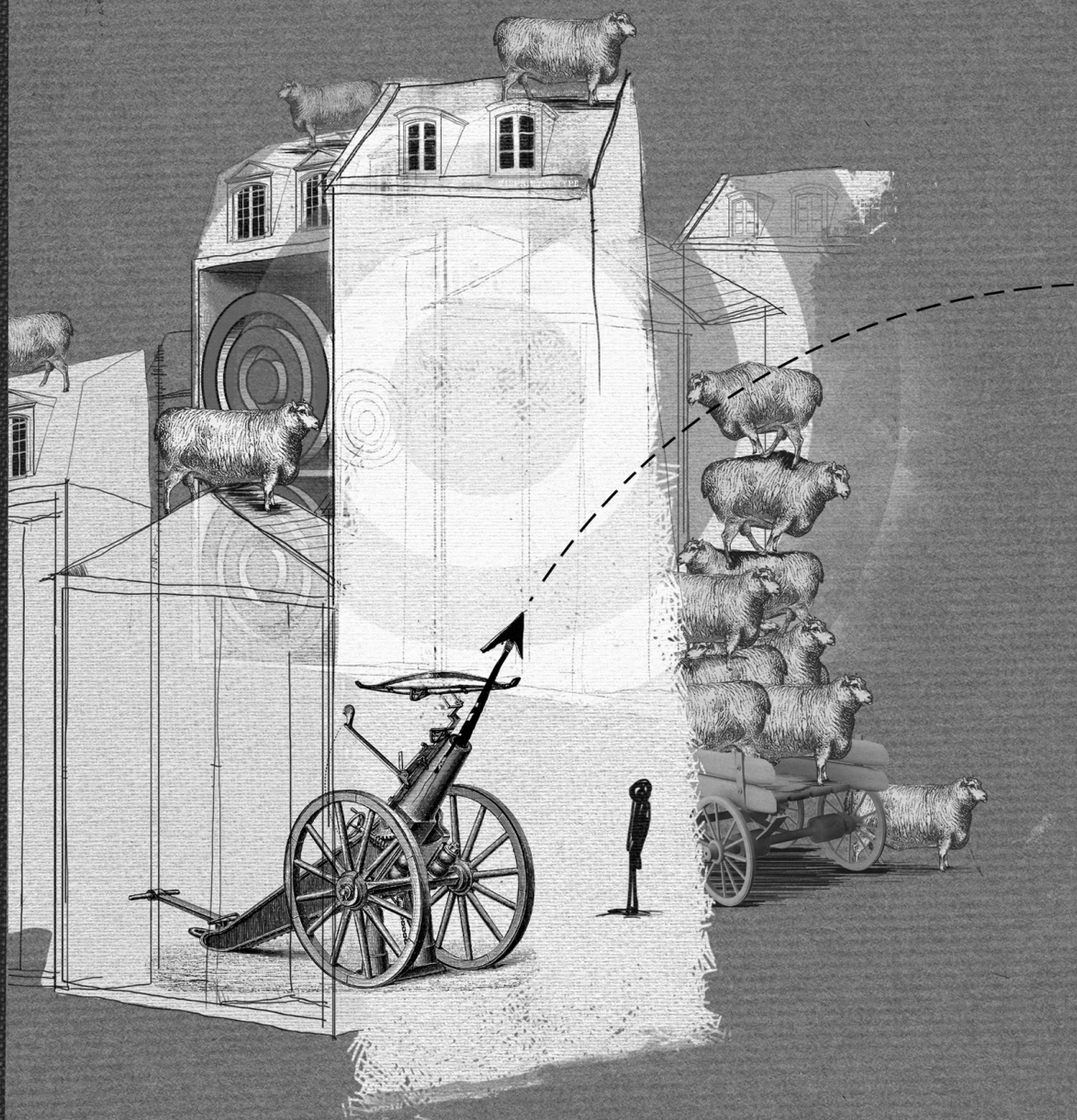
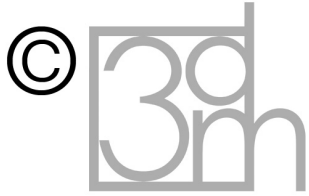


