

EXPONENTIAL⁷

The VIRAL GOSPEL

How Finding your PERSON of PEACE
ACCELERATES your MISSION



by Alex Absalom
with foreword
by Dave Ferguson

The Viral Gospel

**How Finding Your Person of Peace
Accelerates Your Mission**

**By Alex Absalom
With Foreword by Dave Ferguson**

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Thank you Todd, Lindy, Terri, Karen and team for all your servant-hearted support, encouragement and practical wisdom in the evolution of this eBook. This content is so much better due to your insight, editing and help! Your encouragement and belief in this project has been a joy to experience.

It is an honor to be able to help serve Exponential's vision of equipping leaders who are committed to accelerating the multiplication of healthy, reproducing churches. It is so easy to see the hand of Jesus all over what you are doing.

Church Community Builder

You have this tremendous focus on helping church leaders be more effective in doing ministry, guiding them to a better how. What a great passion to have! It has been fun partnering with you in different ventures, and seeing how technology can be such a powerful servant of the mission of the church.

Thank you for taking the ideas in this book and, through your Tribes, providing a forum for leaders to dig deeper in exploring them with their peers. Thanks to Steve, Sean, and the team for your support and encouragement—I appreciate you!

Stadia

Stadia is an incredible church planting organization, with such a big heart to share God's love with the 7 billion people on this planet by planting dynamic local churches. I love that this is taking place in both North and South America!

Over the past three years, I have had the privilege of helping in research and development with Stadia, focused on how to plant in more missional forms. Greg, Tom, Brent and team—you all exhibit both the humility and passion that exemplifies leaders who will do what it takes to reach and disciple the lost.

Synergy

RiverTree, LoveCanton and Stadia: Thank you for your trust in Jesus as together we experiment and develop some of the possible new ways forward for His church. It is amazing to see how Jesus has breathed upon our missional communities and disciple-making activities—what great stories we all have to tell!

Hannah and I love being able to invite both leaders of existing churches and church planters from across the nation to learn from our successes and failures—and to catch the missional bug.

AND FINALLY...

Thank you for my wonderful shepherding evangelist wife Hannah—you are the most relationally delightful person I have ever met (no wonder everyone loves you!). Even before we had this language, you have repeatedly modeled to me how to identify, reach and disciple our many Persons of Peace. I love and admire you so greatly. Ax

FOREWORD

I wish I had read *The Viral Gospel: How Finding Your Person of Peace Accelerates Your Mission* when I was planting COMMUNITY.

It was several years ago that my wife, Sue, my brother, Jon, and four friends from college and I moved back to the Chicago area. We settled in suburban Naperville with a passion to help people find their way back to God and the dream of starting a new church.

We didn't have a tool like this eBook to help guide our efforts, so instead we did what we'd heard Bill Hybels and Rick Warren did when they started a church. We started going door to door, talking to people and asking them what they were looking for in a new church so we could design a church just for them. Our team knocked on more than 5,000 doors in three months.

One of the doors I knocked on was the home of Nick. Nick is an outgoing, party-waiting-to-happen, real estate developer and we immediately hit it off. Nick's wife invited me in, and I went through my survey questions. After I finished, they continued asking their own questions about community, family and how things could be better. The normal three-minute survey turned into a full-hour conversation over coffee. Nick and I formed a friendship that has now lasted for more than two decades.

What I didn't know then was that I had found my Person of Peace. He came to our first Christmas Eve service, joined one of our first small groups, connected us with other people who were searching for God, got baptized, helped us transform our start-up into a church of thousands of people with multiple locations, and started a not-for-profit ministry that would change community development and reach thousands more.

As I look back, Nick was whom Alex Absalom describes in *The Viral Gospel*. As Alex explains, a Person of Peace does the following:

- **Welcomes you** – Literally, the first time I came knocking on Nick's door he invited me in.
- **Receives you** - Nick has been a constant encouragement and supporter of virtually everything I have championed at COMMUNITY.
- **Serves you** - Nick is someone who has consistently been generous with his time, resources and friendship.
- **You intentionally invest in** - For most of the last 20 years, Nick and I have had breakfast on Wednesdays and dreamed about how we can change the world and have fun doing it!

- **Operates as a gatekeeper, opening relational doorways into their network of relationships** - Nick introduced me to business and civic leaders I would have had to work years to meet. These relationships allowed us to advance the mission of Jesus.

By unpacking the principle of the Person of Peace, Alex Absalom shows you how to look for your own Nick.

I love Alex Absalom's *The Viral Gospel*! Why? First, it is thoroughly biblical. It's grounded in Scripture, so it is true. Additionally, it is simple. Alex does not try to make things more complicated than Jesus made them. I love that. Lastly, the contents of *The Viral Gospel* are reproducible. Because it is true and simple, you can easily take what you learn in this book and reproduce it in others. What you are reading has movement-making potential. I love this book, and I wish I had it 20 years ago!

Dave Ferguson

Lead Pastor of Community Christian Church, Chicago
Visionary Leader of NewThing
Author of *Finding Your Way Back To God*

CHAPTER 1: DEFINING PERSON OF PEACE

Elementary Mission

When our eldest son, Joel, was about to start elementary school, Hannah and I lived in a city in England where we could choose between different schools. We wanted him to go to the nearest one—within walking distance of our home—but many people at our church discouraged us: “There are almost no Christians at that school.”

Nevertheless, feeling prompted by God to investigate, we met the new principal and really connected with her. The school seemed to be well run, mildly eccentric and had good results, so we went for it! As we got involved, we found great favor with the principal, and thus with the staff and many parents.

Because the school had no buses, we met and became friends with many families as we walked Joel to and from school and intentionally made time to linger in the school playground with other parents. Gradually, more and more God conversations began to happen, and we ended up starting a kids club for all the families who were interested in fun ways for their children to learn about Jesus. The principal allowed us to advertise and even run sign-up tables as parents gathered after school! In addition, I was drawn into the leadership of the school, and I ended up chairing the school’s governing board. This enabled me to work closely with the principal, including being involved in all new staff appointments.

Today, seven years after we left, the school has a very strong Christian influence and new generations of families are being drawn to Christ as a result.

For our family, that school became our primary place of mission as we grew to know and love the community there. But the real opening came about because of the favor the principal showed us—she was our Person of Peace.

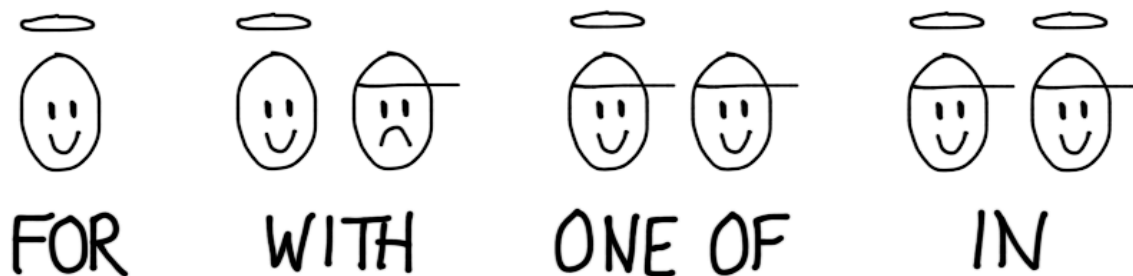
This eBook is primarily focused on equipping you to spot and reach your own Person of Peace. First, though, I want to give you a broader framework of understanding, through the concept of becoming “one of” the people and places where we are called to bring the Kingdom of God.

