

BEING ON MISSION 24-7

To be a people of God, is to be missional. To be missional is to intentionally engage with the people around us. This is what we see God doing all through time. As soon as Adam and Eve sinned, he sought them out from where they were **hiding**. God sought out Abraham in the city where he lived to call him to a great mission. He **sent** His own son into this world as a man, as one of us, “to **seek** and save those who were lost”. Jesus went into the streets, the market places, to weddings, funerals, to dinners, into the homes of people. Yes, Jesus spoke to crowds, but these crowds were not called by him, they sought him out because he first went to them and entered their story, meeting their needs, be it the need for party wine, healing, or forgiveness.

For the last two centuries the practice of mission has moved from this intentional seeking to a “come to us and we will tell you” practice. This was fairly effective in the 1800s and early 1900s but then gradually declined until the bottom fell out in the 1960s. It had worked because the church exercised a great influence and shaped much of the story of culture up until the 1950s. People felt a need to go to church, it was a cultural norm. This sort of missional practice can still get some results today, but the fact is that over three quarters of the population, and even higher percentage of youth, have no intention of attending church and no interest in the gospel. They have become an unreached people group within our own boundaries. The gospel was once the main story of our culture, but now it has been shoved aside, binned, and replaced by a whole host of alternative stories.

As mentioned above, to be missional is to go where people are and incarnate the gospel through our life and words by entering into their story, into their life context. This is what we need to recover today. The main context for doing mission is not the church, an evangelistic event or Bible study, even when held in a pub, a theatre or even one’s flat. The main context is everyday life and mission is 24-7.

How then do we practice this? What does it look like? In the book, *I Once Was Lost*, by Don Everts and Doug Schaupp, Evert and Schaupp provide a helpful framework for how to journey with a non-interested, unchurched individual. They interviewed hundreds of such people who made a commitment to Christ and identified five thresholds that they travelled through to their final step of belief. A summary of these five thresholds of their journey to belief are as follows:

THRESHOLD 1: BUILDING TRUST

In their book Evert and Schaupp write;

“When trust has not been established, lostness feels like wise skepticism and right thinking. If Christians are fanatical and narrow-minded, keeping one’s distance seems like the smartest posture to take toward us. Until this framework of distrust is shifted, growth is nearly impossible”.¹

The core of the gospel is about renewing our relationship with God, knowing his love. Yet if we proclaim the gospel apart from a loving relational context, our approach proclaims religion, not a transforming relationship. This has been an error of the “come and let us tell you” model. Its primary agenda is to tell, building relationships are secondary. It is driven by an agenda, not by loving relationships.

How do we build trust? We befriend non believers. Is this hypocritical? No, Jesus himself was called the ‘friend of sinners’. He loved people not after they believed but from the moment he met them regardless of their belief or behaviour. Making a friend of an unbeliever, sharing life with them, enjoying being with them in their context, accepting and valuing them unconditionally, this is the gospel. When our non-believing friends know that we really care for them, for who they are, they will trust us, they will drop their defences and begin to let us into their life. We will be in a place where we can display and live out before them a Jesus filled life.

THRESHOLD 2: BECOMING CURIOUS

Friends are naturally curious about each others’ lives. They begin to ask questions about what makes each other tick. However, when they are asking questions about our Christian faith, this is not the same as seeking. When asked a ‘spiritual’ question, don’t take it as an opportunity to douse them with the gospel hose pipe. Just fill up the glass they hold out, no matter how small it is, and leave it at that. An invitation for dinner is not an invitation to stay a week. Respect them for that.

What is it that will incite their curiosity? It will be us living Jesus in front of them. I love what Lesslie Newbigin had to say on this point; that people no longer believe in the reality of Jesus because they don’t see anyone living that reality.

This begs the question, how like Jesus is our life? Jesus was intentional about loving and serving others. Friendships normally are tit-for-tat, I like you because you like me. Jesus’ attitude was I love you, regardless of what you think of me; I see you have a need, I want to meet that need. Ask Jesus for ways that you can serve and love your friend in radical ways.

We can further stir their curiosity by asking questions that stir within them some thought or emotion. Evert and Schaupp writes; “Jesus is asked 183 questions in the Gospels. He answers just 3 of them—and he asks 307 questions back.”² We want to give information but what most people

need is questions that cause them to ask questions of themselves and creates a desire to find answers.

