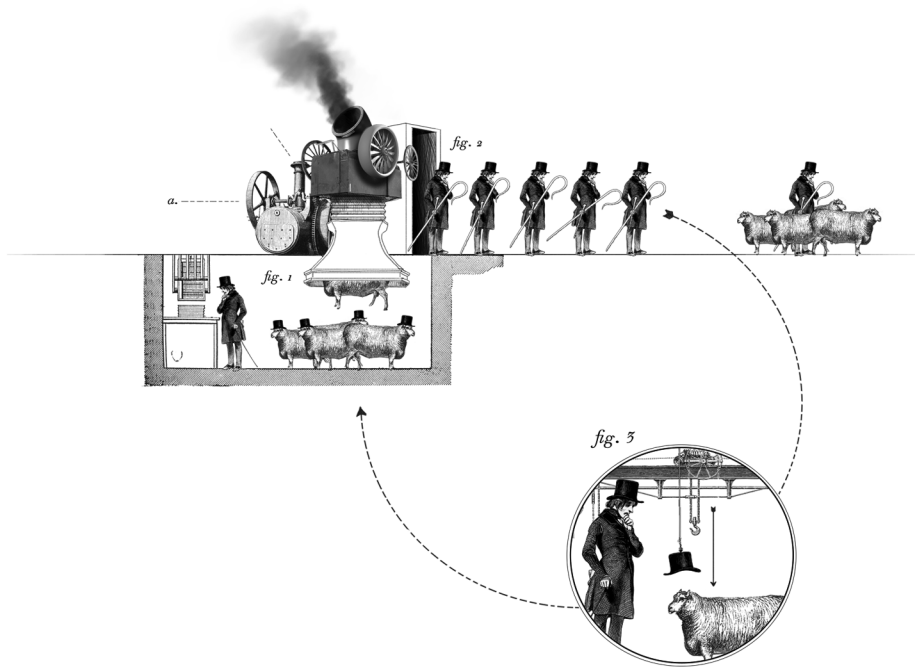


# MULTIPLYING MISSIONAL LEADERS

*From half-hearted volunteers to a mobilized Kingdom force*



Mike Breen



# INTRODUCTION

## A TALE OF TWO CITIES

I remember, as a young man, coming out of college. I had done my training in churches as an associate, and it came time for my first call as a senior pastor. As Sally and I were thinking it through, we got the invitation to go to some of the best churches around. But we sensed the Lord say, “Go to the poor. Live in the inner city.”

It was an enormous wrestling match for us. And finally, as always seems to happen, the Lord won out. We went to what was, at the time, one of the poorest communities in all of Britain, a place in London called Brixton Hill. The church there was tiny and just trying to survive, and we were the new leadership.

We did everything we could to prepare for the post-apocalyptic minefield that was inner-city London at the time. We brought missionaries and young people with us. We raised as much money from people who had it as we could. But while we arrived with a team ready to get after it, our illusions of ministry were quickly shattered.

Our first instinct was to immediately retreat across the drawbridge. We were facing things like watching our next-door neighbor having his car petrol bombed. (If you don’t know what that is, it’s a Molotov cocktail that makes it look like the car has had its own personal Hiroshima). Why did this happen? Because our neighbor hadn’t paid a debt. Believe it or not, walking around the neighborhood and seeing flaming cars wasn’t an unusual experience for us.

We didn’t even know how to respond to this kind of environment.

The Lord spoke to us and said, “Look, I want you to be compassionate, but I want you to be strategic. I want you to find out and understand where the people are.” So with the few people we had, we started knocking on doors and asking questions. Instead of deciding what it was that our church and our team should do “to them,” we decided to ask our neighbors what they’d like us to do “for them.”

As we got strategic, we asked people two questions. First, we asked what the worst thing about living in this community was. Second, we asked people if they had to pick one thing for us to do, what it would be. As you can imagine, we got all sorts of responses to the second question: Children’s programs. Something for teenagers. Racial harmony. Better transportation. Opening local shops. The list went on and on. There was no real agreement on that one.

But in that first question something surprising rose to the surface. About 97 percent of the people said the same thing about what they liked least about the community.

Litter.

*Litter.*

Let's put this in context.

This place had the highest infant mortality rate in all of Europe. People were beaten senseless on the streets and left in their blood daily. Robbery and rape and brutality were everywhere. Petrol bombs. Illiteracy. Unbelievably high unemployment.