One Of

"As the Father has sent me, I am sending you" (John 20:21).

I have no doubt your own story affirms that living incarnationally—in other words, becoming “one of” the people to whom you are called—is absolutely central to being a missionary.

The idea of “one of” can be summarized like this:



FOR: God’s posture towards humanity is one of pleasure—fundamentally He loves and smiles when He looks at us! He is *for* us. Yet He is also a holy God (represented by the halo). While He loves us so deeply, God also hates sin for the basic fact that it stands in direct opposition to His very identity and rule.

WITH: To draw us closer to Him, God comes to be *with* us, revealing His nature and love to us in more tangible ways. The Old Testament is full of moments when He was with His people: the call of Abraham, Moses at the burning bush, Ruth when she chose the God of Naomi, Jeremiah in the pit, Daniel in the lions’ den. But this is not enough. When God is *with* us, He is still holy and, to sinful humanity, too different and unattainable to follow consistently. We fail at keeping His law and thus end up discouraged (the grumpy face!) both at our own sin and God’s otherness.

ONE OF: The crucial shift is when God becomes *one of* us—the incarnation. Jesus puts on human flesh (here represented by the baseball cap), and at last our hearts can stop striving. We see what it means to belong to our heavenly Father when we look at Jesus; we see how our lives can be transformed when the Holy Spirit is allowed to lead us so closely. The frown turns into a smile!

Furthermore, by becoming *one of* us, Jesus is able to decisively deal with the impact of sin in our lives. This is not just Jesus being a great example; it is Jesus

offering a fundamental change in our relationship with the Father, as our barrier against the holiness of God (our sin) is removed through the atonement. But the key to all of this is Jesus becoming *one of*.

IN: Finally God can be *in* us—as we welcome, receive and serve Jesus. As the Holy Spirit comes to live *in* us, not only do we smile but we also start to take on the character and identity of God—His holiness.

The outcome of this process is that Jesus creates a multiplying movement—by commissioning us frail mortals, who have God *in* us—to go and represent Him in the world.

- We begin this commission by being known as people who are *for* others, that we actually like other human beings, including those who are far from God!
- Then we move to being *with* people, finding tangible ways to serve and bless them.
- But the key shift is when we become *one of* a particular group of people. They stop being “those people” and together we start being “us.” We work out what church needs to look like to reach that specific context, to be incarnated into that time and place.
- The message of the gospel remains the same, but we as missionaries do the hard work of cross-cultural translation.
- As we go, we see people become disciples of Jesus, and thus the Spirit comes to live *in* them, and so the multiplication effect increases.

(For more on the “one of” principle and how to apply it in your context, read the eBook [One Of](#) I co-authored with Greg Nettle. You can download it for free.)

The Missional Impulse

Stop and consider the missional journey that Jesus took. Jesus went to the Jews, who in turn went to the Gentiles, who then went to the nations. This is what Alan Hirsch calls the missional impulse—the God-inspired and God-modeled pressure to cross boundaries and take the gospel everywhere. By definition, being a follower of Jesus means that we go, because we know that our God has sent us out into the world to make disciple-making disciples.

We are designed to be disciples who go and make more disciples.

This means that ALL Christians are called to become “one of”—to work out what the church needs to look like to reach the particular nook or cranny of culture and society where, by God’s grace, they find themselves.

This is where all the talk of being “missional” kicks in. Put simply, a missional church is one that allows the mission of God to determine how it does and is church.

Because the church’s purpose on earth is to be a disciple-making mission.

One implication of this is that the church is the net result, not the primary cause. Hirsch summarizes it this way: Our Christology (our understanding of Jesus and what His becoming “one of” is about) forms our missiology (our theology and practice of going in mission), which in turn defines our ecclesiology (our outworking of the purpose, practices and structures of healthy church life).

This missional impulse is planted at the core of us, both individually and especially when we gather in Jesus-centered community. This should not be a surprise, since a missional God is inevitably going to disciple us into becoming a missional people!

This is what helps make the Gospel go viral: We catch the “virus” and then pass it on to others. The core of our faith should be highly “sneezable!”

Consider this: Many tend only to think about incarnation—becoming “one of”—at Christmas, but Jesus showed us that being “one of” is a permanent lifestyle, not an occasional day trip. We are created and equipped to go into a place, love it, invest in it, listen to Jesus and thus show how God is at work to all who are open.

So Where Do We Start?

Many Christians find it incredibly hard to even seriously consider becoming “one of,” let alone doing it on a consistent basis. A lot of this is due to our misconceptions about the nature of witnessing, bad experiences in the past, poor training and general mischief making from the enemy. However, this should not be our final position!

I believe that many, many disciples can be released to go out as witnesses simply by implementing a basic strategy that Jesus taught: identifying the Person of Peace.

The Person of Peace concept contains within it the essence of missional DNA. As a result, it is flexible enough to fit into a wide range of church cultures and alongside whatever models for witnessing and disciple making you may already use.

Lived out in practice, finding your Person of Peace accelerates your mission. This is a biblical tool that will work for you individually, for your household, for your team, and for everyone who is part of your church family. It has the capacity to bring major breakthrough and be a true game changer. As you will see, it is something that my wife Hannah and I have lived with and used for over 15 years in different nations, and it has worked fantastically every time.

The Early Church

When Christians think about witnessing and mission, whether global or local, we tend to think of it as a program.

If we have tried it at all, we have found it to be really hard, because the equation we've been taught is that mission equals going to people who smell different to us, demand things from us, and with whom we have almost nothing in common! Thus, we do this as infrequently as possible, very much in a hit-and-run manner.

Unsurprisingly, this proves to be neither enjoyable nor fruitful.

Which is probably why so many of us Christians are ineffective as witnesses for Jesus.

By complete contrast, the Early Church used the strategy of Person of Peace, coupled with the concept of *oikos*, or households of faith. This proved amazingly fruitful, as the church grew from 120 people to more than half the Roman Empire becoming Christians in just over 300 years.

Throughout that time, Christians were a persecuted minority on the margins of society, constantly harassed and often the victims of open hostility.

For instance, they were accused of being:

- Incestuous - because of their self-declared love between brothers and sisters
- Cannibals – because they ate the body and blood of their leader
- Traitors - because they had their own king above Caesar

In such a hostile context, they needed to be highly relational and use a strategy that would actually work in the midst of the realities of busy, stressful lives, where it was tough to be a follower of Jesus. Instead of going after the meanest, toughest

and hardest to reach, they simply impacted those whom they found it easiest to naturally befriend. This is the genius of Person of Peace.

