

To Reach Your Community, You Must Fall in Love with Your Community

"Give me Scotland or I die!"

That's what John Knox said of Scotland. I would say: **To fall in love with your community, you have to die--to yourself, to the mission and to your own preferences.**

If you are going to reach a community, you need to be deeply in love with it. Jesus, looking down on Jerusalem, cried, "They are like sheep without a shepherd." We have to say the same, about Plainview, Philadelphia and Pasadena. I am convinced you will not reach a community for Christ unless you are deeply in love with the community and its people.

Think Like a Missionary

I have often called for Christians in our world to think like missionaries in the Two-Thirds World. If you have ever been around a missionary, you know that the good ones all love the people they are sent to--they can't stop talking about the culture and context.

When missionaries take up residence cross-culturally, they truly love the culture where they live, sometimes even more than the culture back home. In the same way, a person looking to minister in a specific community cannot be disinterested in it. If it is a fishing community, you had better love fishing or learn to love it. If the community has a high school football team, you had better keep up with it. If you are a church leader, the community and its people must have an important part in your heart.

I think you and I need the same passion in our contexts--our own personal "Scotlands"--for the Gospel.

Jesus demonstrated this very concept in His earthly ministry as He: walked with the people in His culture, lived with them, listened to them, told stories to them, welcomed their children, and recognized and met people's needs.

The Church in Your Head

Too many church leaders read a book or go to a conference and get a great vision of a church in their heads. The problem is, they don't have a great vision for their community. The catch here is that part of you often has to die. Your own preferences have to be laid down to receive Christ's call and mission to the community. I don't care what you like; I care that you love the Gospel and the people God has called you to reach. You may have to die to your desires--to pastoring a cool church in Manhattan or a laid back church in Southern California.

Leading the Church to Love

As a church leader, you must be willing to die to your preferences so your community can be

reached with the Gospel, and so must your church. In established churches, this can be even more challenging than personally dying to self. This is because the pastor often already has the vision and burden to reach the community, but the church is comfortable residing in the Christian ghetto insulated from the community. (While maybe not as common, church myopia can also be a problem for planters if the new church is growing primarily by people coming from other churches, most, if not all, of whom already have their own ideas about how church ought to be.)

Reaching a community for Christ is not about you and your preferences. It is more about Jesus and his mission to send you to people. Your goal is what Count Zinzendorf said: "Preach the Gospel, die and be forgotten."

Until the church dies to its comfort, preferences, wants and desires, it will not be able to reach the community. But like a grain of wheat, it must die so that it may bring new life.

Perhaps we should combine the phrases of Knox and Zinzendorf and say, "Give me Scotland or I die ... then let me die and be forgotten." When that matters most, you'll die to self, live for His mission and reach your community in ways that are unimaginable.

Read more from Ed [here](#).