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The Foundation: Missio Dei and Jesus

I want to make it clear that my purpose isn't to encourage innovation for its own sake. My thinking is driven by theology: the missio Dei. God is at the very core missional. God doesn't just have a heart for missions; God is mission. God cannot not mission.

What we got captivated by because of Christendom is establishing God space, in which God operates. We come to God's space to worship him but he's removed from the rest of the world. We have houses of God. That is blasphemous. Christendom thinks about building cathedrals and calling people to worship him there.

God does not sit still in some sacred spot. He is on mission. He will not be caged. He bursts forth continually. You find him in places where you think you're least likely to meet him.

God sends himself into this world even in the creation story. We are the sent ones. If you want to create a space and attract people to it, all well and good - but it's not who you were intended to be, and it doesn't work anyway.

If the church comes to its senses because it doesn't work anymore, good. But I would prefer that they come to it theologically. God lives where? In us. Christianity becomes the death of all religion. You no longer need temples or priests or altars. When the living God dwells in you, it propels you into the world of which you are part.

This is foundational. It is not just a better way of doing things. It is the biblical model.

We need to anchor our lives in the example of Jesus. The Protestant church has been besotted with Paul, but Paul's whole point was to point us to Jesus. All he did was told the stories of Jesus. His letters conceptually reflect on these stories. For Paul, the Gospel was one point: Jesus. This will save us from the dilemma we are part of.

What's happened is that we've forgotten the stories of Jesus. They're a novelty. We think they're for kids, an introduction to the weighty theological matters. They are the meat. By not concentrating on these stories as our core story, we domesticate them and turn them into kid's bedtime stories. Don't tell your kids the real stories of Jesus before they go to bed, because they won't go to sleep. "Now I want you to die for your friends as I have! Now have a good sleep."

The stories tell us we have a shot at being both godly and human at the same time. We want to pick one or the other. You can thrive here in this godless empire and follow God at the same time. Jesus' full humanness is the part that disturbs us so much.

We have turned following Jesus into a holier-than-thou adventure, and have turned followers of Christ into some of the strangest people you have ever met. Some are socially retarded. Is this what it means to be a follower of Jesus? Jesus was an offense to holier than thou people.

Stop separating the sacred and the profane. It's possible to integrate the two. It's possible to live a purely secular life as the follower of Christ. The standard today is separation and withdrawal. In Scripture, it's the opposite: move out into this unclean world and live as God's people.

When you do mission Jesus' way, it subverts so much of what we normally do. His first miracle was at a wedding in Cana: not an orderly event. A northern Galilean wedding would have been a loud affair. A father started collecting wine every year when a daughter was born, for 15 years putting the wine aside. At the wedding, they start with the oldest wine (16 years). They'd work their way back to the newest wine, that just got fermented last week. By this time people are on top of tables celebrating. In the midst of this, we run out of wine. The daughter is dishonored. This is when Mary wants Jesus to first show his hand? It's a subversive story. Show your hand in the ordinariness and everydayness of a family wedding.

He takes the urns that were set aside for ceremonial washing, set aside if you even brushed someone or something that was unclean. These urns are symbols of the separation of the sacred and profane. Jesus uses that water to turn into the best wine. Does it offend you, this story? At its core: God is intimately involved in even the everyday details. **He separates all the symbols that separate the sacred from the secular.** God has come in human form.

Jesus goes over and over to subvert the separation. The single most common charge is not blasphemy or heresy: it is that he is a drunkard and a glutton.

What does he call us to when we gather? Not singing, but eating and drinking. As far as he was concerned, what middle eastern person would ever get together without eating or drinking? Not some special feast. When you eat... We turn it into a magic religious feast and make it quiet. We've turned it from a thrice daily practice to a special religious thing. Shame on us.

A feast at a restaurant, playing golf, serving the poor can be a religious experience. It's flooding all of life. This ends up subverting so much of what clergy do. We are needed much less to perform the sanctified acts, and needed so much more to equip our congregations to live like this.

Story of Bartholomew: changing the picture of Jesus. Vandalize the normal pictures of Jesus with what we read in the Gospels. So many Christians know nothing of the Biblical picture of Jesus. It's all based on caricatures. We need to learn what it's like to walk with him with us.

Jesus would not qualify for a member in many of our churches. Even if he was admitted, it wouldn't be long before he would be kicked out for subverting the church. If this is true, why are we doing church this way? Why are we putting up with this? We can be part of a revolution.