They Like You And You Like Them

Put very simply, a Person of Peace is someone who is not a Christian, yet who:

- Welcomes you
- Receives you (and thus, probably unknowingly at first, receives Jesus in you)
- Serves you
- You intentionally invest in
- Operates as a gatekeeper, opening relational doorways into their network of relationships

I often summarize it as, *“They like you and you like them.”* Turns being a missionary on its head, doesn't it?

Part of the liberating factor for us as Christians is that Person of Peace only works properly with those who are willing, so it is the very opposite of manipulation. As we will see in Luke 10, Jesus says the spiritual thing is to focus on reaching those with whom you connect well, rather than trying to invest where it is relationally tough or you have no great passion.

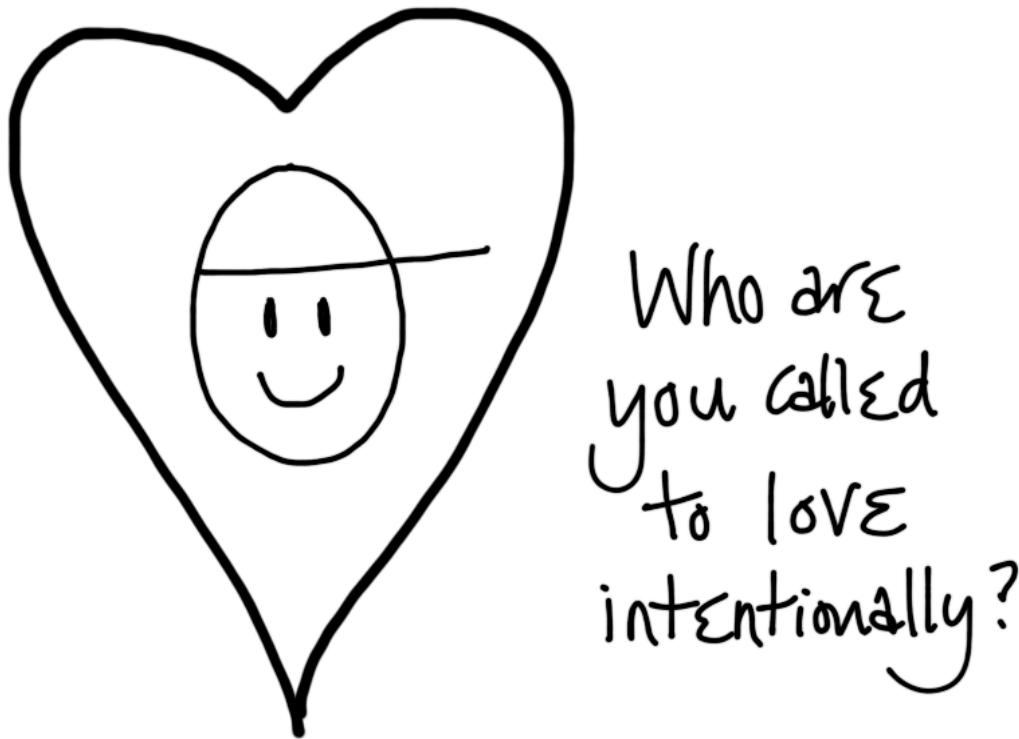
This is NOT saying only go to those who are the same as you—in fact, many times we are called to go cross-culturally. For instance, you might be middle class yet called to the urban poor, or maybe you are young and know you have to reach the elderly, or you have a deep passion to pioneer into a new geographic community.

Put simply, whom would you most love to see become a disciple of Jesus?

The Love Heart Of Mission

Since 2010, I've served as the leader of missional innovation at RiverTree Church, in Northeast Ohio. As part of a team working to help the church move further down the missional path, one of the first things we taught was Person of Peace. It is the strategy Jesus gives to help us naturally and easily identify where we are called to go.

My friend Greg Nettle and I spent time thinking about simple ways to communicate this concept, and this graphic emerged:



Take a napkin, draw a large heart and write the question, “Who are you called to love intentionally?”

The question really is that simple—who do you sense God has called you to love the most?

Who is your heart best shaped to reach for Jesus?

We taught this repeatedly to the men and women at RiverTree who would become the leaders of the first generation of missional communities. (In summary, a missional community is a group of 20 to 50+ people focused on reaching a specific neighborhood or network of relationships for Jesus. For more on missional communities, visit my blog alexabsalom.com.)

We kept bringing them back to the challenge of this question: “Who are you called to love intentionally?”

When people are stuck, we sometimes frame the question a different way: “Who do you most want to see saved?” If someone replies, “The whole city,” narrow the question: “Who specifically would you most love to see reached for Jesus?”

If the answer is a particular community (e.g., people who like to make jewelry, bikers, high school students, those in a local juvenile correction facility, families with preschoolers, young adults—all of which are real examples from RiverTree), then probably that context will be where your Person of Peace is, since clearly you feel called to that neighborhood or network of relationships.

I want to make sure you understand that I’m talking about a Person of Peace as referring to someone who is *not* currently a clear disciple of Jesus. This is about reaching lost people who won’t otherwise be touched by the gospel, since they aren’t interested in coming to be *with* us at our church buildings on a Sunday morning. So in all the questions and comments that follow, assume that we are talking about a Person of Peace who isn’t a Christian. This is about equipping you to be a more effective witness for Jesus.

Having said that, the Person of Peace strategy is one that works universally, so you will also be able to recognize Christians in your life that have acted as a Person of Peace for you. They have shown you favor, helped and served you, and opened gateways of opportunity for you to walk through. Be very grateful for them—but don’t pull yourself off the missional hook by letting them be the primary way you interpret this concept.

CHAPTER 2: EXPLAINING PERSON OF PEACE

A Person of Peace is someone who is not a Christian and:

1. **They welcome you**
2. **They receive you (and Jesus in you)**
3. **They serve you**
4. **You intentionally invest in them**
5. **They operate as a gatekeeper**

I want to explain each of these phrases, including showing you how each one is thoroughly grounded in the Bible. In particular, we'll open up Luke 10, since this is the fullest treatment on the subject (centered around verse 6).

1. THEY WELCOME YOU

No More Excuses!

After this the Lord appointed seventy-two others and sent them two by two ahead of him to every town and place where he was about to go. He told them, "The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field. Go! I am sending you out like lambs among wolves. Do not take a purse or bag or sandals; and do not greet anyone on the road" (Luke 10:1-4).

Luke 10 begins with Jesus sending out the 72, and here we have His briefing and explanation of the strategy He wants them to follow. This is almost unique in the gospels, since usually Jesus gives us a principle and then leaves us to work out how to live it out in practice in our context.

I think the reason Jesus goes into this detailed strategy is to help us overcome our angst about being witnesses. The first four verses are all about pushing us out into the game—Jesus removes our best excuses!

Jesus says:

- Go in teams. Even if you personally make the connection, you need at least one other person to help you invest in that relationship and build a new community.

- Jesus won't abandon you. He is coming! As you are being sent in His name, you must not be afraid of being known as a follower of Jesus. Later on, we'll look at the issue of rejection, but remember:

You can't be rejected for Jesus until you've been connected to Jesus.

I'm not saying to make that the first thing you tell people—but you shouldn't hide it.

