

On Becoming a Missional People

An NAB Picture of Being Missional

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Introduction

When we talk about missional, what do we mean and what does it look like?

This document is meant to describe what it means to be missional within our NAB contexts, and to help us to move from conversation to action.

In recent years, we have been increasingly aware that we are living in a post-Christian time. Charles Taylor has called it “A Secular Age.” Lesslie Newbigin noted that the church is in a “cultural captivity,” with the church no longer at the center in a position of privilege or prestige. This shift of society has awakened us towards new realities and new possibilities. The liminal situation in which we find ourselves is exciting, yet can be disorienting and hard.

Unfortunately the term missional has been used in many different ways, leading to much confusion around its meaning. “Redeeming the integrity of the word missional is especially critical.” (Missional Manifesto). It is crucial that we try to develop a shared understanding of how we, in NAB circles, are using the term. Missional is not a model, an emphasis on evangelism, a new look at the social gospel, an emphasis on justice, a return to the 1st Century church, or many other distortions of the term (see **Introducing the Missional Church** - Alan Roxburgh, pg. 32). Instead we are defining missional “as a renewed theological vision of the church on mission, serving as a sign, servant and foretaste of the kingdom of God.” Let’s unpack this definition further.

Missional is about God. “God is a sending God, a missionary God, who has called His people, the church, to be missionary agents of His love and glory.” (Missional Manifesto) Properly understood, missional is about the nature and action of God in the world. The term we have used for this is *missio dei*. “The Father is the source of mission, the Son is the embodiment of that mission, and mission is done in the power of the Spirit.” (Missional Manifesto)

Missional is about what God is doing in the world. Throughout scripture, God is acting in the world to redeem all things. In the Old Testament, we see Him at work in and through creation and then through His people Israel. In the New Testament, we see God at work in the world through the sending of His Son to redeem all things and through the sending of the Spirit to empower His people as He sends us into the world. God was even active in the world in ways and places that were unexpected.

Missional is about who God invites us to become and what He invites us to do. In order to become, with any effectiveness, “a sign, servant, and foretaste of the kingdom of God,” followers of Christ and communities of faith must experience a profound, real, and authentic transformation into the image of Christ. Without entering into this journey, we have no true message. We must become good news in order to adequately demonstrate and proclaim good news. This formation into Christlikeness is always for the sake of the world.

“Although it is frequently stated “God’s church has a mission,” according to missional theology, a more accurate expression is ‘God’s mission has a church’.” (David Bosch and Ephesians 3:7-13). The role of individual evangelism through both demonstration and action are important, but we need to be reminded that it is the church’s life together that witnesses to the reality of Christ alive and at work in the world. “I am suggesting that the only answer, the only hermeneutic of the gospel, is a congregation of men and women who believe it and live by it.” (227) Newbigin

Missional Theology suggests that the church is the body of Christ, sent into the world to fulfill the mission of Christ and organized around that mission.

Affirmations and Implications

Our understanding of certain theological issues will raise a number of implications for how we participate in God's work in the world.

Theology

We begin and end with our triune God; who He is and what He is doing in this world.

Our God Reigns

The gospel is the good news of Jesus and His kingdom. Our God reigns as king over all of His creation and has made a way through Jesus for the redemption of all things. The kingdom of God is the reality that through Jesus, what God wants done, God gets done. (Willard). We affirm the reality of this kingdom now, and the fullness of that kingdom when Christ returns.

Jesus is the king that the Old Testament expects and longs for. He is the image of the Father, and the one who is at the center of God's story. We affirm that in creation, the birth, life and teaching, death, resurrection, ascension and the promise of His return, we have a way to the Father and life to the fullest in His Kingdom. Christ demonstrates what it means to live life in this kingdom reality. In Him, and through Him, we have the forgiveness of sin and life everlasting.

One God, Three Persons

Deuteronomy 6 states "Hear O Israel, the Lord our God is one God... ." This does not mean that we are monotheists, but rather our God who reigns is one god, existing in three persons. He exists in community and it is that nature that is crucial to understanding His mission. His nature is that He is love.

One Father

He is Father. Because He is one, He creates out of His nature of love. The Father is the source of all things, and the author of creation. He gives us the right to become children of God.

One Son

He is Son. Jesus is the king that the Old Testament expects and longs for. He is the image of the Father, and the one who is at the center of God's story. We affirm that in the birth, life, death, resurrection, ascension and the promise of His return, we have a way to the Father and life to the fullest in His Kingdom. Christ demonstrates what it means to live life in this kingdom reality. In Him, and through Him, we have the forgiveness of sin and life everlasting.

One Spirit

He is Spirit. Jesus did not leave us as orphans, but breathes life and power into us for mission. The Spirit of God dwells within us to give wisdom, guidance, and power to accomplish that which Christ has set out for us to do in His mission.

Missiology

Our missionary God is at work in the world offering a way to redemption and life for all people and all things.

Our God Sends

God is a missionary God in nature and in action. Scripture, the story of God on mission through His people, is authoritative for our lives and reveals the ways in which God is at work redeeming all things. In the Old Testament, God sends His word into the world 220 times. The New Testament tells of God sending His word in and through His Son Jesus Christ.

