

The Evangelistic Church (2)

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[0 : 0 0] right we'll just continue where we left off in our discussion at the table talking about is there a bit of feedback there is it ok talking about the issue of change and I think it's very important to note the order of these first two topics I think you prioritise the gospel and you hope that the gospel itself will lead to change and that the gospel will be a catalyst and inspiration for change and that people might agree that certain things need to be done for the sake of the gospel so you don't begin with change and then trying you begin with the gospel I think and then you look in as what needs to be done then you look out and so it goes on let's pick up on where we were with a culture of invitation we were talking about inviting people to church church and of course there might be many steps between someone's first contact with a Christian and then actually attending a church service on a Sunday

I think one of the things that's very important in this is hospitality hospitality and the use of the home and Tim Chester has a lot to say about these sorts of things one of his books on the bookstall about the importance of inviting people to your home and I can't remember who it was that used this phrase but saying mix your circles of hospitality so there might be an occasion a birthday or celebrating exams or you know something he uses any excuse for having people round and he says you ask a couple of Christian families you ask a couple of non-Christian families people wouldn't normally meet each other round a table and you mix your circles of hospitality and of course the home can also be used in a much more overtly evangelistic way and eventually that kind of relationship building through the home might result in an evangelistic Bible study in the home and there are lots of other strategies as well if I mention lots of things it's not to say you should be doing them all but it's just to say these are things that people have tried as we've heard

David say lots of different things that people have done and maybe if you pick up on one of them it might be useful one illustration I know from friends on the mainland of what they've done with their home is to start a book group now some people do these book groups reading Christian books and they invite non-Christians to come but they did it reading just contemporary books novels in the main and people come Christians and non-Christians and discuss moral and philosophical and literary issues just in a home around the table non-believers you know if you're not comfortable with contemporary novels you might choose classic novels and non-believers tend not to feel got at by having to read Dostoevsky or somebody like that now to go back to the church and inviting people or creating opportunities for people to invite their friends some of the books

I was reading call these stepping stones or bridges or whatever you want to call them and some of them could simply be social events opportunities for non-believers to rub shoulders with Christians these can be for all different kinds of ages or groups or whatever here's an illustration from the mainland some of you will think that this is very unspiritual but I know of a church which found a whole new circle of contacts for the gospel and it eventually led to some of these people being converted non-churchgoers because this church organized regular Saturday morning walks just the church people inviting friends and saying we're going for a walk on a Sunday morning different place every time we do it occasionally they would have somebody who knew about plants or buildings or local history leading the walk and saying something as people went along sometimes just a ramble and people found it easy to invite others to that and they found it easy to walk and talk they developed relationships and from that people are invited to something more obviously evangelistic and so it goes on just an idea an idea that worked in one place

I've seen in our own context and back somebody inviting a non-church person to help with car washing at a fundraising car wash and breakfast for raising money for Kenny John if you think about it it's not a difficult thing to say to a guy who doesn't go to church we need somebody strong to help us wash cars could you come along somebody might come along to that kind of thing and then sit in at a breakfast with people and meet a whole circle of folk so there are opportunities and food always helps the church will also offer all kinds of things to young people and we shouldn't forget the opportunity given by Sunday school I mean a Sunday school with a gospel at its center should expect that people will come to faith through the Sunday school bridges for unchurched families

[6 : 23]

I think it was in Ian D's time in back that children's church was started once a month Sunday afternoon non-churched families with little children coming to a very informal little service with juice and biscuits and so on and it's provided a stepping stone to church for some unchurched families all kinds of other things I won't talk about youth work it's probably a topic for your next conference it's a subject all on its own the church can offer a whole range of other more intentional gospel opportunities for inviting others perhaps a talk by a Christian who's an expert on something you know a John Lennox on science and faith you could hold it in your own hall or a community venue or in a hotel wherever St Andrews is a very easy place to put on that kind of thing people in

St Andrews would come to a public lecture by an expert even though it was being put on by the free church they would come if the speaker on the topic was credible enough so we had things like we had Grant McCaskill in the congregation he's now Professor McCaskill at Aberdeen and when the Da Vinci Code and the Historicity of the Gospels was a big deal Grant put on a public illustrated lecture on Da Vinci and the Gospels Da Vinci Code and the Gospels and we got loads of people coming along to that event we offered lots of other things like that to some of you I know talking to you have done parenting courses with a Christian perspective on these challenges lots of us have done Christianity Explored which you all know about I don't need to go into but this mix of discussing the Bible and food it's been a tremendous resource it actually might be worth you reflecting for a minute or two on what makes