- Be expectant of a harvest. In fact, you will have your pick of it. The smart thing to do is to start with the low-hanging fruit. Jesus wants you to ask Him to show you the ready harvest that is around you.

- Pray for your team. THIS IS VITAL!! Do not underestimate this step. It is central to being in the center of the Lord's will as you move out on mission.

- Ask God to reveal your Person of Peace (and maybe a Place of Peace).

- Bind the enemy and ask for spiritual awakening (Matthew 12:29).

- Bless people and their homes, schools, businesses, etc.

- Pray for favor and resourcing in that community.

- Ask the Lord of the harvest to send out more laborers into the fields.

- Implicitly, how can we be the answer to those prayers—not only by going ourselves—but also by training others to go (including those we reach)?

We have often found prayer walking to be a powerful way of doing this, as you walk in faith around the community to which you are called, with the eyes of your heart open to the promptings and insights of the Holy Spirit. Allow yourself to pray into details and specifics—nothing is too little (or big).

- You will feel scared and intimidated. That's not an excuse not to go. Get over it.

- Go lightweight and flexible. Mission doesn't need permission or special resources. Just use whatever is in your hands.

- Don't be distracted or controlled by social conventions that will hinder your progress.

As a family we have lived this process. Originally from England, in 2007 God called us as missionaries to the United States. Our journey of faith saw us landing in Oklahoma City, finding ourselves in a new country where we had no favor, knew hardly anyone and barely understood the culture—or even the accent!!

So Hannah and I did what we always do: We prayed and asked God to show us our Person of Peace.

And Jesus answered.

Whereas in England, our Person of Peace had been at the kids' school, this time the "she" was a "they"—a family who lived in our neighborhood.

They were out walking past our new house when I happened to be doing yard work. A first conversation ensued, and before I knew it our family had been invited for dinner, and our new friends were busy serving us with gusto. The couple became (and remain) truly close to us. We love them dearly and would do anything for them—and know the same is true in reverse, even though we now live in different parts of the country.

They opened up a whole network of relationships for us in our neighborhood. These various households became our extended family—adopting us foreigners at all the holidays, doing life together, coming and going out of homes and generally building great relationships. Gradually, God conversations began to surface, and over the course of several years there was a sweet spiritual awakening in that place.

But it was always built upon friendship. We loved every person in that community, so our very deepest wish was that each of them would discover the joy of following Jesus for themselves. They knew that was an authentic expression of our love for them, so it never felt like scalp hunting on our part.

And so we went on the journey of discipleship together, helped by a missional community that our friends graciously allowed us to begin in our neighborhood. Looking back, it really was such an easy and enjoyable journey, with Hannah and I just listening to God and obeying the simple steps He gave us along the way.

In hindsight, I think our key step was that we began by asking Jesus to show us the harvest that was already around us—by identifying our Person of Peace.

In many places the Bible tells us that our proactive energy and resources need to be very wisely invested, in a way that will lead to the most impact. The strategy of Person of Peace trains us to look for the place of greatest favor and receptivity, where the door is already ajar and breakthrough looks likely to come most quickly.

2. THEY RECEIVE YOU (And Jesus in You)

Listen: God Is Speaking!

When you enter a house, first say, "Peace to this house" (Luke 10:5).

The everyday greeting of Jesus' time was *shalom*, translated as "peace." It would be the equivalent of us saying, "How are you?" to someone (being parroted as a social norm, rather than as a serious question).

Essentially, Jesus baptizes "shalom" and turns it into a sacred greeting (Luke 10:5). Now Jesus is actively invited into the conversation from the outset. This is not about a change in words or giving people weird looks or inappropriately long and sweaty churchy hugs. Rather, it's about the missionary having ears to hear, to truly listen to the person's response, sensing where the Spirit is already at work and what He is saying.

This is fundamentally about being able to hear the voice of God in everyday situations.

I have a few friends who have one or two simple lines that they use to test the waters. In response to the question "How are you?" they reply, "I'm blessed," and then see what happens. Alternatively, you could voice a prophetic perception you sense about someone, such as, "I can see that you are a really positive person." I realize this looks really cheesy on paper, and this isn't for everyone, but for some personalities this does help.

The point is this: We are to invite Jesus into the unexpected little moments of the day, and see if God is up to something in the life of that person, and how we can join in with God's initiative.

At RiverTree, we have seen the power of the mindset shift this entails. Instead of segmenting life into religious and secular, people are empowered to realize that the Kingdom can break out at any point in the day. Jesus can touch their friends, colleagues and neighbors where they are now—there is no need to first bring them into a church building!

Theologically, we can see that the concept of "peace" refers to the impact of the coming of salvation—God's peace—into the lives of people who respond to Jesus. With your Person of Peace, this means that there is some openness in them not only to you but also to Jesus alive in you. They may not be able to express that. In fact, don't be put off by what comes out of their mouth (swear words, skepticism, stories of dim-witted Christians, etc.).

Pay attention to the deeper realities, identifying when you know in your spirit that there is a God-ordained connection happening, that this is a person open to salvation. Jesus says, be alert to this, so that you can help prepare the way for Him to come more fully.

The Person of Peace

If someone who promotes peace is there, your peace will rest on them; if not, it will return to you (Luke 10:6).

Jesus says that as you bring the peace of Christ with you into a situation or relationship, be on the lookout for a Person of Peace.

The Greek here is actually “son of peace,” a common idiom to indicate belonging to a particular group. For example, “a son of the Kingdom” (Matt. 13:38), or “a son of the devil” (Acts 13:10).

Thus, we are looking for people who are destined for God’s peace. *We are trying to identify a man or woman, boy or girl, who is destined for the salvation that only Jesus can bring.*

Don’t forget: This is a highly relational thing. Your Person of Peace is someone who genuinely likes you—and you like them. It won’t be one of those “grit your teeth and be a martyr” types of relationships! If you have a potential Person of Peace present, he or she probably won’t be hard to identify.

Consider Psalm 25: “Good and upright is the Lord; therefore He instructs sinners in the way.” Don’t be surprised to discover that the Holy Spirit has already gone ahead of you, stirring hearts and prompting people to hunger for a deeper reality, so they begin to be open to the message of the gospel.

From our end, this receptiveness is discerned primarily spiritually. (Some people may talk a good game but have no intention of ever coming to Christ!) However, that doesn’t mean it’s all guesswork. Jesus teaches us about external tangibles we can pick up on, including their willingness to serve you.

Look for Your Place of Peace

One of the ways to identify your possible Person of Peace is to consider if you have a Place of Peace. By this, I mean a physical location where you have favor and where your Person of Peace (and maybe their network) is already present (even if you've not realized that until now). This might be their home, their business, a local coffee shop, the gym, the school, etc.

Think of it this way: When (for instance) you walk into your child's school, who greets, welcomes and serves you way beyond what they need to do? Person of Peace is all about people, but sometimes it's easier to recognize them by reflecting on the places where you receive unusual favor.

There's a French proverb that translates as, "Where God has you planted, you must learn how to flower." He has you here right now, so serve Him here right now. You may not intend to be in this spot forever, but that doesn't stop you from being a missionary for as long as you are in this place.

