

Developing Selfless Influence in Your Community

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Kingsland's Story

My charge and challenge when I was called to serve as Kingsland's first missions pastor twelve years ago was to help move the church from a largely attractional ministry paradigm to a more missional or incarnational model. Kingsland, a large suburban church, had a rich history of ministering with excellence. However, in its early years, Kingsland's ministry was largely confined to our campus.

Those who came to Kingsland experienced the very best in terms of preaching, spiritual development, music, age-group ministries, and family ministry. Like other churches, Kingsland counted all who ventured to our campus. That was one of the most important metrics at the time.

The very first thing I did when I arrived at Kingsland was to brand our missions ministry in a way that would help our people to think differently about their personal spiritual lives and our corporate life as a church in a comfortable suburban setting. Thus I chose the words Go Beyond to brand our missions ministry.

I chose Go Beyond as the distinctive brand for our missions ministry because I believe that in each of our lives there is a line that defines the farthest we've ever been or the most we've ever done for God and His purposes. Everything on our side of that line is familiar, convenient, manageable, predictable, and comfortable. No big surprises, no daunting challenges, no uncharted territory.

However, we will not grow nor will we not contribute to the growth of God's kingdom unless we go beyond — unless we step across that line and allow God to use us in ways we never imagined among people we never thought we would meet in places we never thought we would visit doing things we never thought we could do.

One thing is certain, everything changes when we step across the line. Going beyond is fraught with all sorts of new challenges and frustrating inconveniences. In reality, however, the kingdom of God only advances at our inconvenience, never at our convenience. God never promised a smooth path to those who venture to the other side of the line.

Every major discovery in the history of the world has been made by those who were willing to take risks and embrace inconveniences. Over the centuries, the map of the world was slowly redefined by those who lost sight of familiar shores in order to move toward uncharted lands. Their commitment to the bigger picture enabled them to press on in spite of inconveniences.

Going beyond for the kingdom means that we must make the needs of the lost our primary focus. In his book “The Insanity of Obedience,” author Nik Ripkin wisely notes: “The need for the lost to hear the good news always exceeds the needs of the witnesser.” I agree. Unless we make decisions based upon what lost people need instead of what saved people want we will fail to reach our generation with the good news.

Only heaven will reveal the unimaginable numbers of people who never heard a clear presentation of the gospel because of our failure to cross the line — because of our unwillingness to be inconvenienced. Life’s greatest adventures are always found on the other side of the line. What a phenomenal privilege it is to go beyond in order to participate in advancing the purposes of God. That is worth any inconvenience!

The Geography of Our Lives

I am a map nerd! I have loved and collected maps since I was a kid. In August of 2013, an Austrian map collector found what may be the oldest globe to depict the New World. Dated 1504, the globe is engraved in intricate detail on an ostrich egg the size of a grapefruit. Locations on the globe are labeled in Latin. But perhaps the most intriguing notation on the fragile little globe are the Latin words *Hic Sunt Dracones*, engraved above the coast of Southeast Asia.

The words *Hic Sunt Dracones* are translated “Here Be Dragons.” Thomas Sander of the Washington Map Society said, “In early maps, you would see images of sea monsters; it was a way to say there’s bad stuff out there.” We don’t know who engraved the map on the ostrich egg, but Sanders thinks that it was someone from Leonardo Da Vinci’s time. This unknown cartographer, possibly commissioned by an Italian noble family, consolidated knowledge from travelers of his day and made the globe.

The ostrich egg globe was accurate only for a short time. As explorers continued to go beyond the boundaries of familiar places, they gathered new information that helped cartographers to update their maps. Little by little, intrepid explorers ventured into the habitation of dragons only to discover that there were no sea monsters there, only new lands to explore. And little by little, the depictions of sea monsters began to disappear from our maps.

There is a geography to each of our lives, a map, of sorts, whose borders are defined by our spiritual development and service. Beyond those familiar boundaries lies the habitation of dragons — the uncharted and unfamiliar and frightening places. Fear of encountering dragons can immobilize us and keep us from making new discoveries about ourselves and the world at large. We will, however, never redefine the geography of our lives until we are willing to confront the dragons.

As Kingsland’s missions pastor, I am committed to providing opportunities for our people to redefine the geography of their lives. In many cases, that means challenging people to move in

the direction of their fears, essentially into the habitation of dragons. Only then will the words *Hic Sunt Dracones* begin to fade from the map of our personal geography. Only then will we make new discoveries about ourselves and about those in need. Only then will we contribute to the expansion of God's kingdom. And only then will those who come after us be inspired to do the same.

The Journey Toward Selfless Influence

Selfless Influence is a core value at Kingsland. Selfless influence is all about going beyond — about venturing beyond our campus to engage with our community and the nations in meaningful ways.

In the final sermon Martin Luther King, Jr. preached on the night before he was assassinated, he challenged his listeners to “develop a kind of dangerous unselfishness” — like that demonstrated by the Good Samaritan.

King explained: “The Levite asked, ‘If I stop to help this man, what will happen to me?’ But the Good Samaritan reversed the question: ‘If I do not stop to help this man, what will happen to him?’ That’s the question before you tonight.” And that’s the question before us.