You know who's leading in this? Not the clergy. Some 25 year olds who are trying to love their neighbors. They are going, but we stay and maintain the system - the very system in which we doubt that Jesus would be a part.

He knows the rules and is prepared to subvert them. He hung out with sinners. How do prostitutes, homosexuals feel about us? They hate us. They didn't just put up with Jesus, they loved him. How is it that we have become repulsive to the people who loved Jesus? How is it that you can be sinless and be completely fragrant to people who are far away from the kingdom?

Who was it that understood his message best? Not his followers, or the sinners or tax collectors? No, the people who had worked Jesus out the best were the Pharisees. They knew where this would lead. The people who understood best wanted him dead. Have we become the very thing that we feared? We are teaching people to live as Pharisees.

Teach your people to rediscover Jesus. Don't do it lightly; it's dynamite. It will subvert the system that pays your salary.

The true revolutionaries have nothing to lose. Your salary is based on the old system. Are you prepared to let it all go? Do you trust God enough?

My clergy friend: fishing with lesbians three times a week. It's so easy to preach against homosexuality. It's cowardly. We speak on things when we know nobody will call us on it. We need to learn to know how to remain biblical while we are gracious and loving to the people Jesus was friends with. Who are your friends? Who likes to spend time with you? If you look and act and smell like Jesus, it will be lesbians and sinners, the lost, the lonely, and frightened. If you look like Pharisees, it will be all the religious people. You'll be 24 hours serving them.

Do this, not because it works - because it's who we are destined to be.

Lord help us to look more like Jesus and less like Pharisees.

Q&A

You have to model this. You cannot do mission among acquaintances. It takes place primarily within the context of friendship.

What would it look like to live like Jesus?

We need to look at foundational principles on how to live this way. I will explain where I come from, which from what I hear is similar to Canada.

10% of our population attend church regularly and call themselves Christian. About 2.5% are evangelicals, pentecostals, charismatics. The majority of this 10% are elderly people. This gives us an indication of where it is heading in twenty years. If I had a big church building, I would be worried.

In the next twenty years, we are in big big trouble. We only have 10% of the market and most of them are aged.

There is another 5% who are Christian but don't attend church. Another 5% are not Christians but share similar values as Christians. 80% neither attend church nor are they warm to the possibility. They are at best blasé, at worst hostile.

If you are running Alpha or Purpose-Driven Life or other Christian programs, most of who we are reaching is the 15% who are somewhat church-ed or friendly to the church. We are making little impact on the 80%. The thing that keeps us going is that every so often somebody gets converted from the 80%, but it is rare. But it helps us pretend that it is working.

We have put all of our eggs in the "come to us" basket. If so, we are finished.

Two guys in the pub don't say, "Hey, I heard the church down the road got rid of all their pews and has put in comfortable pews. They don't use the organ anymore either. We should go." That just doesn't happen. We turn ourselves inside out trying to appeal to a group that is at best blasé about us no matter what we do.

So why don't we go? We are too busy. Example: a pastor who cuts the lawn late at night with a flashlight. There goes mission in that neighborhood. Can you imagine people saying, "I want that."

We need to re-educate people and make them less dependent on pastors. We have modeled and taught them to depend on us in unhealthy levels. If you try to integrate being missional into what you already have, then your system will work against being missional.

What does it mean to live life out there? It requires some lifestyle commitments:

We need to recover holiness as mission. We have made holiness all about what we don't do. If you read the Scriptures, godliness is about the reverse: what we will do. It's entirely bound up with living lives of hospitality, justice, mercy, peacemaking. You can make choices about things like drinking and that's fine, but it's not holiness. Holiness is mission (Matthew 5:14-16). When Harry met Sally: "I'll have what she's having." We need to live this type of orgasmic lifestyle where people say, "I want what they have." They throw the best parties, they don't abuse the world, they don't create products

which were made unjustly. They live well; people want what we have. Holiness does not repel people; it should attract people. Titus 2:10: "so they in every way they will make the teaching about God our Savior attractive."

Laugh loud. Sleep soundly. Eat the best food. Give away as much time and money away as you can. Never be satisfied that children die of hunger every day; it's evil. Our government is party to a system in which 80% of this world are suffering. Holiness is an expansive lifestyle.

I've discovered that when you work for justice, the 80% that would never come to you will help you.

We need to rediscover prayer. If you live among the 80% you need to be in prayer. The Bible tells us to pray for three particular things: that God will raise up more harvesters, evangelists (they are there in your church hidden - the Bible promises you these people and we marginalize them, because they are not upstanding people); pray for protection over these evangelists; that God would bless your own friends and neighbors.