Taking this concept a step further, see if you and your missional community/ church can create an accessible Place of Peace. To do this, look closely at your context to see where the need is, and then create a "third space" that will bless the wider community. This is more than just a business opportunity: Identify what is missing in your community and what you can invest. Look to build a true place where people can have relationship. If you start a coffee shop, the goal is to connect with people more than to drink coffee! It will be a reflection of your unique gift to the place where you are planted. Amazing relationships will follow.

3. THEY SERVE YOU

Building a Mutual Friendship

Stay there, eating and drinking whatever they give you, for the worker deserves his wages. Do not move around from house to house (Luke 10:7).

As you come into their lives, a Person of Peace will respond favorably to you, reaching out in friendship and acceptance, often by finding ways to serve and help you.

We have seen this happen so many times now that it is one of the key indicators we look for in a Person of Peace. Of course, they won't be perfect and we should

still offer lots of grace and patience. At the other end of the spectrum, don't abuse their kindness!

Yet what it feels like is that this (probably) relatively new relationship has incredible favor upon it. You are enjoying being with them, wondering if they could be your Person of Peace—and so you are being careful not to push. Yet they seem to be bubbling up with this zeal and desire to serve and bless you as the missionary, by offering help in tangible ways. It feels thoroughly undeserved and a bit unnerving at first. But it is a true sign of the Holy Spirit at work.

People are built with a desire to serve. It is one of the scents of heaven.

Being served as we go also seems to be one of the ways the Lord keeps us humble and dependent upon Him. Often Christians operate with a paternalistic attitude, thinking we have all the answers and that the unchurched just need to be quiet and gratefully receive our download. However, that is not a good foundation for healthy community. Mutual service, instead, puts people on an equal footing.

Jesus is interested in building His church, a community where mutual disciple making takes place. Everyone has something to bring and contribute, and this principle needs to be honored from day one of our interactions with People of Peace.

You are already discipling them, even if they aren't aware of it. So don't do it in a way that has to be debugged at a later stage!

Much of the New Testament is about helping the body of Christ to function healthily, with everyone playing their part and no one simply acting as a passive consumer of religious goods and services. So let's set it up that way from day one.

4. YOU INTENTIONALLY INVEST IN THEM

Stay and Intentionally Invest in That Relationship

Jesus talks about staying with your Person of Peace's *oikos*—the New Testament word for someone's network of relationships. The Person of Peace will open the doorway into their community, giving you credibility and permission to start to bring Jesus' salvation peace into those lives, as well as their shared life together.

Therefore, don't bounce from *oikos* to *oikos* (v.7), but rather stay and invest deeply, until Jesus calls you to move on. Of course, sometimes we may only have a short time, but generally *oikos*-based mission is built around us investing over many months and, probably, years.

This means that you will also need to say "no" to some other opportunities.

In Oklahoma, Hannah and I could have started multiple missional communities, but we knew we needed to focus our investment on our geographic neighborhood. In Sheffield we focused on the school. In Ohio, our call is to the next generation of leaders who are currently in their 20s.

You only have a limited amount of time to pour into significant relationships, and you will be far less effective if you simply keep hopping between different *oikos* that you have some connection with. This doesn't mean ignore everyone else, but it does mean you need to know how to prioritize your limited time, energy and resources. You need to focus:

- Who is your Person of Peace?
- Where is the clearest open doorway?
- Where is your place of peace?
- Who are you called to love in a special way?

For our friend, Todd, Person of Peace has been transformative in his effectiveness as a witness for Jesus. As he thought about the principle, he felt drawn to renew his engagement with the gym where he'd been a member for three years—the place where he spent the most time with non-Christians. Wondering what to do specifically, someone challenged him to make himself the pastor of the gym! Nobody needed to approve or ordain him or give him a certificate of permission. He simply decided to live it out and see what happened.

As a result, he changed the time he went to the gym. Before, he went at a quieter point in the day (to serve his needs). He started going at peak hours (to serve the lost by connecting with the most people, and seeing who might be his Person of Peace).

At this time, Todd realized he'd never met the manager, so he decided to make an appointment to see her. She was about 30 years old and fairly inexperienced, so he simply asked, "What's the biggest challenge you face running this gym?" She told him she needed better marketing, to which Todd responded, "I started a non-profit marketing organization last year, so let me know if I can help you." This exchange led to great conversations and, over time, lots of favor with all sorts of people at the gym. All it took was a simple, intentional approach—choosing to stay and invest time in the context where he was called to represent Jesus.

Eating Is Witnessing!

When you enter a town and are welcomed, eat what is offered to you (Luke 10:8).

Eating together is a central part of missional life in all its forms. Sharing a table and spending time around it communicates acceptance, love and grace. We find that this shared experience creates a natural context for worship (for instance, in the sharing of thanksgivings and, at the right time, the breaking of bread) and acts as a pathway into Christian community.

Jesus tells us to eat and drink whatever we're given. This seems to indicate that sometimes we will be served things that are not in our normal diet! However, instead of trying to convert people to our cultural preferences, we are to be the cross-cultural movers, being willing to make sacrifices to become "one of."

We must be willing to shift to their culture. This might mean not only new foods but also hanging out in places where you've never hung out before, doing things you've never done before.

When we moved from England, the guys in our neighborhood loved to play poker, watch college football and drink Bud Light. So I learned to play poker, cheer for Oklahoma, boo the Texas Longhorns, and bring along some decent ales to show them how beer should taste. One New Year's Day, I went with a bunch of guys from our neighborhood to a poker tournament at a casino. I had no other expectation than losing my \$40 entry fee, but it was part of being "one of" (what had become) my close group of friends. They wanted to go and invited me, and I wanted both to hang out and learn even more about their world.

Soma Communities based in Washington put this principle into a fantastic question:

Am I bringing the party?

In other words, when you turn up at a social event, are people pleased you're there because you'll add to the occasion, or are they kind of disappointed to see you because you'll dampen spirits in a judgmental, religious-y kind of way?

This approach does entail risk. Your lost neighbors may drink too much beer or wine or vodka, and then you have a choice: Can you model how to have a great time without having to become tipsy, and are you willing to clear up their mess and help put things back together afterwards?

5. THEY OPERATE AS A GATEKEEPER

Look to Meet Their Friends

One of the hallmarks of a Person of Peace is that they will introduce you to their network of relationships—their family, neighbors, friends or colleagues. In biblical times, this network of relationships was known as an *oikos*.

To give a quick summary, in both Greek and Roman society the *oikos* was the bedrock of society. This “household” consisted of both immediate and extended family, friends, neighbors, those you did business with (since almost all business was based out of the home) and slaves (it was a slave-owning culture and, through *oikos* churches, the early church was very effective in breaking down those social barriers).

Remember the persecution situation the church found herself in for those first three centuries. The church grew because it was built around *oikos*, not because it owned big buildings and held public services. To understand the success of the early church in a non-Christian culture, think less “Western church today” and focus far more on relational networks gathering in homes and similar spaces.