Finally, introduce them to your Christian friends but in a natural context, not in a church or Christian event context. Let them see how Christians treat each other, how they have fun and how they do life. If they only meet Christians in church, or at an evangelistic event or Bible study, they only see Christians doing their thing, not doing real life. They can't relate their own life to this.

THRESHOLD 3: OPENING UP TO CHANGE

Before a person will actively seek God and consider becoming a follower of Jesus, they have to become open to change in their life. This decision is, "actually a heroic, mysterious, deep thing."³ As they see a different life in you and your Christian friends, one that is real and attractive, they will begin to consider the possibility for change in their own life. However, this will ensure a lot of internal conflict within them. To change, they first have to admit to the flaws or failure of their own take on life. Be patient. Let them know that whatever they decide, you will still be their friend.

To help them, use questions to find out what their excuses are and then get behind them to find out what their fears are. Excuses are just cover-ups. Also challenge them regarding lifestyle habits that are painful or damaging. Do it compassionately and listen patiently. In John 4 Jesus provides gentle affirmation when the woman at the well gets it right but also gentle honesty in pointing out her core issue. Never get into a debate. You are walking with them, not against them.

At this point, seeker events and Christian socials events would be appropriate. Choose events though that answer questions they are asking. Afterwards find out what they thought of the event and what was said. Listen much, speak little. Being open to change does not mean they are actively seeking Jesus, only that they are debating within themselves the possibility. Don't pressure them.

Lastly, if not already, share stories of what Jesus is doing in your own life, including your struggles. Let them into your story, your walk with Jesus. Ask to pray with them about their struggles and needs. Journey together.

THRESHOLD 4: SEEKING AFTER GOD

Even though a person has pushed through the above three thresholds, that still doesn't necessarily mean they are wanting to come to conclusions. Seeking after God is reaching that point of "purposefully seek[ing] final answers, a resolution."⁴ Seekers are asking the questions like; can He be trusted, will He address my issues, will He bring power and hope into my life, what will it cost me? They will begin to show an interest in attending Bible studies, church services and the like. They want to see exactly what it will look like to follow Jesus.

Most importantly though, you and other Christian friends need to be a living story to them. They need to see how you pray, how you read your Bible, even how you talk about Jesus with others.

When they ask questions like, Why is their suffering? How can you know the Bible is true? etc., begin by sharing how you dealt with these questions. Make your answer personal, not just intellectual.

THRESHOLD 5: ENTERING THE KINGDOM

For all who believed, they reached a point where they needed to make a decision. They have decided that the gospel is real, they want it, and know they need to make a decision. When they reach this point you may need to nudge them towards the decision. Being a seeker is hard to maintain, it can't go on forever. When the time is ripe, when you sense that decision time has come, you need to "ask them, explicitly and simply, to enter the kingdom."⁵ If they say no, find out why, what is the blockage, then help them to resolve or set aside the blockage. Focus on the main issues, those to do with Jesus, not minor issues like the Crusades or church. Study the gospels with them. Share your decision making process and have other Christians share theirs. This is the time to be urgent, to push a little but don't pressure them. When they do make the decision, celebrate with them.

Through all of this process, it is key that you are praying your guts out, wrestling with God for their salvation. It is also important that through the first four thresholds that you never exceed the invitation they extend to you. Respect the space they give you to speak about your faith but don't blast them with the gospel. Your actions and attitude will speak 10 times louder than your words.

Stay true to Jesus. Don't compromise on your values or morals even when it's awkward. At the same time don't be judgemental about their behaviour. If you challenge them about behaviour, share why you believe what you do, but without making condemning statements.

Involve them in your Christian social circle. Let others share in journeying with them. However, be cautious about taking them into a purely Christian event or setting. I have had several non Christians tell me of being asked to attend church or an evangelistic event and summing up the experience with something like, "It's not for me", end of story. What's unfortunate is that they would probably have been willing to hear about Jesus from their friend but being taken to church closed that avenue. Be Jesus to them. Reality or truth today is not what people say but who people are. When they see Jesus in you, they are likely to be willing to hear about it from you.

1. Everts, Don & Schaupp, Doug, *I Once Was Lost*, Downers Grove, Illinois, p. 32

2. Ibid, p. 53

3. Ibid, p. 68

4. Ibid, p. 85

5. Ibid, p. 108