Christianity Explored such an effective strategy and working out from that drawing lessons that might be applied more widely to other things or you can have special services to invite people to guest services and family services special occasions harvest Thanksgiving or Remembers Day or things that people might come to for particular reasons the easiest special service to get neighbours and colleagues come to is a cattle service but perhaps that's a step too far for some of you even in a neutral venue another area that I need to mention another area that gives opportunities for invitation is having a mission week or a mission fortnight that can be done by a church themselves or with an invited team of helpers if you don't have enough people yourselves to staff the kind of things that you think should be done now it's important to say this that a mission should never be seen as a substitute for ongoing evangelism ourselves sometimes people do no evangelism they bring in a team for a week and say in effect they'll do our evangelism for us and then there's no follow up so that's not the way to use a mission but a mission can be very useful in a congregation that's doing ongoing evangelism as it gives a sort of focus to what's being done in the church just remember a mission takes an enormous amount of time and effort and prayer and expense forward planning and preparation of events and booking venues and getting speakers and perhaps training people and so on but it can really get a congregation active planning events for all kinds of people and for all kinds of ages and thinking about what can we do and where can we do it and what sort of people do we need to cater for and who might come to this kind of event and get the team and get the speakers and so on and special things for all age groups during the week and special services maybe on two

Lord's days I found it really liven up a church in one particular context and it also makes the church very visible in a community for a week or two weeks and it's also easier to invite people to things when there's all kinds of things going on in different places and people don't stick out like a sore thumb going to a Christian event because lots of people are going to Christian events during that week we did board my first charge and I asked a young free church divinity student and a promising evangelist to choose a team and to come and lead a mission I often wonder whatever happened to David Robertson your big break Tim

Keller was once in the award as well and before he came to Muir award nobody had ever heard of him it's true it's important not to try to do many things I've just run through a list of possibilities not so that people might feel they have to do any of them but just to begin to think about what we might do to invite people in in various ways in our homes or in our churches or in special events I think it's much better to do one thing and do it really well than try to do too much so we ask what does God want us to do with the resources he has given us in the place where he has placed us and don't despise small steps every great athlete who won a medal at the Olympics has started their journey with one step and every

[13 : 00] Christian has started their journey with one spiritual step what matters is the direction of travel so we encourage people to invite others and I think also to accompany others that they have invited and it's a very biblical strategy if you think the beginning of John's gospel Andrew and another disciple of the Baptist ask Jesus where he's staying and Jesus says come and you will see so they accept the invitation Andrew finds Simon and brings him to Jesus then Philip is called by Jesus Philip finds Nathaniel Nathaniel is incredulous about a Messiah from Nazareth so Philip responds with the words come and see little later the woman at the well meets Jesus goes back to her community invites people come and see a man who and so it goes on you read the gospels with that in mind Jesus is always inviting people in different ways and people are always inviting others in various ways like a

Levi to his home you're converted what do you do you have a party for friends and colleagues because you want them to meet Jesus too but it's actually the strategy of the whole Bible in various ways think of the text all the way back in numbers 10 come with us and we will do you good and remember as we invite people to come with us some will say yes some will say no but if we don't invite the answer will never be yes number number six a culture of engagement engagement if invitation was saying let's invite people in in different ways engagement is saying let's go out to people let's go out church now as individuals of course

Christians are involved in their communities in all kinds of ways and I'll say again that a lot of the best gospel work maybe most of the best gospel work is done by individual Christians in informal contacts and friendships and so on but we're asking here about my topic the topic I was given was the church so how should the church be involved in the wider life of its community now every church is placed in a community with deep spiritual needs which only the gospel can meet and we're also placed in communities with a host of other practical needs which call for the love of Christ to be shown in practical ways and I'm going to assume that we're called not simply to be something a presence in a community but to go out into the community in the name of Christ to use the image again that our chairman has on the leaflet we filled in the salt and light the salt needs to be shaken out of the salt cellar into the community the light needs to shine in dark places now how and where we do this is actually a much debated and very controversial issue for some but I'm simply going to argue that we should seek to build bridges between church and community some of them simply making contact some building relationships some meeting various practical needs and others overtly evangelistic