We need to socialize with unbelievers. We need to mix with those who don't know Christ and enjoy it. God doesn't just love me; he likes me. Unbelievers think you don't spend time with you because you don't like them, and you make them think God doesn't either. Your very presence, before you even say a word, communicates God's love.

Example: in Corinth, every man belonged to a guild. Each guild had their own god. You're there with an animal sacrificed to a god. It's sold for profit; do you eat it? If you can't eat meat offered to idols, then you can't eat at the table of anyone whose food you can't trust, which means we need our own Christian food supply. Christians will then only hang out with only other Christians - a ridiculous idea to Paul. We today have done this and become everything that Paul wanted us to avoid.

Fishermen in Jesus' day spend most of their time working on their nets. Maybe we're supposed to spend 90% of our time building strong relationships so we can fish. This takes time.

We need to commit to resourcing mission. We need to spend our money as well as our time.

We need to learn how to answer questions. If we live this way we will ask, "Who the heck are you people?" 1 Peter 3:15: always be prepared. We often give the answers before people have the questions.

It's all found in Colossians 4:2-4. If you find a small number of people to live this way, you don't need programs or churches. It's what Jesus would do.

Steps to Mission

John Eldredge: God is calling together little communities of the heart to fight for each other and the hearts of those who have not yet been set free. This is the Christian life as Jesus gave us and it is completely normal - the normative Christian experience.

What's not normal is what we do: to make mission the occasional experience. Our life is meant to be lived in mission, and only occasionally to retreat and be with Christians. A few times a year you need a church trip, not a missions trip.

Some steps we can take, not a formula, but some things we can do to move out of the hermetically sealed existence. We need to ask these simultaneously.

To whom shall we go? You cannot reach everyone in your area, even if you live in a small town. Don't think in terms of location. Think in terms of people groups.

Ask God to which people group God is asking you to go to.

Where do I find them? Proximity is important. Look at the city as from an airplane, like ant colonies, and find the ant trails. It could be an interest group, mothers at a school, guys in a bar.

Become a missionary. Proximity might involve a change of lifestyle.

Story: Shane who stopped going to church and started water-skiing with friends. They say grace, pray about things, and now have a church there.

The attractional church doesn't know how to reach people groups like this. You can't get them to come to church or publish tracts for them. The only way to introduce people like this to Christ is by becoming one of them.

You are in church every Sunday so you have no chance of reaching them.

The Holy Spirit is asking, "What? Will none of you go to these people?" Most missionary movements have been resisted by church leaders. Pray the Spirit into our contexts, so we can release people to those whom God has sent them.

Who will go with me? Don't ever go alone. How many does it take? More than one. We are greater than the sum of our individual parts. They may not even be the people that you would have picked. Don't only surround yourself with like-minded people or you'll be exactly as you are right now in twenty years. You need the prophets and the agitators. At the end of going on mission with these people, you will die for them.

Four Mothers Movement in Israel: phony war against Lebanon. In 1997, an Israeli aircraft was shot down and killed. Four mothers put on black clothes in mourning, walked to the busiest intersection in their city, linked arms, stepped into traffic, and didn't move.

They brought the whole city to a standstill. They refused to move until the government told them while their sons were dying in Lebanon. There is now a Four Mothers political movement in Israel.

If two of them walked into traffic, they would have been in trouble. They needed to go out as a group.

We like the *Lord of the Rings* movies because a collection of people are thrown together who would have nothing to do with each other, on mission. It's what we long for. We want to be in the *Fellowship of the Ring*.

How will we be led? How do you lead people when you don't know what it will look like? Trade in all your metaphors - general, coach, etc. They only work in a hierarchical system. My new favorite metaphors: angler, midwife, gardener. What they have in common: they assist. They manipulate the situation to bring out what is already there. There are people in your church that already have the answers on how to reach people groups. They don't know they know it; it's packed in there like oranges in an orange seed. **Your job is to draw out all the latent missional potential that is already there.** Don't tell them what to do; learn with them.

Instead of a typical church, why not send out groups of 6-8 people to bars in town, sports leagues, model car clubs, etc. The role of the central church is to resource and protect the groups going out. It will always reach the 20% of the market; send out to reach the rest.

We need to take the inherited or solid church and from it spin out liquid churches. Let the inherited church love the people in it while launching missional projects across the city. If it could happen, this is just the kind of place where it could happen.