

## Overlap—The Community: Of Boldness and Boxes

What TV shows are these quotes from?

- “Yada, yada, yada.” -Seinfeld
- “How you doin’?” -Friends
- “Come on down!” -The Price is Right
- “The tribe has spoken.” -Survivor
- “Survey Says!” -Family Feud
- “Book ‘em, Danno.” -Hawaii Five-0
- “Cut it out.” -Full House
- “Eat my shorts.” -The Simpsons
- “Bazinga!” -The Big Bang Theory
- “To boldly go where no man has gone before.” -Star Trek

For the last two weeks we’ve been talking about the overlap of our lives. Most of our lives are lived in the overlaps, when one part of our lives overlaps with something or someone else. You’re at work, but have a phone call with your wife that impacts your relationship. It wasn’t work related, and it wasn’t a date. That’s an overlap.

You go shopping with a friend and then go to Panera for lunch. While there, you have a conversation that probes some deeper spiritual issues. Friends, fun, and faith. It’s overlap.

What happens in these overlaps is hugely influential in our lives, so how we engage and connect in these overlaps is supremely important. Usually, we just let the overlaps come and happen however they come. What you’ve been challenged with over the last two weeks is how we need to be more intentional in these overlaps. Two weeks ago we talked about our lives need to overlap with Jesus. Last week we talked about how we need to overlap with each other in the church. This morning we want to look at how we need to overlap with our community.

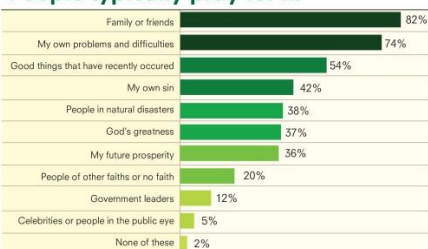
So how do we boldly go where we haven’t gone before for our community? I want you to know that the key to reaching our community through the overlaps of life lies in a proper understanding of boldness and boxes.

### I. Praying boldly.

According to Lifeway research, among Americans who pray<sup>1</sup>:

Among Americans who pray:

#### People typically pray for ...



LifewayResearch.com

Note: Participants could select all that apply

Lifeway

Do you notice anything missing? What are we not praying for? We're not praying for our community. We're not praying for the lost people with live next to and work with. It strikes me that some will pray for celebrities that they will never meet, but not pray for the people they share lives with every week. We pray for our government leaders, and we should. Paul tells us that we should. But what about our neighbors, or coworkers, the people wait on us at Sheila's or Grillo's? Compare this to what the early Christians prayed for, and how they prayed. Acts 4:23-31

*23 When they were released, they went to their friends and reported what the chief priests and the elders had said to them. 24 And when they heard it, they lifted their voices together to God and said, "Sovereign Lord, who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and everything in them, 25 who through the mouth of our father David, your servant, said by the Holy Spirit, "Why did the Gentiles rage, and the peoples plot in vain?*

*26 The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers were gathered together, against the Lord and against his Anointed'— 27 for truly in this city there were gathered together against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, 28 to do whatever your hand and your plan had predestined to take place. 29 And now, Lord, look upon their threats and grant to your servants to continue to speak your word with all boldness, 30 while you stretch out your hand to heal, and signs and wonders are performed through the name of your holy servant Jesus." 31 And when they had prayed, the place in which they were gathered together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and continued to speak the word of God with boldness.*

How often do we pray for boldness? What does praying for boldness suggest?

**We are facing a challenge so big it scares us.** If we need boldness, then that means we're facing something that makes us timid. Scared. We need to attempt something so big for God that it's doomed to fail unless God is in it. We need to be stretch beyond our own strength and our own wisdom to where we have to depend on God.

**We believe what we have to share is worth sharing**—no matter what! This is important. This is life or death. We can't afford to keep quiet. We can't keep this to ourselves. Lives and souls and eternity depend on our boldness.

**We believe God has the power to make us bold.** How powerful is the God you serve? Do you really believe this?

*And when they had prayed, the place in which they were gathered together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and continued to speak the word of God with boldness.*

Do we really believe God has the power to shake a place? Have you ever asked God to shake your place? If He honestly did, I'm not sure, we'd praise Him. We'd be scared. We'd think something was wrong.

God, having the ability to actually shake our church, to shake your home, to shake your life, is not on our radar. We don't expect Him to shake us up, so we don't ask Him to do it, and so He doesn't shake us.

If I'm being honest, for a lot of my life in Christ, God, being able to shake this place because we've asked Him to, is not something that fit comfortably into my theological box. My training and experience have all taught me about finding the right methods and implementing the right programs.

