

SHOWING UP

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How the Power of Presence
Is Reshaping Evangelism

Kerry Willis
and
Margaret Michael
with Brian Charette



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*King Jesus, as our inheritance, you have
filled the sanctuaries of our everyday lives
with the holiness of your presence.*



*Empower us now to be light and to shine so that we might
bring your inheritance of lost souls to you, finally found.*



We dedicate this project to presence, unity, and love.

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I am a debtor to God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit—one. The holy inheritance, the presence of my God within me—I humbly but surely claim him as my life and light on earth and for eternity. Holy presence really is everything to me; it's true that presence matters most!

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Margaret

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FOREWORD



If you want to bring non-Christian friends to Christ, it is absolutely essential that you build relationships with them. Those who are far from God are usually also far from the church, and for the most part, nonbelievers are isolated from the Christian message: they don't watch Christian television or listen to Christian radio; they don't read tracts left in bathrooms or attend conferences and revivals. Rather, nonbelievers are most likely to be reached through relationship. Of course, that is by design: relationship is at the heart of the Trinity of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. By extension, relationship is folded into our being as bearers of God's image.

Interestingly enough, the unchurched also recognize the primacy of relationships. In recent research by the Barna Group, nonbelievers were asked, "What would encourage you to attend a church?" Out of seven possible choices, which included options such as advertising and marketing, one answer rose to the top: *the invitation of a friend*. Nonbelievers themselves acknowledge that in order to hear the gospel, they need someone to venture into their world and build a relational bridge.

Thus, the first step in leading someone to Christ is to reach out to the people in our sphere of influence through the ministry of presence. Rather than beginning with a gospel tract or presenting step-by-step plans to salvation, we begin by building credibility through personal connections. Most people are far more inclined to consider a life-changing message from a trusted friend than from a stranger or casual acquaintance.

The Christians who practice regular acts of kindness, cultivate friendships through hospitality, and manifest the unconditional love of Christ at all times are the ones who have the greatest influence on others. This is what the apostle Paul addressed in Colossians 4, when he encouraged the early Christians to fill their conversations with grace and season their words with salt. It is the combination of warm love and generous grace that prepares hearts to receive the gospel seed.

In these pages, Kerry Willis and Margaret Michael have provided a practical, yet profound guide to “presence evangelism.” They remind us that when Christ is in us, people cannot help but be impacted. The authors’ emphasis on being, rather than mere doing, is based on the truth that a faithful, loving presence will do more to draw people to Christ than anything else.

In inviting you to read this book and put its time-honored wisdom into practice, we also invite you into a new world of meaningful relationships with eternal results.

David A. Basic
General Superintendent, Church of the Nazarene

INTRODUCTION



We are writing this book because we've seen the struggle—the struggle that comes with living life in our time. Lonely people crave relationships, but often lack true connection. We see those who are desperate for hope never find it and choose an empty substitute in food, alcohol, or drugs. Even in the church, there are some who put on their best face on Sunday morning, but find it difficult to face the world on Monday.

We see the practice of hospitality, the discipline of connection, and the art of real friendship under siege. Where true connection and caring are so desperately needed, we see isolation. We invent new technologies, new social networks, that promise deeper connection. But those often become barriers rather than bridges. People hurry. People hide. People hurt.

There is an answer, of course—his name is Jesus Christ. He is the one, last, and lasting hope for mankind; the Lord and giver of life; the light for a dark world.