Litter on the streets? Seriously?

But there it was. Litter on the streets.

After poring over 600 surveys, we came back and just looked at each other. The overwhelming desire from the community was for someone, anyone, to do something about litter on the streets. We prayed about it and thought about it and felt that the Lord seemed to be saying something about Brixton Hill.

Let me try to capture the message we heard: This community was what is known as “sinkhole” housing. It was almost all government-subsidized housing — the projects. The only way to get out was to buy your way out (no one had any money) or trade your way out by going to other public housing that was nicer (and no one was going to swap). As a result, the people there felt like they were in the bottom of the trash can and they were never going to get out.

The people of Brixton Hill felt like the dirty gum stuck to the shoe of the world, like the scum of the earth. Their surroundings told them every day that this is what they were, because there was trash absolutely everywhere.

Maybe that's why they told us they wanted us to do something about litter on the streets.

A community down the street had started doing these things called Marches for Jesus, and so in imitation and innovation of this idea, all 40 of us in the church started doing a Praise and Litter March. After church on Sunday, we ate our packed lunch and got a ghetto blaster. Remember those? It was a stereo that was basically the size of a Buick. It had a tape recorder with giant speakers. We strapped it to a baby stroller that my kids had recently vacated and decorated it with balloons.

BALLOONS. I have no idea what that was about.

Our march was led by our balloon-festooned ghetto blaster on a stroller, playing a recording of me on my 12-string guitar and my buddy playing an upright piano, moving down the street. And it was absolutely awful. *Terrible*. As we pushed all of this down the street, everyone looked at me to lead the singing. After all, it was a Praise and Litter March.

Now in England, if you're having a march, you have to have a policeman there. So the bobby (as we call policemen in England) was walking alongside of us, watching me and expecting me to really go after it. I was singing, but it was barely audible. You could barely hear it.

Eventually, we started to get more into it. We started to break out the garbage bags and buckets and bins to collect the trash as we walked down the street singing.

Eventually, the curtains in the nearby homes started twitching.

We could see the curtains start to open as people looked to see what in the world was going on. Then people started to come to the doors. Finally, a man with a Cockney accent looked at me and said, "Oy, Vicar! Vicar! Whatchya doin'?"

(Everyone in Brixton Hill talked like the gecko in the Geico advertisements.)

I went up to him and said, "We're clearing up the litter."

"NO!" (Again, said in that one-of-a-kind hackneyed accent.)

"Yeah," I responded.

"NO!"

"Yeah."

"NO!"

"Well, you know how we took that survey?"

"Yeah."

"You know how we wrote down everyone's reply?"

"Yeah."

"Well we figured out that everyone thought the litter was the big problem. So we decided to clean it up."

"NO!" Then this man called up to his wife: "Hey darlin', come on down here. The Vicar has a rubber glove on!"

Now his wife came down the steps. "Ahhh, Vicar, what are you doing?"

"We're cleaning up the litter."

"NO!"

“Well, you know the survey we took?”

“Yeah.”

“Remember how you said you didn’t like the litter?”

“Yeah.”

“Well, we thought we’d clean it up.”

“NO!”

She said, “Wait there, Vicar. We’ll put the kettle on and have a cup of tea.” So she went inside and called her neighbor, and we had tea. Then, more people came out of more houses, and we had more tea, plus orange juice and cookies for the kids. It was like wartime England in World War II. Some of them started picking up litter, and the march just carried on down the street.

We did this regularly, and it made a massive difference. They knew that we couldn’t clean it all up. It was impossible. But we did something. And funnily enough, the local government felt convicted by it and started to send people in regularly to help clean up.

One day, I was out there clearing some glass near one of the kids’ playgrounds, and a guy walked over to me and said, “Alright Vicar, I’ve got it. I’ve worked it out now.”

“What’s that?” I asked.

“I’ve worked it out. You’re very clever, you are, aren’t you?”

“What do you mean?”

“It’s one of them parabolas.”

“A what?”

“A parabola. You know, one of those stories that Jesus tells – a parabola.”

“Oh. OK. Well, what do you think I’m trying to say?”

“You’re doing something to show us what God wants to do in our lives. You’re saying that God wants to clean up our hearts.”