# TARGET

LEADING  
MISSIONAL COMMUNITIES  
FOR STUDENTS  
AND YOUTH



RICH ATKINSON



TARGET:  
LEADING MISSIONAL COMMUNITIES FOR STUDENTS  
AND YOUTH

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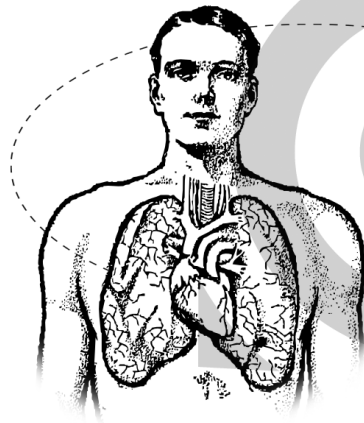
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First printing 2013

4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 Printing/Year 15 14 13 12 11 10

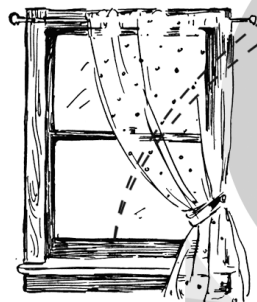
Cover Design: Blake Berg  
Editor/Interior Design: Pete Berg  
ISBN: 978-0-9846643-9-9



# CONTENTS

<b>Foreword</b> .....	i
<b>Chapter One:</b>	
Intro .....	1
<b>Chapter Two:</b>	
Spotting the Target .....	5
<b>Chapter Three:</b>	
Phase 1—CONTACT .....	17
<b>Chapter Four:</b>	
Phase 2—COMMUNITY .....	37
<b>Chapter Five:</b>	
Phase 3—CONNECTION .....	61
<b>Chapter Six:</b>	
Phase 4—COMMISSION .....	69
<b>Chapter Seven:</b>	
10 Steps to Transition to Targets .....	83
<b>Chapter Eight:</b>	
Conclusion .....	111





# FOREWORD

## **"I don't know how to live without walls!"**

Those are words that I don't think I will ever forget.

They came out in a conversation I was having with Junior, a Haitian man, as we drove throughout the city of Port Au Prince, Haiti, trying to find the appropriate official who could help my wife and me with some documentation for the adoption of our son Frankie. They were the kind of words that you hear not just with your ears but with your spirit.

See, in Haiti, everything is separated by walls. I encountered this unmistakable reality the first time I flew into Haiti to visit my son. After making my way through the craze and chaos of the Port Au Prince Airport, with only a minor panic attack, we jumped into the car of a missionary friend who was waiting to pick us up. We drove throughout the city until we finally found our way to the missionary compound that would be our home the next few days. But what struck me as we drove throughout the city were the walls. Everywhere we drove, it seemed like there were 14-foot walls with barbed wire around the top of them. These walls separated the outside streets from the residences on the other side of them. Inner walls separated each residence from the other residences beside it.

For most of the week, Kim and I stayed behind the walls with our son, getting to know him, playing with him and loving him. But on this particular day, Junior was helping us journey outside the walls, both to give us a tour of the city and to fill out some "must-sign" paper work. That's when we began to have our conversation.

Junior and I were talking about his recent visit to the United States, and I asked him how he enjoyed his time there. I was surprised to hear his answer. Junior said that while he enjoyed his time in the United States—eating the food, staying in the hotel, shopping at the stores, and visiting the sites—he also struggled with anxiety for most of his visit. This answer intrigued me, so I pushed him a little further. That’s when Junior made this statement: “In the United States, you don’t have walls. And I don’t know how to live without walls.” The words struck me in the core of my being and seared themselves in the centre of my mind.

Living behind the walls of the missionary compound over the next few days, I began to understand more fully what Junior meant. See, while Haiti is a beautiful place, it is also deeply broken. It was broken long before the earthquake of 2010, and it remains broken to this day. Walls are what help keep people safe in the midst of the brokenness. Walls help provide a little bit of security and order in the midst of the panic and chaos that happen outside them. So, in lots of ways, it makes sense to spend most of your day and life behind these walls. To be honest, it is just safer that way.

But what Junior experienced in his trip to the United States was a different kind of society. It was one, in his estimation, that didn’t have walls. It was also one that challenged his view of safety and security and left him feeling a bit anxious.