But this early church prayer meeting wasn't about what new ministry they should start, it was about God shaking them at the deepest core of their being.

### **Thinking Outside the Box**

How many times have you heard the expression, "Try to think outside of the box"? Do we have a theological box that we put God in, and we have a hard time thinking outside of that box. We need to think outside of the box! Especially if we believe what Paul says in Ephesians 3:20,21:

*20 Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, 21 to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.*

What does it mean to think outside of the box?

### **Thinking out of the box means we...Ask for more!**

There is an apocryphal story about golf legend Arnold Palmer. Years ago, Arnold Palmer was invited to play in a series of exhibition matches in Saudi Arabia. When he finished, the king was so impressed with Palmer's expertise that he desired to give Palmer a gift. Palmer, a multimillionaire in his own right, demurred: "It isn't really necessary. I just enjoyed meeting your people and playing in your country."

The king indicated his extreme displeasure at not being able to give the golf pro a gift. Palmer wisely reconsidered and said, "Well, how about a golf club? A golf club would be a wonderful memento of my visit here." The king was pleased. The following day, a messenger delivered to Palmer's hotel room the title to a golf club, thirty-six holes, trees, lakes, buildings.

The moral of this story? In the presence of the king, don't ask for small gifts.

Thinking out of the box means we...**Understand that He can do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think.**

If God can do more than we ask or imagine, then it's time to grow our imagination. We will never ask for more, unless we can imagine more. We need to imagine more for our lives. We need to imagine more for our marriages, more for our children. We need to imagine more for our church, more for our community, more for our world.

What do you do when you encounter... A health problem that seems hopeless?

Bills that seem impossible to pay?

Do we really understand that God is able to do immeasurably more than we ask or imagine?

A marriage that seems unsalvageable?

Do we really understand that God is able to do immeasurably more than we ask or imagine?

Illness?

Do we really understand that God is able to do immeasurably more than we ask or imagine?

Infertility ?

Do we really understand that God is able to do immeasurably more than we ask or imagine?

A broken heart?

Do we really understand that God is able to do immeasurably more than we ask or understand?

I love what Max Lucado says in his book, *Before Amen*:

Most people have small thoughts about God. In an effort to see God as our friend, we have lost his immensity. In our desire to understand him, we have sought to contain him. The God of the Bible cannot be contained. With a word he called Adam out of dust and Eve out of a bone. He consulted no committee. He sought no counsel. He has authority over the world and...He has authority over your world. He's never surprised. He has never, ever uttered the phrase, "How did that happen?"

God cannot be contained!

If you have a need, ask Him boldly to meet it. If you have a pain, ask Him boldly to heal it. If you have a question, ask Him boldly to answer it. If you have a broken relationship, ask Him boldly to fix it. And, if you have a place in your life where you want God to show up, ask Him boldly to shake it!

Thinking outside of the box also means, **we need to think outside of THIS box!** (our building)

We must find ways to get out of this box and overlap our lives with people who need salvation.

In the book of Acts we see the early Christians thinking out of the box, overlapping their lives with others, and dynamically impacting their community.

Why? They were... Praying boldly. But they were also... Living boldly.

## II. Living Boldly

As we read on in Acts we living boldly—out of the box—for their community.

### A. Stephen

When Stephen is ordained he's identified as "*Stephen, a man full of faith* (Ac. 6:5)." He is so bold that he ends up being stoned to death because he won't stop telling people about Jesus. Acts 6:7,8 describes him living boldly "among the people."

*7 And the word of God continued to increase, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests became obedient to the faith. 8 And Stephen, full of grace and power, was doing great wonders and signs among the people.*

Because of this Stephen was executed for his faith. Acts 8:4 describes the aftermath of Stephen's death: *"A great persecution broke out against the church and the Christians were scattered, but these believers were bold and kept preaching the word."*

Stephen's death motivated other Christians to get out of the box, overlap their lives with others, and to live more boldly. One of those Christians who was scattered but kept on preaching the word was Philip.

### **B. Philip**

Philip goes up to the neighboring province of Samaria and proclaims the good news of Jesus. Acts 8:6 says, *"the crowds with one accord paid attention to what was being said by Philip."* And verse 8 says *"So there was great joy in that city."*

But Philip was just getting started. Once you start thinking out of the box, you don't want to go back in!

