



Seven Practices for the Church on Mission

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Pastor and professor David Fitch shows how these seven practices can revolutionize the church's presence in our neighborhoods, transform our way of life in the world, and advance the kingdom:

- *The Lord's Table*
- *Reconciliation*
- *Proclaiming the Gospel*
- *Being with the "Least of These"*
- *Being with Children*
- *The Fivefold Gifting*
- *Kingdom Prayer*

David Fitch Introduces Seven Practices for Becoming God's Faithful Presence the World

Toward Racial Reconciliation

Some may say that the practice of reconciliation is too small of a strategy to make an impact on the systemic injustices of our day. We must fight through larger organizations and governmental strategies.

I would never want to discourage such larger efforts. But in order for such efforts to avoid becoming another bumper sticker or a T-shirt slogan, they must be shaped by practicing the face-to-face presence Jesus teaches us in Matthew 18:15-20. The various mass efforts for justice of the past century have shown a propensity to be absorbed into our societal systems. Civil rights legislation has at times become the means to institutionalize racism through other means. Injustice can so easily become justified by an ideology that enables the privileged to point to the injustice, make minor changes, control it, and move on.

And so Christians are called to be present in the half circles of injustice, broken racial relationships, and the oppression of one person by another. A public demonstration, done in peace, can orchestrate such a face-to-face encounter. The victims, as well as people standing with the victims, become present to the oppressor. The march puts real human faces on the injustice. A moment of presence then occurs, and it becomes extremely uncomfortable for the privileged to turn their faces away and move on. A space is opened to dislodge the ideology and invite the oppressor to submit to one another. Repentance and reconciliation can begin.

The idea of bodily face-to-face *presence* here is key. In Martin Luther King Jr.'s words, it will be nonviolent with the goal of creating a "constructive non-violent tension" in the minds of the public versus a "violent tension." This constructive nonviolent tension is presence. It is necessary and inevitable as we seek to bring the reconciliation of God in Christ into the world. It is dangerous. Christ was crucified and Martin Luther King was assassinated in this tension. But thus is the beginning of true reconciliation. It is the opening of space for the presence of Christ and the actual practice of reconciliation.

We go into these half circles of racial injustice to be present face to face. This is Matthew 18:15-20 in another form. Here in this space those in power (or perceived power) submit first, as Jesus modeled for us. As one of my white friends says about marching with black brothers and sisters in Chicago's Black Lives Matters protests, "I'm basically there to check my privilege and show my face." We become present to one another, and then Jesus becomes present in that space if we will just discern him. A space is opened up for the Holy Spirit to work.

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Reconciliation can begin and transformation can commence in the space of face-to-face presence, which can be afforded in a nonviolent demonstration. Carried out in this way, demonstrations can be a premier example of faithful presence. And it can lead to so much more.

Faithful Presence and the Reconciliation of the World

One evening in October, while sitting in front of the neighborhood ice cream shop, I met a Latino man named Jorge. He told me stories of the police giving him tickets for his car being parked over the sidewalk. This man felt it was a “white man’s law” written for Westmont people living as single families. Because Latino people often live three families to a house, they had more cars. White people lived more often as single-family households. The sidewalk parking law was therefore a white man’s law because it discouraged Latino people and other less affluent people from living in Westmont. That evening we talked about the built-in racism of our town. We pledged that day to work together for peace.

That began a journey for me to more awareness of the racial divides of my suburb of Westmont. A few weeks ago, while writing this chapter, four police cars stopped one black man in front of our house. With a new awareness, I decided in all my white machismo to do something about it. So I called a meeting. I said to our leadership, “Let’s bring our black, Latino, Asian, and white brothers and sisters together and have a meeting! Let’s invite some police officers. Let’s talk about this, listen to each other, work for peace.” Let’s open up space for the kingdom. Let’s lead some reconciliation!

Jean, a woman leader in our church, looked at me graciously and said, “Dave, you’re doing it again.” I said, “What? Doing what?” She said, “You’re doing your white privilege thing. You’re inviting people of color to come to your church building to settle a problem. You are taking a posture of power. You are leading the meeting. You are enforcing your rule on them.” She said I somehow needed to get invited to their turf. They need to invite me into these struggles. She was telling me I needed to be present long enough to be a guest, and offer, as opposed to impose, reconciliation. This is the way God brings healing. This is the way faithful presence works.

My knee-jerk response was, “That could take years.” I thought to myself how much I would have to order my life differently so that I could be among these friends and spend time being present to them. I must sacrifice time, speaking engagements, nights watching hockey games. I must be present to them on their terms and watch basketball or soccer (“football”) games. I must be present regularly over time. When and if the time comes, I must offer to our neighborhood the reconciliation that God is working in the world through Jesus Christ.

Imagine what could happen if churches everywhere inhabited their neighborhoods with Christ’s faithful presence of reconciliation. Amid domestic disputes on the block, gang fights in the local school, racist police activities on my street, we bring a concrete practice of

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reconciliation that begins with presence. As we become present at local tables, protest marches, every conflict in our churches, with faithful presence, imagine what God might do. According to Jesus this is how the world will change. God in Christ is reconciling the whole world to himself (2 Cor 5:19), and we are his ambassadors (v. 20).

– From chapter 2, “Reconciliation”