Unless the church develops a dangerous unselfishness and is willing to be the hands and feet of Jesus in its own context, then many will never experience the beauty of Jesus nor hear and respond to the gospel.

Dino Rizzo’s book “Servolution: Starting a Church Revolution through Serving” is an inspiring read. Rizzo, the lead pastor of Healing Place Church in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, founded the church with the intention of reaching out to the least of these. From its earliest days, Rizzo led the people of HPC to serve and care for the people of their community without expecting anything in return.

Serving isn’t something the people of HPC think about doing, it defines who they are. One of the most challenging things Rizzo writes in his book is this: “If HPC closed down tomorrow, who would notice? Would there be an outcry from the city for us to keep our doors open?” Rizzo continues, “If Healing Place Church disappeared from the map and no one felt the loss other than those who attended services, then we would have failed miserably.” Now, that’s something to think deeply about!

Rizzo’s question haunted me. Would our community care if our church closed down tomorrow? The fact of the matter is that churches in our city and nation close their doors every week, never to open again. And perhaps sadder, their respective communities seldom notice or care.

As I initially contemplated Rizzo’s question something amazing happened in our community — the Gallery Furniture Warehouse burned to the ground. Well, that’s not exactly the amazing part

of the story. What was amazing was the response of Houstonians. The day after the fire people from throughout the community drove to the Gallery Furniture location — some with checks in hand for the store owner and others prepared to purchase anything in order to help out. Gallery Furniture is not a church, but what happened there caught the attention of the entire community.

Jim McIngvale, aka Mattress Mack, started Gallery Furniture in 1981 with a modest investment and built it into a multi-million dollar business. However, he started his business with the intention of doing more than making money. By his own confession he wanted to give back to the community. And, that's exactly what he has done.

McIngvale has poured millions of dollars into making Houston a better community. I was present at a home in the 1990's when a Gallery Furniture truck arrived to donate a house full of furniture to a struggling single mother who had been battered by hard times. This is just one example of the kind of philanthropy that describes Mattress Mack.

In the days following the fire, Houston was abuzz with stories of how people had been blessed and helped by Mack. So, it's no surprise that when his furniture warehouse burned to the ground, there was an outpouring of love from the community and an outcry for McIngvale to rebuild. Houstonians said, "It's our turn to be there for Mack."

There are several lessons that the church can learn from Mattress Mack, but I think that the most important lesson is the value of having an external focus. For Mack, Gallery Furniture is about more than making money or saving people money, it's about doing something beyond the walls of the store that will make a difference in the lives of Houstonians. You can't turn on the television or drive around our community without seeing advertisements for Gallery Furniture.

Rizzo writes, "Remember, it's not just about billboards, mail-outs, or phone directory ads. A name is just a name until you are able to make an impression of generosity and love for them to associate with that name." Jim McIngvale understands that. When people think of Gallery Furniture they think about more than sofas and lamps. They associate the name with a man with a generous heart who is in business to help others.

Church leaders and members should learn from the response of Houstonians to the Gallery Furniture fire and determine to develop an external focus. Reggie McNeal, author of "Missional Renaissance," says that churches must move from being internally occupied to externally focused, and from primarily concentrating on institutional maintenance to developing an incarnational influence. He's right.

Church can no longer be just about us and what we do to benefit our members. Churches everywhere need to join the servolution and invest in their respective communities. Proverbs 3:3-4 states, "*Do not let kindness and truth leave you; bind them around your neck, write them*

on the tablet of your heart. So you will find favor and good repute in the sight of God and man.”
That’s solid advice.

I’ve discovered that kindness can open the door for the truth. “Why are you doing this?” I am often asked while leading service initiatives around the community. I love that question because it is the sound of kindness opening the door for the truth. I hope that if Kingsland ever burns to the ground there will indeed be an outcry from the community for us to rebuild because of the value we bring to our community.

Seeing Others Clearly

From my first week as Kingsland’s missions pastor, I have sought to provide both the training and opportunities for our families to go beyond — whether that means engaging with the neighbor across the street, working alongside our local and urban partners, or engaging with the nations. For many of our families, something as seemingly simple as venturing to Houston’s Third Ward amounts to moving into the habitation of dragons.

Engaging meaningfully with our community starts with seeing our community clearly. How exactly do we develop that kind of vision? Mark’s gospel records the account of a miracle that Jesus performed in two stages (Mark 8:22-26). This simple story yields a profound truth.

Some people brought a blind man to Jesus at a place called Bethsaida. Jesus took the man aside, laid hands on him, and then asked him if he could see anything. The man replied that he could see men, but they looked like trees walking about — an indication that his sight was blurry. Jesus laid His hands on the man’s eyes a second time and, as a result, the man could see everything clearly.

Jesus could have healed the blind man with one touch but instead chose to heal him in two stages — a reminder that insight often comes slowly. Most of us move through life so fast that the people around us look like trees walking about. We speed past need and fail to recognize hurt. I often remind our people to ask Jesus to touch their eyes a second time in order to see our community with greater clarity.