And that brings us to another struggle at the heart of this book: believers' struggle with the Great Commission. We know what the Bible says about reaching the lost:

“So wherever you go, make disciples of all nations: Baptize them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Teach them to do everything I have commanded you.” (Matthew 28:19–20)

“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes to you. Then you will be my witnesses to testify about me in Jerusalem, throughout Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” (Acts 1:8)

“But dedicate your lives to Christ as Lord. Always be ready to defend your confidence in God when anyone asks you to explain it. However, make your defense with gentleness and respect.” (1 Peter 3:15)

We know that we are called to be his witnesses, to tell our friends and neighbors about Jesus, to—dare we say it?—*evangelize*. We don’t see it as optional, but many see it as excruciating. In some church circles, the word “evangelism” conjures up thoughts of door-to-door cold calls or sales-like closing techniques. For some, witnessing means rejection, embarrassment, and putting our reputation on the line. While we understand that risking rejection, embarrassment, and reputation for the gospel may be necessary, we also believe that our enemy has used those anxieties to keep people rooted in their pews on Sunday mornings so that they hardly ever venture out of their comfort zones.

That is the struggle that motivated this book, and the battle we wish to engage. We believe there is a biblical model for evangelism that every believer can embrace regardless of personality, background, or spiritual gifting. We won’t claim this model is easy, but it is from God, and it will result in the increase of his kingdom—and likely, the increase of your local church too.

As we write, we are making some assumptions about you. In fact, we’ve been praying for you along these lines:

Assumption #1: That you are in a right relationship with God—that is, that you are pursuing an intimate and committed relationship with Jesus Christ and answering the call to holiness. (You can’t give love to others if you haven’t received God’s love yourself.)

Assumption #2: That you are willing to reach others; that you want to build friendships with people who haven't made a commitment to Christ.

Assumption #3: That in those relationships, you desire to love and influence; that you see Christ's call to love others as supreme; that loving your neighbor as yourself isn't optional for you.

Assumption #4: That you are open to telling your story when the Lord calls you to share it with a friend or family member.

So, with those assumptions, we are introducing a model for evangelism that centers on the idea of *presence*. Presence is certainly not a new concept—its roots are in God's Word. However, it is a way of life that needs reviving. Simply stated, the idea behind this model is that, by recognizing and acting on opportunities to be present in your relationships, you can become the evangelist you never thought you could be. The reason for this is simple: presence makes you an influencer. The Spirit's work within you is all you need to change the world. If you are willing for Christ to reach the lost through you, he will. In fact, the heart of this book can be found in this single statement: The main purpose of our lives must be to serve as carriers of the presence of Christ and to make a way for him to manifest himself through us.

At a time like this, people are counting on Christ in us.

Pastor Kerry Willis
Pastor Margaret Michael



Let us wait in silence until we are
aware of the presence of Jesus
with and within us, without
which we will experience no
rest for our souls, no power for
our lives, no joy for our hearts,
and no peace for our minds.
The secret of Christ's presence
within us is this:
eternal heavenly treasures are
secured in our earthly lives,
beginning now.



1 IN YOU

You can't really be present to others without God's presence in you; that's where it all starts. This is reflected in Colossians 1:27, which includes one of the most beautiful promises in the Bible: God wants people all over to know him, to hope in him. And he does it through Jesus living in you by his Spirit. Only Christ's presence in you empowers you to be present with others.

That's why John 15:5 is such an important foundation for our understanding of presence: "I am the vine. You are the branches. Those who live in me while I live in them will produce a lot of fruit. But you can't produce anything without me." Apart from Christ, we don't have much of anything to offer those around us. Again, this is how presence begins: by Christ living in you and supplying all that you need to be the person he has called you to be.

If you pay close attention to the story of Gideon, you might notice that it features somewhat strange imagery. We already know Gideon—God's unlikely hero from the book of Judges. In the story, God's people had turned from him (again) and were being threatened by the Midianites. That's when God called Gideon, who was threshing wheat in an attempt to hide it from the enemy.

The LORD turned to him and said, “You will rescue Israel from Midian with the strength you have. I am sending you.”

Gideon said to him, “Excuse me, sir! How can I rescue Israel? Look at my whole family. It’s the weakest one in Manasseh. And me? I’m the least important member of my family.”

The LORD replied, “I will be with you. You will defeat Midian as if it were only one man.”