What’s interesting about Jesus’ instruction in v.5 is that He tells us to greet the *oikos* (translated “house”), the relational network located there (so He doesn’t mean the physical building!). The key to doing so fruitfully is through the introduction and support of the Person of Peace.

Note that your Person of Peace is not necessarily the one with the largest number of relationships. The key is their spiritual openness to Jesus and their relational openness to you. It might even be that they have a smaller network of friendships than you, yet you know you are called to them and they open up the relationships they do have (who, of course, may well in turn open up their networks to you).

By relationally endorsing you, your Person of Peace breaks down barriers between you and their *oikos*, in effect encouraging you to use their relational capital to befriend and bring the Kingdom of God near to that network of people. They act as a gatekeeper and authenticator for you to their *oikos*, in whatever shape it comes.

As the unchurched people of that *oikos* start to move towards Jesus, we are then able to disciple them in their existing cultural context (rather than expecting them to leave that context before we’ll disciple them).

Both in Oklahoma and in Ohio, we have seen that this has been one of the keys to the planting and development of our numerous missional communities (we have overseen the start of more than 100 mid-sized groups, each with a specific missional vision). Each leader knows who their Person of Peace is and therefore can look to build their missional community in a way that impacts their particular *oikos* network.

Don't Fret About Rejection

But when you enter a town and are not welcomed, go into its streets and say, 'Even the dust of your town we wipe from our feet as a warning to you. Yet be sure of this: The Kingdom of God has come near.' I tell you, it will be more bearable on that day for Sodom than for that town (Luke 10:10-12).

Jesus moves on to remind us that not everyone will want to follow Him. This means that we risk rejection, even with People of Peace.

While they may well be particularly open to God, this does not guarantee that they will submit to Christ as Savior and Lord. Obviously, in some situations the issue is a matter of timing, so we always need to be open to long-term relational impact. However, we will also experience relationships where we realize that they are not responding to us, and we need to move on.

As painful and sad as those times are, there is so much ripe and ready harvest that when we don't focus on that harvest, we act irresponsibly. Jesus warns us of this partly, I think, so that we won't be despondent when that call to move on does occur. Also, be aware that they may well be a Person of Peace for another Christian at some future point. Certainly, that is something we can pray for.

But we cannot share Jesus without risk of being rejected.

SPECIFIC EXAMPLES OF PERSON OF PEACE IN THE BIBLE

We can see the principle of Person of Peace being lived out throughout the New Testament. In addition to teaching it, Jesus also modeled it, and for Paul it was his primary strategy in almost every new city. Specific examples include:

- The man of the Gerasenes (Mark 5:1-20) – In spite of the bondage he was under, he seeks out Jesus, receives deliverance, and is sent back to his people to bear testimony (who have just begged Jesus to leave their region). When Jesus returns in Mark 7:31-37, there is a hugely positive response to Him in the previously hostile, mostly Gentile, region of the Decapolis because the man of the Gerasenes has acted as gatekeeper for Jesus.
- The Samaritan Woman (John 4:1-42) – Notice how the narrative ends, when v.39 tells us that “Many of the Samaritans from that town believed in Him because of the woman’s testimony: ‘He told me everything I ever did.’” Jesus’ interactions here represent a classic (if compressed) arc of the different stages of Person of Peace.

This story also brings fascinating insight into the effective use of prophecy as a tool for mission. (If this is not an area you have much experience in, then chase this one down. I have found it tremendously helpful in leading people to Jesus.)

- Lydia (Acts 16:13-15, 40) – A textbook Person of Peace encounter in a completely new continent for the gospel. The first convert in Europe is a woman who is baptized along with her household (*oikos*) in Philippi. Paul and his team had gone to where they expected to find God-fearers (the mostly likely to be a ready harvest), and she was the most spiritually open of the people gathered there.
- The Philippian Jailor (Acts 16:23-36) – As Paul and Silas’ jailor, he literally acts as their gatekeeper! In response to Paul and Silas proclaiming the Gospel, in the light of an incredible supernatural act, his whole household (*oikos*) is baptized.
- Publius, chief official of Malta (Acts 28:7-10) – After the shipwreck, he opens his home to those from the ship, and Paul heals his father from sickness (as Jesus commanded in Luke 10:9). Thereafter, a huge move of God happens, focused around healing the sick. We aren’t directly told of Publius’ conversion, but it can reasonably be inferred from the text.
- Cornelius (Acts 10) – Peter also uses the principle of Person of Peace, in this case to bring the gospel to a God-fearing Roman Centurion. Cornelius acts as gatekeeper to his *oikos* (v.2), specifically his friends and relatives (v.24). This encounter, of course, was the tipping point in opening up the mission to the Gentiles.

CHAPTER 3: WINNING YOUR PERSON OF PEACE

Be Naturally Supernatural

Heal the sick who are there and tell them, “The Kingdom of God has come near to you” (Luke 10:9).

As you begin to identify your Person of Peace, the obvious next issue is what you can do to be proactive in drawing them to the Lord.

After all, it is all very well identifying people who are open to Jesus as He lives through me, but that is of no use eternally if they never join me on the journey of discipleship.

After a lot of practice (including both successes and failures!), Hannah and I have realized that the next step boils down to a simple principle:

Treat your non-Christian friends the same way you treat your Christian friends.

If one of my Christian friends says that he’s feeling unwell, my response is to offer to pray for them—right then. I’ll place a hand on their shoulder and pray a simple prayer of faith.

Why can’t we do the same with our non-Christian friends?

Whenever I’ve done so, two things happen:

1. Jesus heals them—which leads to some really fun conversations (“So then, what do you reckon happened there?”)
2. They aren’t (fully) healed, but they are really touched by what they receive as an authentic expression of love and compassion.

Hannah and I have noticed that our unchurched friends kind of expect the “real” us to act in a spiritual manner. They really like that Jesus-weird part of us! (Of course, Jesus-weird is totally different from religious-weird. Don’t do the latter.)

In Luke 10, after teaching us how to identify a Person of Peace, Jesus tells us to heal the sick that are there and to proclaim the Kingdom. Our experience is that our People of Peace are deeply touched when we offer to pray for them when they or their family are sick. At worst, they see it as just our way of expressing love, but very often they do have a genuine God encounter. What is really cool is when they are healed. That does change their operating worldview!

We call this being naturally supernatural—being an authentic Jesus follower in all situations, not just when we’re safely among Christians.

- So when a non-Christian friend is sick, we lay hands on them and pray—right then.
- When they are out of work, we pray with them for work. Often they know that is the best thing we could do for them.
- When we sit down to eat together, we heartily give thanks to God and share thanksgivings from the day.
- If we sense God saying something to a friend in a situation, we will appropriately share that with them.
- When we can lend or give or help or serve, we do those things.

And we would fully expect them to contribute in these ways to our family, because we are in community together and this is what the Kingdom looks like.

We have found that encouraging people to be naturally supernatural is one of the central drivers in the life of discipleship. If we aren’t people who carry and share the supernatural presence of God, we’re no different than our friends and family who are nice and moral but lost.

The difference maker is not our own virtue (that’s legalism), but the presence of Jesus bubbling over in our lives.