I was surprised. “Oh . . . ummm . . . yeah!”

“How do I do that, Vicar?”

And it was easy. I just led him to Christ right there.

Our church kept doing things like this: Listening to the people in the community. Finding ways to connect the Gospel of Jesus to their everyday lives. And I kid you not, revival happened right there in one of the poorest places in all of Europe. We led scores of people to Jesus. The quality of life increased. We were seeing things happen that you only read about in Acts 2. I had never seen anything like it. The Kingdom of God was colliding into earth. The future was coming into the present.

**But today, if you go to Brixton Hill, there's very little evidence we were ever there.**

**Why is that the case? That's where the second city comes in.**

Fast-forward about 10 years.

After a few years in Arkansas, Sally and I took a position as the senior leaders at a vibrant church called St. Thomas in northern England. It was in a place called Sheffield where about 2 percent of people went to church. Sheffield was a hard place to live, because it was a dried-up steel town where unemployment was astronomically high. Sheffield is a lot like Pittsburgh in both look and feel.

In my time in Brixton, I had almost accidentally stumbled into some principles and practices that came into full fruition in Sheffield. (No one can get credit for this but the Lord.) Pretty soon into my time there, we started experimenting with a missional vehicle that has become known as *Missional Communities*. These were groups of people, about the size of an extended family (20-50 people), who were bound together in community by their mission and were incarnating the Gospel of Jesus in every crack and crevice of society, becoming a scattered and gathered church. These groups were laity-led, and the leaders decided what their vision was and how the Lord was asking them to be the church to the places he was sending them.

Over time, it all started to pop. Hundreds and hundreds of people were coming to faith. The number of Missional Communities doubled. Then they doubled again. Then they doubled again. A few years after starting this, much to all of our surprise, we had become one of the largest churches in England. But then something familiar happened again. I felt the Lord asking Sally and I to leave St. Thomas and move to the United States where the next season of our life would unfold before us.

You can see the symmetry, can't you? Revival happened again, and again I was led to leave. The last time I left, slowly, over time, the imprint of the Kingdom disappeared from that little community in London. It was almost as if we had never been there. But the Lord was asking us to leave, and so we did.

But with Sheffield and St. Thomas, it was different.

Seven years after we left St. Thomas, the church has more than doubled in size and is now one of the largest churches in all of Europe. Thousands have come to Christ through Missional Communities, and a missional movement has spread throughout the European continent from this slightly inconsequential city in the north of England. The quality of life in the city has gone up. The city council, which has always been hostile to Christians and which has done everything it could to make life miserable for believers, started giving out grants to the Missional Communities working with teenagers. Why? After studying these communities, the council found that they were pretty much the only things in the

city that were able to positively deal with the crime, poverty, and apathy found among most of the teenagers in the city.

All of this was being done by lay leaders who weren't getting paid. They were just missional leaders doing the work of Jesus in the city they'd been called to.

I've thought about the tale of these two cities a lot. What is the difference between Brixton Hill and Sheffield? Both experienced massive outpourings of the Spirit. Both saw something happen like we see in the book of Acts. I left both churches in the hands of very capable leaders.

After thinking and thinking about it, I have only been able to come up with one real difference between Brixton Hill and Sheffield. I can only see one reason that revival was snuffed out in one place while it continued in another. In Sheffield, I learned how to multiply missional leaders who could lead the people of God. It didn't matter whether I (or Paul Maconochie and Mick Woodhead, the remarkable men who followed me) were there or not. The people of the church understood who they were called to be and whom they were sent to. The everyday, ordinary people of God were leading the church.

In Brixton Hill, I was a missionary who rallied the church around my missionary impulse. But it never became theirs. So when I left, they stopped rallying. In Sheffield, I continued to be a missionary, but I learned how to transfer that missional DNA to a small group of people, who then did the same for others, who then did the same for others. A missional revolution began that has now spanned six continents.

**I am absolutely convinced this story is not meant to be the exception but the rule. This is supposed to be the story of the Church. This is meant to be your story — a story of shaping and multiplying missional leaders who can lead the people of God to their destiny.**

That's what we will seek to do in this book. You will find practical tools that will help you identify, recruit, and develop missional leaders who can then multiply themselves. So join us on the journey from Brixton Hill to Sheffield and beyond — the journey of multiplying missional leaders.