(Judges 6:14–16)

Later, with the battle approaching and armies gathering, Judges 6:34 reveals the key to Israel and Gideon’s victory: “Then the LORD’S Spirit gave Gideon strength.” But as we see in the Jubilee translation, there is more happening here than a simple imparting of power: “And the Spirit of the LORD clothed himself in Gideon” (Judges 6:34, JUB). According to the Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew lexicon, this is the most accurate translation of the original Hebrew. God’s presence in Gideon is so strong that it’s as if he were *wearing* Gideon. On the outside, we see the Little Wheat Thresher That Could—but this is only the “clothing.” On the inside is God, and he wears Gideon like a garment. God’s presence was the source of Gideon’s power, and it’s the source of yours too.

When it comes to reaching the lost around you, can you imagine God wearing *you* like clothing? In this scenario, you are still the one working to build meaningful relationships with your family, friends and community. However, the power and the presence come from the Lord within you. And from there, like Gideon, you see things you never imagined. It’s not you, a lone superhero, accomplishing the impossible through your strength and cunning; rather, it’s you surrendering to God, inviting him to take hold of your life and live in you. That is indeed the hope of glory.

One of the challenges of evangelism is that it has sometimes felt too dependent on the evangelist, as though witnessing were an individual pursuit—you against the world. No wonder so many Christians

have found it daunting. When it comes to presence, the “secret” to reaching others is not in the struggling, but in the surrendering.

We think this is what Paul is getting at in Galatians 2:20 when he writes, “I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live I live by believing in God’s Son, who loved me and took the punishment for my sins.” Perhaps we become so frustrated with our worship, our prayer, service, and evangelism because we are striving to work *for* God, straining against obstacles to try and try and try with precious little to show for it. But effectiveness is more about his presence than our planning, more about his grace than our guts.

God’s presence and power become the engine for all we do in Christ—the service, the prayer, the worship, the good deeds, the evangelism. As Paul reminds us in Philippians 2:13, “It is God who produces in you the desires and actions that please him.” Jesus himself prayed about this presence before he made his great sacrifice: “I have made you known to them, and will continue to make you known in order that the love you have for me may be in them and that I myself may be in them” (John 17:26, NIV). And then, when he rose again, Jesus promised this same presence to his disciples: “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes to you. Then you will be my witnesses to testify about me in Jerusalem, throughout Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8).

If you’re weary of and frustrated by falling short when it comes to prayer, devotion, and reaching the lost, this is good news! It’s not about you and it never has been. It’s not about clinging to the rope with blistered hands in a spiritual tug-of-war, or doing your best and failing miserably. No—presence evangelism is about falling to your knees and kneeling at the feet of Jesus, admitting your frailties and proclaiming your need for him.

In the end, Jesus isn’t looking for followers. He’s looking for sanctuaries—disciples who will reflect his presence, power, and love to all around them. When Christ is in you, it’s difficult for people *not* to be



God's presence and power
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deeds, the evangelism.



impacted by your presence. That's how we define presence evangelism: it's a lifestyle of manifesting Christ to the people around you.

That's Elaine's story. Elaine is a precious senior citizen who lives in an assisted living facility and doesn't get to come to church very often. But I (Kerry) remember one Easter when Elaine's granddaughter brought her to the service—they sat toward the back as I preached, both smiling broadly. At the end of the service, Elaine's granddaughter pulled me aside and told me that her grandmother wanted me to know something very important: "Grandma Elaine wanted me to tell you that she can't hear a word you're saying," her granddaughter said. "But she loves to come whenever she can just to sit and look at the countenance of the presence of God on your face."

Immediately, I knew that what Elaine had seen wasn't the result of anything I had done. It was something I *couldn't* have done even if I had tried. But God does things we can't even know about; he works *through* us because of his presence *in* us. That's the idea of God wearing you like a garment: people see you, but the presence of God pours out through the stitching, the seams, and the smiles. From a practical standpoint, this means we enter the world of presence evangelism from a kneeling position.