I get what Junior was talking about. I get how living without walls could be a little challenging, to say the least, because it is a completely different way of life for someone like Junior. I also know that it’s not exactly true that we live without walls in the United States. We have walls. It’s just that most of our walls are invisible walls of racism, sexism, classism, and the like. We have walls, and we live inside these invisible walls in order to keep ourselves safe and secure.

January 12, 2010, changed things though, for at least, a moment in Port Au Prince, Haiti. On this day, an earthquake measuring 7.0 on the Richter scale knocked all the walls down. On that day, a new reality emerged. On that day, it didn’t matter whether you knew how to live without walls or not—all the walls were down. And on that day, you had to learn how to live without walls whether you wanted to or not. As a father who had a son in that rubble, I’m glad today that people did.

I tell you that story because I believe, on a spiritual level, that it is exactly why those of us who have given our lives to trying to reach the next generation have needed Rich Atkinson to write this book. Most of us who work in church, go to church, and are involved in church don't know how to live without walls. In fact, many of us have given our lives to build spiritual walls for people to keep them safe from the world outside. At best, we know how to invite people into our compounds or journey out for an occasional visit or short-term mission—so much so that we really have trouble imagining a society without them.

The truth is, there must be life without them—because, I believe we too are living in an earthquake of sorts. It's not a physical tremor but a cultural one—and it's shaking everything. The walls of truth, beauty, marriage, banking, finance, and pretty much everything we once thought could keep us safe have been shaken. People are trapped in the rubble. Even the walls of the church itself have been shaken. In fact, just 4 percent of the millennial generation is going to church. In this moment, the lives of real people depend on us learning to live without walls.

What Rich Atkinson does in this book is give us a guide to such a kind of life. More than simply inspiring us to mission beyond our walls, Rich teaches us how to live without them. And in doing so, he reminds us that what could look like our biggest threat may also be our greatest missional opportunity. In fact, as a pioneer outside these walls, Rich not only helps us see our calling to live outside them but brings the testimony of a real movement that is building on the other side.

In an age where the church behind walls is dying, the church outside the walls is beginning to thrive. As one who has spent his life calling others to journey outside of the walls and to even live life without them, I'm glad that I now have a resource to give others who have heard that call to teach them how to live this way—and even more how to thrive.

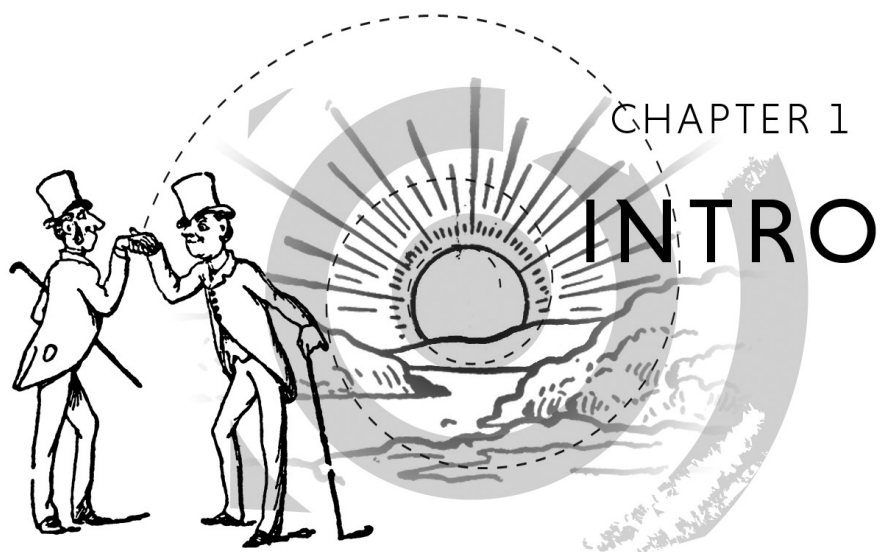
Because Rich and his team have journeyed outside the walls, his community is changing: crime is low; students are finding Christ; relationships are being built, and even the city itself is taking note.

I want these same things to happen in my city. And I know you do too. So, it is with great exuberance that I invite you to turn the page and begin Rich's

book. I believe your entire community will be glad you did.