I won't be able to go through them all but let me begin with that last category of clearly evangelistic I don't think anybody here will doubt that we're called today the gospel to the community we see the lord in the gospels going out to the community taking the message to where people are if you think about it most of his gospel work is done out in the work of day world and he was criticized by the religious leaders of his day specifically for doing that and going out to where people were and sitting with sinners at their meal tables and so on and Paul and others did this in the new testament think of Paul in Athens in Acts 17 again in the marketplace literally and also in the marketplace of ideas of his day or in

Ephesus this is in Acts 19 where he used the lecture hall of somebody called Tyrannus Paul actually went to secular or maybe neutral territory or secular territory got a building where people felt comfortable and he was there in the middle of every day during the time when people would perhaps have some sort of siesta and they would come to the lecture hall of Tyrannus and listen to Paul and we're told that the whole region of Asia as that region was known heard the word of the Lord now we might go out in a similar manner some of you here will use the old schoolhouse in Shabbos this evening in a very Pauline way if you can't have an apostle I suppose a moderator will have to do others use this very venue for Cabber faith as many people throughout the country use hotels and restaurants and coffee shops and even beyond lots of other things that can be done out in a community for the gospel one very popular way we found on the mainland was to use a neutral venue and hold a debate between a

[19:18] Christian and a non-Christian a topic of interest and again people like that and people will come to that kind of thing very easily as long as the speaker is credible and the venue is appropriate and comfortable and it's not difficult to get people to participate from the floor on issues like that people love coming and taking on a Christian other people I know use music and the arts perhaps a Christian talking about their own music and showcasing their own work and then talking about the gospel and being a Christian in their own world those who are more imaginative than me can think of many other things as well there's also the whole area of the church meeting broader needs you know physical and social needs now I know that there are some in the free church maybe many there's certainly many in other reformed churches who don't believe that the church as a church should be engaged in this kind of work they believe that individual

Christians do this in their own lives or maybe professionally through a welfare state but they don't believe that the church should be involved in simply doing good deeds in the community for the sake of the good that's done they say the church is to be involved evangelistically and if something isn't directly and overtly evangelistic it's not the church's job to do it they will often quote Tim Keller to disagree with him this is Tim Keller in his book center church a missional church must understand itself as a servant community a counterculture for the common good its neighbors must see it as a servant society sacrificially pouring out its time and wealth for the common good of the city in his case or as he's often said elsewhere he believes that the church is called to meet needs with deeds very simple way to put it there are needs out there is the church called to meet needs with deeds now I think that

Keller's position is actually classically reformed Calvin's church in Geneva was engaged in a great deal of diaconal ministry meeting all kinds of needs throughout the city and that became the model for a good deal of the Dutch tradition and a good deal also of the Scottish tradition and I used to encourage students at college to read at least part of a book called Candy for the Foundling when I first saw the title I couldn't work out what it was about a foundling a child left just left at the church door for the church to take in and look after one of its families and candy the word they used then for sweets as Americans still do and where did this come from from a Kirk session minute we must buy some candy for the foundling and it's used the title for the book showing that the Scottish reform tradition for a couple of centuries did actually deal with the needs they saw in the communities around them and Thomas

Chalmers when the free church was set up one of the first things he wanted to see done was to restore the biblical office of the diaconate and he saw a job for the diaconate not simply with its own membership with its own church membership but in the wider community around with all the ignorance and poverty and human squalid and degradation that he saw he wanted the church to reach out and care for the community so as has been said our heritage is to care in practical ways and maybe to care in such a way that if we disappeared overnight the community would really miss us now there are obvious limits to what we can do in meeting needs with deeds but again maybe we can simply reflect on things that we might do here's an illustration that maybe is more relevant to the previous topic of invitation sort of bridges them both but I'll put it in here in back we were recently made aware of the community's need for a mother and toddler group and that is now up and toddling now it's on our premises because we have such a good the E&D; memorial hall we have such a good hall so it's on our premises but you know it's not physically out in the community but it seems to be a simple example of engaging with a practical need in the community and providing for it and then you begin to build bridges with people who have never been in the door before and relationships with people who wouldn't have crossed your threshold for any other reason now it may lead perhaps one day to an evangelistic bible study for young mothers but it doesn't need to immediately it's meeting a need with deeds people do the same kind of thing for elderly people many congregations have an afternoon tea or a lunch club for older people and we found that in back just beginning to trying to something about this when we did some door to door work we found a surprising number of lonely elderly even in a community where people still know each other and care for each other that are still lonely elderly who would like to meet other people much of your youth work would come into this kind of category