Jesus sums up the process by encouraging us to spot the moments of breakthrough and to proclaim the closeness of the Kingdom. This is no hyped-up talk. When you say the Kingdom is near, that is truth, because you've been sensing Jesus and listening to Him and He clearly is at hand. Your friends might think they are far from God, but He is really near and ready to come right in. It is often at these points that tremendous God conversations can take place, which can be immensely robust due to the strength of the relational bridge that has been built.

Put simply, the key to seeing genuine change in the life of your Person of Peace is respecting them enough to treat them like you’d treat your Christian friends. Stop living a dualistic life!

Sharing the Content of the Gospel

We do want every Person of Peace to come to an active and deliberate faith in Jesus as their Savior and Lord. There will come the time when they need to respond to the message of the gospel, so that they not only receive the gift of salvation but also know that they are intentionally walking towards Jesus for the rest of their life.

Throughout the Gospels, Jesus makes clear that we are sent to share His words and His works. As we look at the story of the early church, it is clear that they followed this simple pattern.

To help those we lead do likewise, Hannah and I have boiled things down to four questions that we ask (internally) when with a Person of Peace. They are:

- 1. Can I Pray for You?**
- 2. Can I Serve You?**
- 3. Can I Share My Story?**
- 4. Can I Share God's Story?**

1. Can I Pray for You?

Our starting place is an intentional openness to pray for those with whom we are starting to form community.

This first question keeps us humble and dependent upon God. Most leaders are pretty competent at organizing things; so serving others can easily be done in our own strength—not the wisest (or most effective) way to win someone to Jesus.

This is all about Jesus and His Kingdom, so we always reckon that He loves to be involved in extending His rule even more than we do!

If you're still nervous about stepping out in faith like this, here's an interesting anecdote: I have been turned down when offering to pray for someone—but only by Christians. My unchurched friends have never refused!

2. Can I Serve You?

There will be lots of practical ways to serve, love and “one another” People of Peace and their *oikos* relationships. Clearly, this is a wonderful way to express the reality of the Kingdom of God in tangible ways.

Your mission context will determine exactly what this might look like. Reaching the urban poor is different from serving college kids or the upper middle classes in the suburbs. But the principle of loving service is the underlying theme.

As I noted earlier, the temptation can be to jump to this as a safe zone, so make sure that you aren't doing this and skipping the "naturally supernatural" aspect of your witness.

3. Can I Share My Story?

In addition to being naturally supernatural and serving, we are also attentive to moments when we can share part of our story. Whether it is how we came to Jesus, significant moments along the way since then, or simply something He has done in the past seven days, these are our stories—and friends share their stories with one other.

Of course, my assumption here is that you already have a listening posture with the lost people you encounter, which is part of how you identify a Person of Peace (refer back to the "Listen: God Is Speaking!" earlier section).

We need to be people who take time to listen, to genuinely know those we love and are called to love intentionally. The benefit of living like this is that it is not abrasive or rude when we share parts of our story about how Jesus has impacted us. In fact, it feels entirely appropriate and normal.

4. Can I Share God's Story?

There comes a time and a place where we simply have to share the content of the gospel. That will involve us summoning courage, praying internally and opening our mouth to speak! Do you remember the bit about feeling like a lamb walking through a field of wolves? Jesus knows it will be scary, but having acknowledged that, He then doesn't let us off the hook for witnessing.

Sometimes you will simply be sharing one idea, Scripture or insight about God. Other times, it might be some of the core content of the gospel, in a way that is appropriate for that person and the context you are in.

A lot is written about this aspect of evangelism, and there are plenty of great materials that can fill gaps in your knowledge of the Good News (e.g., what is the

evidence for the existence of Jesus? Did He really rise from the dead? What about other religions?).

My encouragement to you is not to switch into some strange, non-relational mode in your zeal to share the content of the gospel. Don't be *that* Christian!

Instead, chat, listen, ask questions, respect what your friend says, allow them to say dumb things (which they probably know are dumb views), ask God for simple yet clear words, pray like crazy, and have fun (you can laugh while doing this!). There is no objective gauge for knowing how far to push a specific conversation. It will be you sensing the prompting of the Holy Spirit mixed with some trial and error.

But it is an important moment, which we can't duck. You, after all, have the relational capital to speak love and truth into the life of your Person of Peace. They do need to come to that place of repentance and wholehearted commitment to Christ and His cause.

My friend Jason Lantz talks about revealing neither a pushy Jesus nor a mushy Jesus! Pushy Jesus is akin to Bible-bashing someone, when we operate with little emotional intelligence and harangue people in a controlling manner. Mushy Jesus does the opposite, and is so watered down as to offer little, if any, of the challenge of the gospel, in the mistaken belief that our top priority is to be nice. Often, we fail to be witnesses because we misunderstand what Jesus calls us to do.

To Recap:

- 1. Can I Pray for You?**
- 2. Can I Serve You?**
- 3. Can I Share My Story?**
- 4. Can I Share God's Story?**

It is worth memorizing these questions, and seeing them as tools to select from in the different conversations and situations you experience. Ask yourself:

- What is the story of this person?
- What is my history with them?
- What would be most helpful?
- How does the Holy Spirit seem to be at work right now?
- How can I step back to make room for the Holy Spirit to step forward?

Then go for it!

CHAPTER 4: NEXT STEPS WITH PERSON OF PEACE

What Others Have Taught About Person Of Peace

Many Christians have used Person of Peace as a powerful tool to equip people to go as witnesses for Jesus. While often it has been taught in the context of training cross-cultural missionaries, especially in pioneer contexts, it is equally applicable in our everyday life of going to work, school and the grocery store.

Dr. Tom Wolf was probably the pioneer thinker on Person of Peace in the modern church in the West. He describes three markers of a Person of Peace:

1. A Person of Receptivity – Jesus is already at work in their life, so they are open to those who carry the presence of Jesus with them. Thus, our role as missionaries is to recognize where the Holy Spirit has gone ahead of us.
2. A Person of Reputation – whether good or bad, that reputation will enable them to gather others to hear about the difference Jesus is making in their life.
3. A Person of Referral – the gatekeeper principle builds on their being a person of reputation, so that their *oikos* is impacted.

Wolf also identifies People of Goodwill. Whereas a Person of Peace will, in time, become a disciple of Jesus, others who have seemed open may not ever fully respond to Christ. But Wolf notes that such people may be extremely positive about the difference Christians make to the wider community, and thus become their “protector, promoter and pathway finder.”

Mike Breen, and Bob and Mary Hopkins, identify seven markers of a Person of Peace. They suggest we use:

- Perception – sensing the Person of Peace’s openness to God.
- Presence – when you are present in a situation, you naturally draw Persons of Peace to you because of your (Jesus-inspired) difference.
- Proclamation – speaking as Jesus would and seeing who responds.
- Passing Relationships – brief moments when you influence someone you will otherwise not encounter again, such as at the checkout or on a plane.
- Permanent Relationships – those long-term connections with family and close friends.
- Preparation – you cultivate the ground through your ongoing activities.
- Power – allowing God to impact people, for instance, through healing.

