...generosity enlarges the soul, realigns priorities, connects people to the Body of Christ, and strengthens congregations to fulfill Christ's ministries. Giving reflects the nature of God. (pp. 106-107)
- How people use their material resources either honors or dishonors their relationship to God. Generosity aligns one's life with God's purposes... How people use what they have matters to God. (p. 109)
- Wesley taught Methodists to "Gain all you can, save all you can, and give all you can" (*The Use of Money*, 1744). (p. 111)
- There's no end to what the church can accomplish for the purposes of Christ when the sharp awareness of the assets, resources, and talents that

God entrusts to us supersedes the fear of scarcity and the obsessive focus on needs, problems, and shortages. Extravagant Generosity means graciously and responsibly placing ourselves and our resources in service to God. (p. 112)

- ‘We buy things we don't even need with money we don't even have to impress people we don't even know’ (*The Dave Ramsey Show*). (p. 113)
- Happiness based on possession causes people to pursue a receding goal, leaving them dissatisfied, wanting more, and never able to satiate their desires. At root, these are spiritual problems, not merely financial planning issues... At some point, followers of Jesus must decide whether they will listen to the wisdom of the world or to the wisdom of God. (p. 114)
- ...proportional giving and tithing force people to look at their earning, saving, and spending through God's eyes. It reminds them that their ultimate worth is derived from the assurance that they are children of God, created by God, and infinitely loved by God. God's eternal love revealed in Christ is the source of self-worth... (p. 114)
- We struggle with tithing because our hearts and minds are more powerfully shaped by our affluence. We find it harder to give extravagantly because our society's values shape our perceptions more than our faith's values do. (p. 115)
- ...generosity increases with participation in ministry and community... By growing in ministry, giving increases. (p. 121)

### imagine if...

- we focused on the abundance of God's grace and emphasised the Christian's need to give rather than on the church's need for money
- we realised that what we *earn*, what we *spend*, what we *save*, and what we *give* actually belongs to God and we are entrusted as stewards of these resources
- the church lived its counter-cultural message, moving from a fear of scarcity to a trust in God's abundant provision
- faith shaped our views of affluence and values of generosity more than society did
- we gave according to our means – growing from proportional giving into tithing
- the church offered seminars, workshops and support to help people with debt counselling, unemployment, financial planning, compulsive gambling
- we modelled and taught our children to spend wisely, save consistently, and to give generously
- we invited young adults into leadership and planning

- we surprised someone in need by offering unexpected generosity
- our congregation's stewardship efforts united and energised people, engaging them with the ministries of the church, and built community

... that's what Extravagant Generosity looks like.



### start by changing just one thing

Take your monthly giving and divide it by your monthly income. Does the percentage accurately reflect your faith in a generous God? Commit to growing one step in your own personal giving.

### biblical basis

As Schnase reminds us (pages 108-109):

Giving is central to Jewish and Christian practice because people perceive God as extravagantly generous, the giver of every good gift, the source of life and love. People give because they serve a giving God. If the Old Testament, numerous passages underscore the significance of tithing (giving a tenth) and of first fruits (offering the first and best of the harvest, livestock, and income to the purposes of God).

In Jesus sacrifice and death, we see the ultimate expression of God's extravagantly generous love.

### *Bible passages*

- 2 Corinthians 8:1-14, 9:1-15 (especially 9:11) – *collecting for the believers in need*
- Mark 12:41-44 – *the widow's mite* • *see also Luke 21:1-4*
- Ephesians 3:14-21 – *all the fullness of Christ*
- Proverbs 3:9 – *'Honour the Lord with your wealth and with the best part of everything you produce.'*
- Malachi 3:8-12 – *cheating the Lord*
- Luke 12:13-21 – *parable of the rich fool*
- Matthew 25:14-30 – *parable of three servants*
- Luke 19:1-10 – *Zacchaeus*
- Luke 10:25-37 (especially verse 35) – *parable of the Good Samaritan*
- Acts 2:42-47 (especially verses 44-45) – *early believers shared all they had*
- Romans 12:6-13 – *generously sharing God's gifts*
- Luke 6:38 – *give and you will receive*

- 1 Timothy 6:17-19 – *using money to do good*
- Romans 11:33-36 – *great are God's riches*

## hymns and songs

- All to Jesus, I surrender
- Everything I have comes from you
- For the fruits of His creation
- Give thanks with a grateful heart
- May the words of my mouth
- Take my life, and let it be
- This is my Father's world

## questions for reflection

- From whom did you learn generosity? How has someone else's generosity touched you and shaped your practices of giving?
- What's the most fun you've ever had giving money away?

## additional resources

A variety of sample sermons on Extravagant Generosity can be found using your favourite internet search engine. In addition, the following links contain websites with some more ideas about Extravagant Generosity:

- [a more radical Christian life](http://www.patheos.com/blogs/formerlyfundie/5-practices-toward-a-more-radical-christian-life/) www.patheos.com/blogs/formerlyfundie/5-practices-toward-a-more-radical-christian-life/
- [from stewardship to generosity](http://www.ministrymatters.com/all/entry/989/from-stewardship-to-generosity) www.ministrymatters.com/all/entry/989/from-stewardship-to-generosity
- [40 acts of generosity for Lent](http://www.40acts.org.uk) www.40acts.org.uk
- [a week of daily devotions](http://www.faithlexington.org/index.php/2015/10/19/extravagant-generosity-worship-series-daily-devotions/) www.faithlexington.org/index.php/2015/10/19/extravagant-generosity-worship-series-daily-devotions/
- [Christians against poverty](http://www.capuk.org) www.capuk.org
- [selfish generosity experiment \(2 min video\)](http://www.m.youtube.com/watch?v=s8hij8yDIXM) www.m.youtube.com/watch?v=s8hij8yDIXM
- [God's extravagance \(1 min video\)](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fZYAFp7JQMQ) www.youtube.com/watch?v=fZYAFp7JQMQ