The Lord told Philip to go south from Jerusalem to Gaza into a desert. And he went, into a desert by himself with no clear destination! On his journey he encountered an Ethiopian eunuch who was reading a passage from Isaiah. The Holy Spirit spoke to Philip and told him to go over to the man's chariot. And he did, boldly. Here's what we read in Acts 8:30-31

30 So Philip ran to him and heard him reading Isaiah the prophet and asked, "Do you understand what you are reading?" 31 And he said, "How can I, unless someone guides me?" And he invited Philip to come up and sit with him.

So Philip begins to teach the Eunuch about Jesus starting with Isaiah:

35 Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning with this Scripture he told him the good news about Jesus. 36 And as they were going along the road they came to some water, and the eunuch said, "See, here is water! What prevents me from being baptized?" 38 And he commanded the chariot to stop, and they both went down into the water, Philip and the eunuch, and he baptized him.

The Ethiopian eunuch was baptized immediately and his life eternally changed because Philip lived boldly out of the box and allowed his life to overlap with the lives of others.

As we keep reading in Acts, we find another believer living boldly.

### **C. Ananias**

No one of the guys who helped kill Stephen and was leading the persecution that caused Christians like Philip to scatter was a guy named Saul. In Acts 9, Saul was on his way to Damascus, Syria to persecute even more Christians, when Jesus confronted him and literally knocked him off his feet.

Acts 9:4,5 *"Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?"* 5 And he said, *"Who are you, Lord?"* And he said, *"I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting."*

People who persecute Christians are really persecuting Jesus. Saul was blinded for three days and was taken by his traveling companions to Damascus where he neither ate nor drank. The

Lord then appeared to a believer named Ananias, who was just minding his own business, and called him to go to Saul and lay his hands on him so he can regain his sight. Acts 9:13-17 says,

*13 But Ananias answered, "Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much evil he has done to your saints at Jerusalem. 14 And here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who call on your name." 15 But the Lord said to him, "Go, for he is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel. 16 For I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name." 17 So Ananias departed and entered the house.*

Ananias was scared of Saul, and he should have been because Saul was persecuting Christians, but he went to Saul anyway. Ananias faced his fears because of his faith in God.

He lived boldly, out of the box, and overlapped his life with the life of Saul and an amazing thing happened.

Let's read what happened after Ananias came to him in Acts 9:17-19.

*17 And laying his hands on him he said, "Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus who appeared to you on the road by which you came has sent me so that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit." 18 And immediately something like scales fell from his eyes, and he regained his sight. Then he rose and was baptized 19 and taking food, he was strengthened.*

When we overlap our lives with the lives of others, amazing things can happen.

Because of Ananias' boldness, Saul—now "Paul"—became a Christian who then began living boldly out of the box, overlapping his life with the lives of others, and many people were saved.

#### **D. Paul**

Of course we all know Saul more by his Greek name of Paul. Listen to what it says about Paul in verses 28 and 31,

*28 So he went in and out among them at Jerusalem, preaching boldly in the name of the Lord...So the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria had peace and was being built up. And walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, it multiplied.*

There's that word "boldly" again. In all the word "boldly" or "boldness" is used 8 times in the book of Acts to describe how Christians prayed, spoke and lived. What are the results of boldly living for our community? Peace, growth, and lots of people getting saved!

I want you to know that the key to reaching our community through the overlaps of life lies in boldness and boxes.

We must pray boldly and live boldly and we must think out of the box.

I want us to boldly go into our community in new and effective ways. Let us start by praying boldly. Enough with the wimpy little prayers that keep God contained and controlled. Little prayers that never threaten our comfort zone. Let's pray big prayers. Scary prayers. Prayers that require us to depend on God. Prayers that God be in whatever it is we are doing.

We need prayers big enough to shake our homes and save our marriages. We need prayers big enough to shake your workplace and rearrange priorities. We need prayers big enough to shake our community.

We need to ask more, imagine more. We need to think outside of the box to pray these big prayers. I want you to pray more. Pray bigger. Pray boldly.

Next, we need to live boldly. Up here we have some boxes with blank cards. As we sing our invocations song, I want to challenge you to imagine something bold. Write down one way you can intentionally overlap your life with our community in some way to make an impact. Some way you can volunteer. Maybe you can mentor a young person. Sponsor a project. Start a service project. Write this on your card. Sign it, and then post this card put it somewhere it can be seen. Take a picture and put in on social media. Pray about it.

Put in on your refrigerator, mirror, front window of your house, etc.

God can then take each of our visions and multiply them.

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<sup>i</sup> <https://www.dailysignal.com/2014/10/07/often-americans-pray-strangest-prayer-requests/>