George Patterson and Gallen Currah give a [list of 12 short but very helpful reflections](#) on living out Person of Peace.

Sugar Creek Baptist Church has an [eight-page document on Person of Peace](#), which in particular does a good job of going through the Bible for examples and asking application questions.

Finally, enormous potential exists in the Person of Peace principle. Victor Choudrie has overseen an enormous church planting movement across India that has baptized over a million people in the past decade, and where the focus is on making disciples who can make disciples.

One of their key strategies is sending small teams to look for the Person of Peace in specific villages or locations. Their expectation is that a new church will be planted in the house of the Person of Peace, and that their networks of relationships will be evangelized. Read Choudrie's [14 Steps to Church Planting based on Luke 10](#).

Let's pray and ask the Lord of the harvest to do something similar here in the West!

Summary

A Person of Peace is someone who isn't a Christian and who:

- Welcomes you
- Receives you (and thus, probably unknowingly at first, receives Jesus in you)
- Serves you
- You intentionally invest in
- Operates as a gatekeeper, opening relational doorways into their network of relationships

Remember: They like you and you like them.

It is not meant to be relational torture.

Rather, it is an intentional developing of a friendship that is such a fun and rewarding thing both for you and for them!

Overall, Person of Peace is a strategy given by Jesus to help you be a more supernaturally natural and fruitful witness for Him.

Now Go And Do This!

Hopefully this short eBook has inspired you to believe that missional living is possible in your life today. If you are a leader in your church, you now have in your hands a very practical tool for witnessing that releases people to take the gospel out into the world (please invite as many people as you wish to download this eBook – it's free for that reason!).

Don't forget: The genius of Person of Peace is that it is so simple! Anyone who is following Jesus can do this, however basic their faith is, as it is cross-cultural and works in every time and place.

When Hannah and I arrived at RiverTree, it was easy to see that the church had faithfully journeyed from *for* to *with*, and were poised to become "*one of*." Person of Peace proved to be a down-to-earth practice that many could adopt, and thus help tip the church into becoming *one of*. The heart drawing gave us a simple means of communicating and encouraging this as an easily reproducible lifestyle.

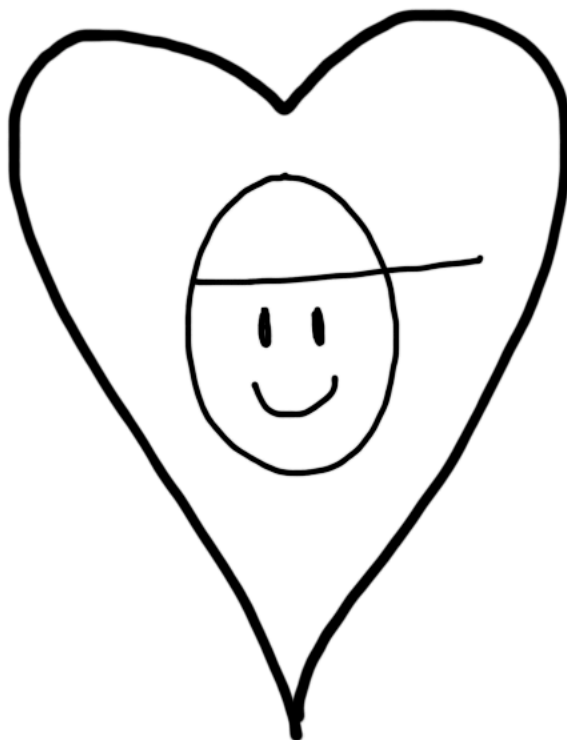
Connect With Me

Thanks so much for plowing through this eBook!

I'd love to connect with you and hear some of your missional stories, especially as you seek out and reach your own People of Peace. Here are some ways to keep the conversation going – I'm an active user in each of these spaces, and my blog has TONS of material related to missional life, including living out Person of Peace and lots on missional communities.

@alexabsalom
alexabsalom.com
facebook.com/missionalcommunities

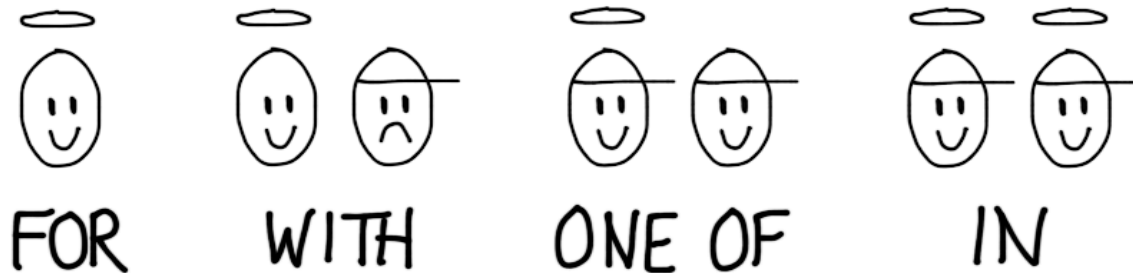
In order to help you start to apply this material in your context today, some application questions follow. I suggest you use these both personally and in teams, so that you start to implement what is a wonderfully simple, biblical and effective strategy for releasing workers into the harvest field.



STUDY GUIDE

One Of

Look at the *One Of* drawing:



Personally, where would you place yourself in this journey to becoming "one of"?
Where were you a few years ago?
What is your biggest obstacle moving to the next stage in this process?

As a community, where would you place your church in this journey?
Where were you a few years ago?
What is the biggest obstacle to you moving to the next stage in this process?

Understanding Person Of Peace

Without looking at the book, define Person of Peace. Then go back and compare!

Write down the name of someone who has been a Person of Peace for you in your past (even if you didn't use that language then).

In the past, how comfortable have you been with allowing a Person of Peace to serve you?

Previously, what strategies for intentional investment in your Person of Peace have proven most effective?

How deliberate are you in eating regularly with non-Christians? What needs to change?

Identifying Your Person Of Peace

The answers below should refer to people who are not yet Christians

Who are you called to love intentionally?

Who comes to mind in response to, "They like you and you like them"?

Who is your heart best shaped to reach for Jesus?

If you are not sure, try answering:

- Who is already responding positively to you?

- Who do you currently "do life with" most enthusiastically?

- Do you have a Place of Peace?

What is Jesus saying to you as you pray about this?

Narrowing Your Options

If you have a variety of possibilities, think through:

Where do you have the most favor?

Is there an obvious “open doorway” of opportunity for the Kingdom to advance?

Where do you think you will easily connect and most impact lives?

List the different oikos that you keep jumping between.

Where should you stay and invest?

What do you need to say “no” to for better focus?

Making This A Lifestyle

How can you become better at inviting Jesus into the everyday greetings and little interactions of your day?

Specifically, how can you intentionally invest in your Person of Peace relationship?

What holds you back from being “naturally supernatural” with your Person of Peace?

What are the things your Person of Peace will do that are different culturally for you? Where do you need the courage to walk into something that is not like you?

What is it about your life that makes you at risk of rejection, e.g. values, how you spend money, forgive, etc?

How can you best pray for your Person of Peace?