I guess and we did some of this in St Andrews in the community I'm sorry to keep pointing to the man on my left but I just realised before I say the name we started a youth club for the kids who lived in the area around where we had our church services morning service then and we called it ID it wasn't honour of a great journalist or anything it was short for identity talk to these kids and they talked about identity and finding identity so the first meeting made identity cards for them and the club was called ID others of you are involved in things like road to recovery out in the community I know that has an evangelistic side of course as well and so on others are involved in food banks or similar initiatives perhaps alongside Salvation Army or other groups others involved in street pastors we did something like that in

[26 : 49] St. Andrew's before street pastors were coming officially on the scene as I left but students from our church and one or two other churches through the CU would give out toasties late Friday night or Saturday night to people in and out of pubs and so on and we had a place they knew they could come and have a toasty and a tea or a coffee and a seat and a conversation and so on so it was meeting a need that we hope would lead to evangelism other churches on the mainland have heard dealing with counselling issues marriage issues or debt issues and so on so the motivation for any of that think about it is simply I think the love of Christ now it may result in fruit for the gospel but that sometimes takes a long time to come and we need to be patient but it's certainly work that illustrates a church that's concerned for a community it illustrates the gospel it advertises the gospel it's work that brings us into contact with people we would never meet at close quarters perhaps in any other way and it can build relationships with the gospel again the point is if you do it start small with something manageable and do it really really well so you have a reputation for doing something practical and doing it well another area of engagement in a community is door to door work that was raised last night it's often a very useful way of getting information about the church into people's hands and some churches have a parish magazine they take round every quarter or gospel literature they take round

I've known one church where one of the focus they had was to say to everybody they met at the door we pray for you for this whole community and people are surprised at that and then would you like us to pray for anything specific in your life obviously provises about keeping certain things very private some people were willing to say somebody is very ill we'd love you to pray so all kinds of openings another area of engagement is the media local magazines so there's an opportunity for Christians to contribute or the kind of columns we read I better not mention them again but you know there are local papers with sometimes more than one minister on a page expressing rather different understandings of the gospel perhaps others are involved in local radio television here others very involved in social media about which

I know only what Cathy reads out to me from Facebook and the rest but in a world where people live online especially a younger generation living online it's really important I'm told one Hebridean minister has even tweeted summaries of bible books in four words each so his sermons must be short there are other engagements I don't know why END suddenly came into every paragraph in my head there there are other engagements where some would not wish to go but let's push let's push the boat out in terms of the previous image and another story about me getting into trouble with the Lewis presbytery now this is not the present presbytery which wouldn't think of themselves as policing the rest of the church but there might have been an age generation where that was felt to be part of the role of the

Lewis presbytery to point out to others all the time where they were going wrong and there was one occasion where I was sitting at a senate meeting at the free church college and my colleagues hadn't told me about a particular letter I never saw the letter or the reply to it but the letter was wanting information whether it was true they had heard that I'd visited the local mosque new mosque in Edinburgh and whether this was true and if it was what action the senate and then the presbytery were going to take with me for having broken my vows in some way I think it was by going to the mosque I would never actually go to a mosque just like that but I was teaching apologetics among other things and the mosque had advertised that they were having one of their top their sort of

David Robertson down in England was coming up to Edinburgh and was going to tell Edinburgh why Islam was right but especially why Christianity was wrong and why Jesus wasn't divine and why Jesus didn't die on the cross and why the gospels are full of nonsense and have been changed by Christians and so on so he was going to come and do this and people were invited to come and engage with him I thought it was a great opportunity for me to take students who were there was no pressure in students it was part of the course but students who were willing to go to take a group of students with me and take them to the mosque it was actually quite an intimidating situation we were sitting at the back and it looked like 150 200 men with black beards all turning looking at us whenever we spoke but we did it for the sake of the gospel to learn a little more about what these people are saying about us be able to engage with

[33 : 01] Muslims and their objections to us but clearly the presbytery here thought it was a heretical act but somebody from the college wrote a nice letter and we never heard any more about it in terms of all of this engagement I'll need to give five minutes to each of the final points to put all this about engagement in another way think of the significance of body language church the incarnation was the body language of God on earth and still the body language of God in heaven so what is God's body language now on earth well the church is the body of Christ we are his visible presence in the world and we are called to do what Christ did and to be his hands and his feet and like him to go about doing good that's a challenge to us individually of course but is it also a challenge to us corporately as a church that we are called to embody

