

A Deeper Dive: The Incarnational Posture and Everyday Presence

Building upon the previously discussed foundations of Gospel Fluency and the structural dismantling of consumer Christianity, this document explores the practical implementation of these frameworks. The central pedagogical goal here is the repudiation of instrumentalist approaches to evangelism—specifically, moving away from viewing individuals outside the faith community as targets, statistics, or "religious projects."

By synthesizing Hugh Halter's "incarnational posture" with Caesar Kalinowski's framework of "everyday presence," a blueprint emerges for cultivating authentic, agenda-free relationships embedded in secular spaces.

The Theological Foundation of the Incarnational Posture

The attractational model of church ministry, which focuses on extracting believers from culture into highly orchestrated events, frequently relies on a methodology that implicitly demands non-believers adopt church norms before experiencing belonging.

The incarnational posture takes its cue from the Christological doctrine in the Gospel of John: the divine "took on flesh" and dwelt among humanity. Halter translates this into a missiological imperative. If the incarnation represents the divine willingness to enter human reality fully, incarnational ministry requires the church to embed itself deeply within secular spaces rather than expecting culture to cross the threshold of a religious institution.

Dismantling the "Religious Project" Mentality

The attractational model inherently risks reducing non-believers to metrics of institutional success. Forming relationships primarily for the instrumental purpose of conversion creates a dynamic of coercion and superficiality.

Halter notes that people are not pagans to be reconverted, projects to be preached at, or demographics to be reprogrammed. Every person is a complex story rich with history, creative potential, clarity, and blindness. The incarnational posture demands radical empathy and humility, requiring practitioners to engage in the daily grind of work and neighborhood life without a hidden institutional agenda.

The theological premise is that Jesus did not take on flesh merely so individuals could pray a salvation prayer and settle into a semi-religious life; He came to relate to broken reality. Adopting an incarnational posture means valuing a relationship for its own sake, suffering the inefficiencies of real relationships—expending time, energy, and comfort—to truly know and be known.

Modalic vs. Sodalic Structures (Revisited)

As introduced in earlier discussions regarding *AND: The Gathered and Scattered Church*, this shift requires a structural change balancing "modalic" (gathered) and "sodalic" (scattered) identities. The following table delineates the specific relational and directional differences between these models:

Feature	Attractional Model (Modalic Dominant)	Incarnational Model (Sodalic Integration)
Directional Flow	Centripetal: "Come and See" (Extracting from culture)	Centrifugal: "Go and Be" (Embedding in culture)
Primary Space	The centralized church building (First/Second spaces)	"Third Places" (Pubs, cafes, neighborhoods, secular spaces)
Relational Motivation	Instrumental: The relationship is a means to conversion	Intrinsic: The relationship is valid and valuable in itself
Belonging Paradigm	Belief enables belonging (Adopt norms to be accepted)	Belonging precedes belief (Acceptance without prerequisites)
Discipleship Method	Classroom, curricula, and programmatic instruction	Life-on-life modeling in the natural rhythms of the everyday

Feature	Attractional Model (Modalistic Dominant)	Incarnational Model (Sodalistic Integration)
View of the Unchurched	A target demographic or a "religious project"	A human being with a complex story

Embedding in Secular Environments

A critical component of this posture is geographical and sociological location. The transition requires shifting engagement to secular spaces, specifically focusing on the "Third Place" and the marketplace.

The Sociology of the "Third Place"

Sociologically, the "First Place" is the home (domestic life), and the "Second Place" is the workplace or school (productivity and hierarchy). The "Third Place" encompasses informal public gathering spaces—pubs, cafes, parks, and local diners. These are the primary arenas for unstructured social interaction and communal bonds.

While the attractional church historically attempted to function as a pseudo-third place, its highly regulated environment often triggers anxiety in unchurched individuals. The incarnational posture demands inhabiting secular third places. Halter's Adullam network in Denver utilized local pubs as environments for community formation. By becoming a "regular" in neutral territory, the practitioner strips away religious hierarchical authority and assumes the posture of a neighbor.

Halter's Five-Stage Incarnational Progression

Halter outlines a five-stage progression mirroring the life and ministry of Jesus, demonstrating how non-coercive relationships naturally evolve:

1. **Incarnation (Presence):** The foundation is presence. This involves moving into a neighborhood and understanding what constitutes "good news" for that demographic before uttering theological propositions. The focus is entirely on proximity, observation, and genuine empathy.

2. **Reputation (Trust):** Theological propositions require a trusted source. Authority to speak into deeper issues is earned after establishing a localized reputation for goodness and hospitality. Christ's willingness to eat with sinners led them to call Him their "friend," proving practitioners must be the least judgmental people in their communities.
3. **Conversation (Grace and Truth):** Once trust is established, organic dialogues arise. These are not scripted apologetics, but conversations pointing people toward Jesus rather than recruiting them to an institution. The practitioner translates the gospel into a resonant vernacular learned through presence.
4. **Confrontation (Spirit-Led Truth):** This is a sensitive, Spirit-led moment where the gospel's implications challenge an individual's worldview. Because the practitioner has proven unconditional friendship, confrontation is received as an act of profound empathy for the individual's flourishing, not as judgment.
5. **Transformation (Divine Life):** The ultimate goal is an ongoing renovation of the human heart, where the divine life of Christ reorders relationships with God, self, and the world. This is viewed as the work of the divine, with the practitioner's role being to facilitate the environment through sustained presence.