Rizzo used a term in his book that I really like — what he calls “peripheral compassion.” He defined peripheral compassion as “the capacity to reach out and envelop the multitudes while noticing the tiniest need.” Peripheral compassion “is one of my favorite qualities I see in Jesus,” writes Rizzo, “and one I have always wanted to emulate.”

Developing selfless influence requires that we look at our community with deeper insight and greater clarity. Henry David Thoreau wrote, *“It’s not what you look at that matters, it’s what you see.”* Thoreau was absolutely right. It all begins with what we see.

In the parable of the Good Samaritan, the priest and the Levite both “saw” the poor fellow that had been beaten and left for dead. However, when the good Samaritan “saw him, he felt compassion” (Lk. 10:33) and that made all the difference.

Intentional Engagement

Once you see your community clearly, the only options are to strategically move in the direction of need or to move in the opposite direction. Jesus set the ultimate example of what it means to move in the direction of people in need.

Even a cursory study of the life of Jesus will reveal that He moved toward people in need. I like the word “toward” because it means “in the direction of.” For example, lepers were perhaps the most feared individuals in Jesus’ day — disfigured outcasts banished to a life of loneliness and desperation. Lepers had to announce their comings and goings in order to warn others to clear the way. In other words, so that others would have plenty of time to “move away from” them.

The presence of a leper always produced more than a little fear and anxiety. Jesus however, was not afraid. He did what others must have considered totally absurd. He moved in the direction of lepers. Mark (1:40-45) records an occasion when Jesus reached out His hand and touched and healed a leper.

In his book “Dirty God: Jesus in the Trenches,” author Johnnie Moore points out that touching others is a sign of intimacy. “It is a bridge not just from a hand to a shoulder,” he writes, “but also from a heart to a heart.”

There are many other examples in the Gospels of Jesus moving in the direction of those in need. Whether it was a woman at a well, a despised tax-collector in a tree, an adulteress being dragged through the streets by her accusers, or a widow at the funeral of her only son, Jesus did not shy away from messy or painful situations. Instead, He moved in the direction of people tangled up in webs of sin, imprisoned behind bars of hopelessness, and struggling beneath the weight of heavy burdens. Grace and compassion moved Jesus in their direction.

If we want to become more like Jesus, then we must learn to consistently move in the direction of those in need. We must close the distance between ourselves and those who, like the lepers of Jesus’ day, are longing for the kind of touch that will build a bridge from heart to heart.

Demonstrating grace and kindness is one way to show people in need that God loves them, believes in them, and has not forgotten them. But in order for people in need to experience the benefits of grace we must intentionally engage with them by moving in their direction, slowing down, looking into their eyes, listening to their stories, and doing what Jesus would do.

Over the years, our missions ministry has developed strategic partnerships throughout our community and the nations that provide our people with opportunities to intentionally engage with those in need. We work alongside partners who serve our community in a variety of ways, including addressing the needs of the homeless, widows, single moms, individuals in recovery, girls and women rescued from domestic and international trafficking, refugees at home and abroad, championing the sanctity of human life, and more.

Involving the Next Generation

A key component of our engagement with the community is providing opportunities for our children to make memories of serving alongside their parents. We teach our children that they don't have to wait until they are grown up to help change the world.

We intentionally engage our kids in our Saturday service initiatives. All of our community groups take ownership of at least two local initiatives per year. We encourage each community group to involve every member of the family in serving our community. This provides great opportunities for our kids to learn from their parents and to experience what it means to move in the direction of those in need.

Our annual Caring for Katy initiative, for example, has involved thousands of parents and kids in ministering to the people of our own community. Once a year we close the doors to the church on a Sunday and invest 100k of that Sunday's offering in meeting needs throughout our own community. Every community group is responsible for identifying and mobilizing their groups to engage meaningfully in meeting needs.

Years ago I started the Go Beyond Kids Explorers Club to teach, inspire, and challenge our kids to engage in making a difference in our community and around the globe. We have developed a special kit that each kid receives that is full of interactive fun that teaches them about the needs of others.

Our kids have also engaged in initiatives to raise funds for kids in need around the globe, including building clinics in the Congo, a school and clinic in Egypt, helping a special needs school in Nicaragua, funding a classroom in the Miskito Coast, reaching unaccompanied Eritrean minors who have fled into Ethiopia, and much more.

These are just a few examples of the kinds of things we are doing to help the next generation of our own kids to develop a dangerous unselfishness. A number of our Kingsland kids who have grown up serving others have chosen to go into some field of ministry, many are serving around the world through parachurch and missions organizations, and others have embraced selfless service as a way of living incarnationally.

The Story Continues

Our story is still being written by the families that have embraced what it means to go beyond and by parents who take seriously their responsibility to be the primary faith trainers of their children. We understand that apart from the involvement of parents we would face an even greater challenge in equipping the next generation to love God and serve others.

We value the role of spiritual development and selfless service in raising a generation that will take seriously their responsibility to live incarnationally in a hurting world. Teaching alone is not enough. We must also provide opportunities for meaningful engagement in directly serving others. We remain committed to that end as we long for the day when the whole earth will be filled with the knowledge of God even as the waters cover the seas.