I (Margaret) was preparing for our church's local outreach at the annual county fair. We were planning to host a booth called The Resting Place, where people could come and sit, no strings attached. It's an unusual approach to fair exhibits, we admit. We simply provided a place for people to relax—no pressure, no sales, no questions asked. As I was preparing, I contacted Sally, one of my mentors, to ask for her advice on how to train the people who would be staffing the booth and providing a ministering presence to the fairgoers.

Sally said, "First, I would teach about the importance of prayer—that it's not about us but about Christ in us. Our responsibility is to stand

before him and soak in his presence. When we show up, we have no idea of the work he will do just because he is in us and we are there. Then just sit back and watch what happens in people's lives."

It's counterintuitive, isn't it? We live in a dying world, and we watch the hope drain from the faces of those around us. The condition of the human soul is an urgent one. The harvest is ripe and the workers are few. Since you're reading this book, you probably know all about that.

But the change doesn't start with an action plan or a ten-step process for reaching the lost—it all begins in the quiet. It begins with you, on your knees, seeking God, asking him to empower you, thanking him for his presence, and seeking his guidance.

How can you be sure that this is the right approach? Because God desires it. He wants you as close to him as possible. No effort to approach him is wasted; you can be sure he will honor a surrendered heart that clings to Him. A life of intimate prayer and worship is an impactful one.

You have nothing to offer apart from this important beginning, but everything to offer with it.



PRESENCE PRACTICE

- In this chapter, we've suggested some parallels between the story of Gideon and our own journey of rethinking our role as evangelists. Read Gideon's full story in Judges 6–8. What other connections can you make between Gideon's lives and ours? What do you make of the Jubilee translation of Judges 6:34 ("And the Spirit of the LORD clothed himself in Gideon...")?
- The other key texts we've discussed in this chapter are Colossians 1:27 and Galatians 2:20. Study these two passages for yourself before moving on to the next chapter. How can they apply to you?

- It's not an accident that you picked up this book and encountered these passages from God's Word. What is the Spirit telling you through them?



Is Christ in you? We don't want to assume that the matter is settled just because you've picked up this book—but it can be. In Christ there is a great promise of freedom forever—freedom from fear, sin, pain, and death.

Your soul will live forever—and where you spend eternity is a matter of what you do on earth. If you've never committed your life to Jesus and asked him to live within you, it's simply a matter of inviting him. The three Scripture verses listed below provide the Biblical basis for the promise of salvation. They are followed by a prayer to guide you.

Right now, in this very moment, God is with you, calling you. The fact that you are reading these words is not a coincidence. He wants to do things in and through you that you could never guess, expect, or imagine—beautiful things. There is hope, and his name is Jesus Christ.

“If you declare that Jesus is Lord, and believe that God brought him back to life, you will be saved. By believing you receive God's approval, and by declaring your faith you are saved. Scripture says, ‘Whoever believes in him will not be ashamed’” (Romans 10:9–11).

“However, when God our Savior made his kindness and love for humanity appear, he saved us, but not because of anything we had done to gain his approval. Instead, because of his mercy he saved us through the washing in which the Holy Spirit gives us new birth and renewal. God poured a generous amount of the Spirit on us through Jesus Christ our Savior. As a result, God in his kindness has given us his approval and we have become heirs who have the confidence that we have everlasting life” (Titus 3:4–7).

“Now you have been freed from sin and have become God’s slaves. This results in a holy life and, finally, in everlasting life. The payment for sin is death, but the gift that God freely gives is everlasting life found in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 6:22–23).

A Suggested Salvation Prayer

Father, I believe that Jesus is Lord—that he lived a sinless life on earth, was crucified on my behalf, and rose from the dead. I believe that I can have that same victory over death through him. I admit that I’m a sinner and that I need you. I am now committing my life to you, by your mercy and grace. I ask you to live in me as you promise; please ease my fears and forgive my sins. Thank you for hearing my prayer. In Christ’s name I pray. Amen.