Everyday Presence: Kalinowski's Methodology

Caesar Kalinowski provides the granular methodology for living this out, addressing the burnout that occurs when discipleship is treated as a programmatic addition to an over-scheduled life. Kalinowski argues discipleship is a comprehensive lifestyle, requiring a shift from an "additional" mindset to an "intentional" mindset. The practitioner invites others into the life they are already living. Kalinowski summarizes this with the axiom: "Small is Big, Slow is Fast."

Eradicating the Relational "Bait and Switch"

A central ethical pillar of Kalinowski's methodology is avoiding the "bait and switch"—pretending to offer genuine friendship (the bait), only to leverage it to force a theological conversation (the switch). Everyday presence requires transparency about beliefs while proving the friendship is not contingent upon the other person's spiritual response. If the gospel is rejected, the relationship must remain completely intact.

The Six Rhythms of Everyday Discipleship

Expanding on the six universal rhythms of life, Kalinowski details their specific missiological impacts for agenda-free relationship building:

Discipleship Rhythm	Description and Application	Missiological Impact
1. Story	Understanding God's overarching story (Creation, Fall, Redemption, Restoration) and intersecting it with personal stories.	Moves individuals from isolation into a larger narrative; allows understanding of deep personal history.
2. Listening	Listening backward (to Scripture), forward (to the Spirit), and deeply to the community.	Validates the humanity of the non-believer; replaces preaching with empathetic understanding.
3. Celebrating	Joining cultural milestones and being the "bringer of better wine."	Bridges the sacred-secular divide; demonstrates Christianity is characterized by abundant joy.
4. Eating	Leveraging roughly 21 weekly meals; dedicating 3 to share intentionally with those being discipled.	Breaks down socio-economic boundaries; creates an intimate, disarming environment for vulnerability.
5. Blessing	Intentionally blessing three specific people weekly through service, words, or gifts.	Proves the unconditional, agenda-free nature of love; alters neighborhood atmosphere.

Discipleship Rhythm	Description and Application	Missiological Impact
6. Recreating	Resting in completed work, engaging in hobbies, creating beauty, and taking breaks.	Counters the idol of extreme busyness; provides neutral, low-pressure environments for connection.

In practice, practitioners utilize "The Story of God" framework. However, they must first listen deeply to understand the unique contours of a person's "Fall"—how their identity has been fractured. Furthermore, eating and celebrating act as boundary-breaking tools. Just as Jesus engaged in sacrilege by eating with societal outcasts, dedicating meals and celebrating milestones proves that the kingdom of God affirms human joy.

Gospel Fluency and Identity

As established in earlier frameworks, Kalinowski reinforces that Gospel Fluency requires diagnosing unbelief using four sequential questions: *Who is God? What has He done? Who am I? How do I live?*

Kalinowski emphasizes in *Transformed* that identity is received as a birthright from Christ, not earned. Rather than viewing a non-believer as a moralistic project needing behavioral correction, they are viewed as someone suffering from spiritual amnesia, trying to secure value through created things. When a friend expresses anxiety, the fluent practitioner speaks good news to the underlying identity crisis.

Strategic Engagement: The "Person of Peace" Paradigm

To avoid emotional exhaustion in a vast cultural landscape, missional leaders utilize the "Person of Peace" strategy derived from Jesus' instructions in Luke 10.

Jesus instructed His disciples not to force their presence on unreceptive audiences. Instead, they were to look for a "Person of Peace"—someone welcoming, hospitable, and spiritually curious—and remain in that household. In the modern context, the Person of Peace serves as the relational gateway into a secular community. The practitioner enters third places, practices listening and blessing, and observes who responds with reciprocal openness. Investing deeply in the Person of Peace honors the agency of the community, often allowing that person to become a bridge to their wider network of friends and family.

The Cost of the Incarnational Posture

The attractional model is highly efficient, relying on mass communication and minimal personal vulnerability. The incarnational posture is profoundly inefficient. It requires practitioners to die to their own preferences, expending emotional and temporal capital by inviting the chaos of messy human lives into their own spaces.

Practitioners must relinquish traditional metrics of success. Sharing the rhythms of eating and celebrating with a secular friend for a decade without a definitive "conversion" is deemed a failure in the attractional model. In the incarnational model, this long-term, steadfast presence is a faithful replication of a God who is endlessly patient. To live incarnationally is to find things that make one "mad or sad, to the point where blood boils and tears fall," fighting alongside the marginalized for the long haul.

Appendix: Recommended Reading for a Deeper Dive

- ***AND: The Gathered and Scattered Church*** by Hugh Halter and Matt Smay
- ***Bivocational and Beyond (BiVO)*** by Hugh Halter
- ***Brave Cities*** by Hugh Halter
- ***Transformed: A New Way of Being Christian*** by Caesar Kalinowski
- ***Everyday Church: Gospel Communities on Mission*** by Tim Chester and Steve Timmis