***Dave Rhodes***  
***3DM U.S. Team Leader***





**“Christianity is just one big stupid crutch!”** Rhi said bluntly. Rhi was a 12-year-old girl who certainly knew her opinion. She shared it after I finished sharing a testimony with one of our Targets (which is our name for youth missional communities) a few years ago. I had no answer to her staunch criticism other than a childish retort: “It’s honestly not!”

For this Target, we had gathered a group of young people together for an evening of fun and community in a local church building. We called this Target “Encounter” because we wanted the young people to encounter God, encounter each other, and encounter the lost. The target had about 30 young people who gathered together every week. Many of these young people had come from a single friendship circle because one Christian girl had invited them all from school. We had some fun games, which they enjoyed, and then had some community time as we sat around drinking hot chocolate, chatting about life (and providing some stuff for boys to do as we all talked). One of the leaders always shared a story of what God had been doing in his or her life over the last couple of weeks. On this occasion I shared how God had helped me through a tough time. But Rhi wasn’t buying it.

Fast-forward a year from Rhi’s rather blunt distrust of my story, however, and you’d see me dunking her in a swimming pool full of water with a crowd of people cheering and prophesying. God had gotten hold of another life, flipped it on its head, and brought a sworn atheist firmly into the Kingdom. Five years later, Rhi is now an amazing singer-songwriter who plays songs that bring hope and the Kingdom to

young people all over our city. Even more, she recently took on the task of leading the youth work at a local church.

Honestly, I'm completely hooked on seeing God break into the lives of young people and change them by His power. I'm constantly blown away that He allows little ol' me to be involved in these young people's precious lives and faith journeys. My hope is that you'll be as hooked as I am on seeing God change young people's lives because of what He won for us.

This book is my attempt to explain the crazy journey God has taken us on at St. Thomas Church Philadelphia in Sheffield, England, over the last few years, as we have seen our youth ministry develop from reaching 60 young people a week to reaching more than 800. We have seen hundreds of young people give their lives to Jesus in one of the toughest mission fields in the country. It has been an amazing journey, as we've held onto God's coattails and learned the lessons of developing multiple communities of missional youth spread throughout a city.

Before we begin to express ideas, concepts and lessons and explore how they can transform youth ministry, however, it's important to recognise that we have learned these lessons as God has transformed our youth ministry. We have been blessed to see God breathe life into our outreach to the lost generation of Sheffield and have tried at every step to learn from our mistakes. God has blessed what we've done. We don't claim to be geniuses who have come up with some magic formula; instead, we have simply learned by watching what the Lord has done. We now feel compelled to pass on the knowledge of what we've discovered. Our hope is that you'll find within these pages inspiration, experience, and learning that will help you as you go on your own crazy journey with Jesus. We pray that you'll see transformative growth in your youth ministry whether you're a youth worker leading hundreds, a parent helping your young person reach their mates, or a pastor trying to work out how to make your church effective at reaching the younger generation.

A generation of young people is desperate for someone somewhere to share the Good News of Jesus with them in a context where they have community in which to safely process it. Seeing young people's

lives changed and transformed by God is the most exciting thing in the world, and we want to help you do that based on what we've experienced. We have found that running a youth ministry based on the principles we'll explore in this book has given God room to do some amazing things in young people's lives. It's an amazing privilege to be part of the process, and I'm sure you'll find it rewarding as you read this book and share in the Kingdom stories. Our hope is that, after reading, you will see God give you some of your own stories.

We'll go through a journey together as we share the story we have been on over the last few years, drawing lessons and principles as we go and helping you consider how God is calling you to lead in the emerging generation. We'll go through the four phases of Targets and discover how the Target can connect UP, IN, and OUT at each level. Then, we'll provide a sample timeline that helps you start your own Targets. The heartbeat of this book is to provide you with all the tools you need to lead an effective youth ministry of Targets that meets young people, builds community, makes disciples, and is able to multiply. I know that this probably sounds like it's going to be incredibly complicated, but it's actually surprisingly straightforward if you follow the simple steps that we'll run through and allow God to do the hard work. Let's all begin to shoot for the Target together.