As the Father sends the Son, so the Father and Son send the Spirit, but the sending is not complete until we understand that the Father, Son and Spirit have sent us, the church.

Our God Transforms

It is God's great passion that this world, and the people in it, will experience fullness of life, an abundant flourishing, what the Hebrew prophets referred to as "shalom." God's primary means of bringing this about in the world is through the witness of spiritually transformed people and faith communities (the church) who live deeply and authentically in the Way of Jesus. The Spirit of God is always at work to join with the intentional effort and cooperation of His people to bring about this supernatural transformation.

The World and Culture

The world is the mission field where God is at work. Christ was sent into the world, because God loves the world. He did not stand apart from the world, but entered in and became a part of a specific time and place. Culture is the reality of how people in that time and place see that they should live. Christ and His followers are not separate from culture but are seeking to live within culture as a faithful presence.

Our God is Present

Christ is alive and at work in the world. He is present. He reigns as King of the kingdom of God, present and active in the midst of the world. The good news is that we do not have to talk about Him alone, but can point to the reality of His presence. His holiness means that He is **in** and **for** the world and not separated from it. His name reveals that He is a God who redeems and leads us to life, for the sake of the world.

Our God is Present in Time and Place

Although God's nature does not change, the way in which He is at work in the world is contextualized in place and time. God is at work in specific neighborhoods in different ways. He has worked across time in different ways also, but regardless of the time and place, He is present and at work in the world. There are periods of time, where it seems as if God's presence is less discernible. He is also at work in and through people, or networks of people.

Ecclesiology

The church is a sign, servant and foretaste of the kingdom of God.

God's People

Our identity is not as individual children, but as a spiritual family. Our character is to be that modeled by the Son, Jesus Christ. Our vocation is to see ourselves as a missionary community, sent into the world to join Christ on mission through the power of the Spirit.

Communal Life of Formation

The very first followers of Christ were referred to as followers of The Way. Therefore, to become a follower of Christ is primarily an invitation to a certain way of living. The way of Christ. The communal life of God's people is to be a life of purposeful, disciplined effort, where we cooperate with the transforming work of the Holy Spirit, in order to learn how to routinely and easily live as Jesus would if he were us. This profound transformation is both individual and communal.

Communal Life of Mission

The community of God's people and their life together is a witness to God's nature and action. Through our worship (loving God with our hearts) we bring gifts to the king. Through our devotion to scripture and its authority in our lives (loving God with our minds) we hear God speaking to us and guiding us on mission. Through our stewardship (loving God with our strength) we show a generosity and a pace of life that reflects the nature of God, and a

care for creation that reflects His love for all things. Through our witness (loving our neighbor) we proclaim the good news of salvation and life in Christ and we demonstrate a kingdom reality. Through fellowship, we witness that God exists in community and that we are created in His image as a spiritual family.

Leadership

God's people are to be led by those who are himself or herself followers of Christ on mission. They recognize their identity in Him and are growing in character. They know that their vocation is as a sent one, and therefore lead out of a dependence on the Spirit of God in order to help the community of followers to draw close to Christ on mission. Leadership in the people of God looks radically different than models of leadership in corporations across our continent.

The Path of Discipleship

Christians are those who are learning to put their confidence in the work of Christ in them and in the world. We are invited to "come and see" Jesus, and therefore need to emphasize the introduction of our friends to Jesus, over the invitation to a church service. Christ then invites us to "follow Him" (put our confidence in Him for all things) which is a radical call to obedience in mission. Then we are sent into all the world to make disciples of all nations, baptizing them and teaching them also to obey all that Christ modeled and taught. One cannot be a follower or disciple of Jesus without recognizing the importance of seeing themselves as sent ones.

Proclamation and Action

Through the power of God's Spirit, we proclaim the good news of Christ and His Kingdom. It is in and through Jesus we are redeemed and led to life to the fullest. We are a sign, servant and foretaste of the kingdom. Both proclamation and acts of kindness and justice are important for joining God on mission.

One Another - Fellowship

Because God exists in community, is one and is loving, He creates us and gives us the right to become children of God. We, His people exist as a community or family of His children. We too are one in Christ. It is because of His nature that we are a community and not just a collection of individuals. This community bears witness to who He is. The way in which we learnt to live together is itself a witness to the reality of God at work in the world.

Multiplication

God at work through His people will lead to the evidence of the kingdom and the ultimate growth of the church. As we introduce others to Jesus and to life in the kingdom, we will see the multiplication of our influence in increasing neighborhoods. We will multiply our witness through increasing number of Christian Communities who are incarnated in neighborhoods across the continent and around the world.

Conclusion

We are made in the image of our missionary God, and adopted as His children into a community of His people – a spiritual family. It is through life in Christ together, that we bear witness in all that we are and all we do to the very nature and action of a God who is Himself, a missionary God. All of life is best seen through the lens of God, our missionary Father, sending His Son into the world to redeem it, and then together they have sent the Spirit to empower us, His people, to join Him on mission in every way.