Christ publicly in ways that are seen by a community in ways that cannot be hidden is the church the body language of God in a community and if it is remember that body language can be very eloquent number seven a culture of service this is simply talking about let's use the church as gifts I won't go through all of this but it struck me reading some of the books that one of the things that seems to mark evangelistic churches and it seems to be a characteristic of growing churches throughout our land is the involvement of laity for want of a better word in the ministries of the church not simply that lay people use their gifts in their daily lives which of course they will do but the church harnesses the gifts that

God has given its people there's something very attractive when you visit churches like that seeing men and women young people older people in all ages in between all kinds of different personalities and experiences and giftings immersed in the ministries of the church and helping to pioneer new initiatives now in some places no doubt it just happens inspired by the pulpit and the fellowship in other places it seems to be much more organized but however it's done Christian people should be playing their part the part for which God has equipped them to base this on scripture the obvious passage is Ephesians 4 11 to 12 as you know don't be told many times that equipping the membership for the church's ministry is one of the biblical tasks of the church's leadership so Paul talks about the offices of the church coming at last to evangelists and pastors and teachers and he says that they are to be directed to this end quote to equip the saints or to put the saints on a functional footing for the work of ministry meaning their ministry for the sake of building up the body of

Christ so in that passage the leadership of the church has the job of preparing people and equipping people or showing people that they are equipped and harnessing people's gifts for their ministry in the body and through the body as well some of some of some of the church attention and I've heard that so many times that I need to believe that they actually do believe it I don't know what the problem is is it the way they're reading the Bible have they just grown up in a culture where you're not expected to do too much publicly but they certainly haven't come to see and recognize their gifts and think that these gifts might be used for the church and we need to encourage people to find their gifting and use them for the church as well as in their daily lives

I don't think I'll say much more about this topic except to give you an acronym that I read many years ago for gifting and I found it very helpful it's shape S stands for spiritual gifts the spirit is of course the supreme gift and he gives spiritual gifts to his people we can discuss whether these are brand new gifts or the spirit working with existing even latent talents but anyway spiritual gifts for S it's hard what do you have a heart for what do you really feel passionately about you might say I've got a heart for the young or I've got a heart for the lonely elderly or I've got a heart for the poor well that's important you've got a heart for something A abilities the actual things you're good at doing it might be a natural ability or a talent or a sporting ability it might be things you've learned through your job through training professional skills but you have abilities that can be used

[39 : 20] P is personality God's given us all different temperaments and these things suit us for different kinds of things and all temperaments should be welcome and E is experiences we all have our own different life experiences over the years and these can be used by the Lord in service and I read somebody saying that sometimes you only find the point of an experience when you find how it equips you to minister to somebody else you wonder why you went through something then one day you realize that you can now comfort someone with a comfort wherewith you were comforted perhaps many years ago I think SHAPE is a very helpful acronym for all of us as we think about giftings churches can do it beginning with the gifts and seeing what they have and what they might do other churches begin it with the needs of the church and listing the needs and then looking for people with the gifts to fill them so that latter one is often called ministry led start with the ministries look for the people the other one is gift led start with the gifts you have and see what you might do because of these gifts

I'm also a great believer myself in teams and I just throw out the idea that a church might have an evangelism team men and women young and older reporting to the minister in session but people who are released by the leadership to say go and think about what you might do what we might do pray and plan and read and talk and go and see what other churches are doing and come back to us and talk about it and lead some new initiative and so on I also have a thing I'm told in back about the ministry of women I don't mean women in the ministry but the ministry of women and I think churches that have women in the majority in the communicant membership and all the gifts that they represent we perhaps aren't using the gifts of women in the way that we might in the ministries of our church perhaps one of the keys to maximizing gospel potential might be simply to empower the majority of our membership to exercise their gifts in and through the church number eight is a culture of confidence and by this maybe you'll guess that

I don't mean self confidence but let's find confidence in God we should have no confidence in ourselves no strength no power no wisdom but we find our confidence in the Lord so the evangelistic church as I have looked at churches and read about churches tends to be a confident church which places its confidence in the Lord so self confidence is out but God confidence is in now I have a whole list of things here that some of them you'll think they're not they're more theological and practical but I actually think when you get hold of them they are practical I won't discuss them just mention most of them think of our confidence in the electing father the father who has given a people to his son and the son who could say to Paul in Acts 18

I have many people in this city now we may not get a revelation like that but it's actually an exciting thing to believe in a sovereign God who has his people and we are looking for these people to come in and who knows how many of his people he has in our village or town and people that he has purposed will be reached through us reaching out to them think of our confidence in the son he's our mission director whatever David Merida's title is he's an under mission director whatever Jesus is our mission director and he's also the evangelist who's head over everything for the church including evangelism a whole list of texts here where Jesus is the preacher if you think about one that you know very well John 10 Jesus looking to a future Gentile mission to sheep not of the

Jewish fold to a mission that will happen when he has returned to heaven and he says I must bring them also and they will listen to my voice so as a Gentile mission has unfolded for two millennia every time anybody's converted it's because they heard the voice of Jesus say come up to me and rest from a great free church hymn writer think of our confidence in the spirit Jesus said his disciples would be clothed with power from on high and they were to be his witnesses in Judea and the ends of the earth and he's still the empowering evangelistic spirit think of our confidence in the scriptures the word of God is living and active we have confidence in the book that's why in St.

[45 : 17] Andrew's I used to be so thrilled if a student took a gospel and said I'll read it I mean I honestly used to sometimes think that's 90% of my work done that's 99% of my work done they've taken a gospel and they've promised they'll read it and these are people who are used to reading and they'll like to come back and say I read it and I didn't agree with it so they will read it and I was so excited about that sometimes I'm not always as confident as I should be in the word Calum Ian will know what I'm talking about here when there was a series in the letter of James where somebody foolishly thought that he could go through James dealing with every verse in four midweek longer than usual sermons so four 45 minute talks on James for Christians and somebody in the community said you're always talking about inviting people so I've invited a girl who's not a

Christian to come on Wednesday nights and I thought this is not the one to invite her to and I had no confidence at all that girl came to these four nights and kept coming to the prayer meeting and kept coming to everything and became a member and you know she'd made a big jump coming from where she did to coming to a midweek lecture on James but the Bible spoke to her and she got immersed in scripture and I was really rebuked from my own lack of confidence in the actual word of God think of our confidence in the gospel it's the power of God for salvation 1 Corinthians 6 9 11 I keep going back to 1 Corinthians look at the list there 6 9 11 of the kinds of people who are saved they're a list of what people would have thought of perhaps as impossible cases but you were washed he says and I've often thought back how often testimonies reinforce my confidence in

God's work there's a culture that I didn't know in the mainland of people in home was just giving their testimonies and everyone is so different and they really reinforce your belief in the power of God to reach individuals in his own unique way and change anybody however they think think of our confidence in spiritual weapons 2 Corinthians 10 4 the weapons of our warfare you know the passage well our confidence is in God's weapons as we do the work of the gospel as I read somebody saying don't use the world's weapons and try and ape the world he said you can't outworld the world I think that's a great phrase you can't outworld the world so don't even try and think of our confidence the universal relevance of the message the unique translatability of the Christian faith in any culture a long time ago

I had a teacher called Andrew Walls a great scholar of what's known as missiology and he used to talk he was a church historian he used to talk about the translatability the translation principle in the Christian faith and the way that the same gospel as you go through the centuries and go across geographical areas of the world and different cultures the same gospel will convert individuals and sometimes communities and they will express the gospel in their own way they won't look or sound or speak or dress or whatever like Christians in another culture you know the gospel will really be part of them and their culture and for me if you think of it actually as a contrast with another world faith how often you know somebody belongs to that faith because of the way they're dressed they reflect a particular culture where the faith started but you can't tell a Christian by walking through an airport and seeing how somebody just looks on the outside and it's actually one of the key arguments

I think for the truth of the gospel that you can go to some very remote group of people or something known as primal people they seem to be at a very early stage of all kinds of things and they are changed by the gospel and expressed in their own way and they say Jesus is the answer to my needs and then you get Tim Keller going to Manhattan to all kinds of college educated yuppie rich people secularized western people they're converted and they say Jesus is the answer to my deepest needs and they express their faith in their way it's a vital argument the translatability of the gospel which is not the product of a culture or the prisoner of a culture but the answer to the needs of the human heart in any and every culture point number nine is a culture of discipling let's provide for new converts that's part of the great commission and we need to think about how we can nurture new people in the faith because people are coming as

[51 : 10] David has kept emphasizing from so far away from the way that we think and speak and they need to learn a new language they need to learn a new ethical system they need to learn all kinds of things and we can't any longer perhaps just assume that they know it or they'll pick it up we need to disciple new believers but I don't have time to deal with that one and then number ten a culture of prayer let's be people of prayer now prayer is one of the great strengths of the Christianity we've long known long known here private prayer family prayer congregational prayer and so there's nothing more vital for evangelism than prayer and I put it at the end I'm sorry I don't have time to deal with it in any depth but I put it at the end not as an afterthought but the idea was to give it deliberate prominence at the very end that everything that has gone before needs to be bathed in the prayer with which we conclude even just think about the

Lord's prayer when Jesus was asked by his disciples give us a prayer teach us to pray and you think about the Lord's prayer especially the first half of it isn't it a missional prayer it's longing for the father's name to be hallowed and for his kingdom to come and for his will to be done on earth these are missional petitions in the basic model prayer given to us by the Lord we have to pray for mission our praying is the clearest acknowledgement that gospel blessing is God's prerogative again I don't need to tell you that we all know that only God can change anyone and every conversion is a miracle God can change anyone only God can change anyone so we pray and God can change anyone so we pray and we pray for the spirit and though we're not Ezekiel let me use this text we pray to the spirit as Ezekiel did in a valley of dry bones quote come from the four winds of breath and the breath came into them and they lived

Ezekiel 37 prayer is the bridge there between death and breath our prayer is also the clearest acknowledgement that we are in a spiritual battle prayer is realism and you might look at 2 Corinthians 4 following the God of this world has blinded their minds or Ephesians 6 spiritual warfare and that passage section concludes with a reference to prayer we pray for our ministers I wanted to say things about that plenty texts about that we pray for every ministry of the congregation we are grateful for those no longer able to come to church who continue to pray in advancing years I sometimes think that some of the greatest work these saints have ever done is done in the years where we don't see them in church but we know from talking to them that they're praying all the time for the church and we pray for our families and friends and neighbors and colleagues and we pray for opportunities to speak and how to speak and for the right attitudes and the right words and crucially we pray

Nehemiah-like in the micro moment between someone's question and her answer it's a lovely thing Nehemiah 1 4 5 he's asked a question so I prayed to the Lord of heaven and I said that micro prayer and we pray for each other's daily witness and many other things that I don't have a voice to talk about and corporate prayer so important Acts 1 what do the first Christians do their meeting in prayer Acts 1 14 and what do they do when they need help they pray together Acts 4 31 and when they had prayed the place was shaken and they were all filled with the spirit and continued to speak the word of God with boldness so corporate prayer is very important in Acts and the prayer meeting should not be an optional extra if we want the world to believe and I believe that I am able if I can put it this way to ride the breeze in back because the prayer meetings in tongues times two are an absolute priority for the

Lord's people Wednesday and Thursday every week that concluding reference in touch and in tune not out of touch and out of tune by in touch I mean being in touch with our time and place both with the age in which we live and the way it thinks and with the communities in which providence has placed us God has not placed us in some supposed golden age of the past but he's placed us now in this time and in this place with its own peculiar challenges and we want to know this place as it is now and how we can reach this changed and changing community the unchanging message of the gospel perhaps to paraphrase another famous verse 1st chronicles 12 we can become men and women of Issachar who understood the times and knew what Israel ought to do and in tune final paragraph we don't want to be in tune with the age we want to be in touch with the age but we want to be in tune with the

[57 : 28] Lord attuned to his heart and his mission and we want to be in tune with one another as congregations and as presbycies and how is that possible well think of the illustration of an orchestra often often used it's not original to me and this will bring us back to where we began with the gospel think of that illustration where the instruments in an orchestra are all out of tune it won't help at all to tune your musical instrument to that of your neighbour or to that of anyone else's because they're all out of tune and if each of them is only slightly out then each of them will need to be tuned to one reliable source of pitch and spiritually where do you find that source so that our lives and ministries are properly in tune with the Lord and with what his will is for us we find that source of pitch in only one place as we tune into one clear certain sound and that of course is the sound of the gospel amen thank you for listening so patiently applause applause applause applause