A person wearing a dark suit and brown leather shoes stands with their hands clasped in front of them. The background shows a blurred interior space with large windows that let in bright light, creating a soft, out-of-focus effect. The overall mood is contemplative and professional.

# RETHINK

## **9 PARADIGM SHIFTS FOR ACTIVATING THE CHURCH**

BY BRAD BRISCO

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CHAPTER ONE

# THE NEED TO RETHINK

*The illiterate of the 21st century will not be those who cannot read and write, but those who cannot learn, unlearn and re-learn.*

– Alvin Toffler

When bringing about change in the way people behave, we often need to start with questions of “why” before considering the practical issues of “how.” In the book *Start with Why*, author Simon Sinek contends that there are two primary ways to influence human behavior: you can either manipulate it or inspire it. While manipulation is not always negative, for example when a retailer drops the price of a product to motivate a purchase, it often involves the use of fear or peer pressure to influence behavior. Additionally, change that is manipulated, is usually short-lived.

Inspiring change, on the other hand, involves the consideration of deeper issues. We need to ask underlying questions of “why.” Why do we perceive things in a particular way? Why do we behave in a certain manner? What are the motivations or inherent factors that undergird our behaviors?

Dealing with similar issues of change, author Ronald Heifetz, in his book *Leadership Without Easy Answers*, makes a distinction between organizational change and cultural change. He argues that organizational change typically involves restructuring of some type, along with the use of new programs, processes and techniques. Cultural change, however, looks at how to create a new culture or environment, which will in turn require a completely new set of skills and capacities. Connecting the themes of these two books together, we can say that cultural change is about starting with the “why,” while organizational change is more about the practical issues of “how.”

The reason this conversation about change is important is because the answer to the crisis of the church in North America will not be found by making organizational changes. We can't settle with minor adjustments in our ecclesiology, or how we *do* church. Instead, the problem is much more deeply rooted. We have to look to make cultural changes. We must be prepared to ask questions of why. The underlying issues are primarily spiritual, theological and missiological. To lead disciple-making, missional-incarnational churches that have a mind-set of reproduction will take deep cultural change in the way we think about God's mission and the nature of the church, as well as how the church engages in that mission in local contexts. We must change our attitude from “we have never done it that way before” to “whatever it takes.”

Another way to frame the discussion is to use the language of paradigm. The word “paradigm” is commonly used to refer to a

perception, assumption or frame of reference. In the more general sense, it's simply the way we see the world, in terms of perceiving, understanding and interpreting.

Every organization, including the church, is built upon underlying paradigms or assumptions. This is not the same thing as the church's beliefs or theological systems. Rather the paradigm determines how an organization thinks and, therefore, acts. Paradigms explain and then guide behavior. If we try to restructure an organization but leave the original paradigms in place, nothing will change within the organization. Therefore, for real change to take place, we need to experience a paradigm shift or, in most cases, multiple paradigm shifts.

A paradigm shift happens when there is a fundamental change in an underlying assumption. It's a change from one way of thinking to another. There is a transformation, or a sort of metamorphosis that takes place. Now in the context of our understanding of church, mission and church planting, there are at least three reasons we need to experience this type of genuine paradigm shift.

**First**, if a person has been "churched" for a long time they typically have some deeply held assumptions about church and mission that may no longer be appropriate in a post-Christendom context. Often these assumptions need to be challenged, or at least investigated, to assure they are still correct.

**Second**, cultural change, and ultimately organizational change, will not last if it isn't rooted in paradigm shift thinking. Without reestablishing certain theological foundations that help us "unlearn

and relearn” (to reference the Alvin Toffler quote at the beginning of this chapter, we naturally default toward making modest tweaks in how we operate, rather than cutting to the deeper issues of why. We also believe these theological foundations provide a more robust claim and motivation for real change.

**Third**, it is difficult to fully understand the practices we ought to engage in without first seriously reflecting on these key paradigm shifts. For example, chapter 3 titled “ReThink Mission” speaks to the paradigm shift of allowing *the* incarnation of Jesus to inform our posture toward a local context. When we don’t spend time considering the missiological implications of Jesus’ incarnation, we will not fully understand what it means to incarnate our lives into a local setting to love and serve our neighbors.

One final thought on the importance of paradigm thinking. An adage that speaks to the importance of considering change in an organization goes like this: We are perfectly designed to achieve what we are currently achieving. Read that again. We are perfectly designed to achieve what we are currently achieving. If we make application of this statement to the church today, one of the questions we might ask would be: Are we satisfied with what we are currently achieving? In other words, are we content or pleased with the impact the church is having today? If we are totally honest, the answer would seem to be a resounding “*No!*”

The fact is, regardless of what marker a person looks at to judge the health of the church in North America, every indicator is trending in the wrong direction. If we are perfectly designed to achieve

what the church is currently achieving, then shouldn't we ask if there is an issue in the way we are designed? Or at least question if there is an issue in the way we understand the nature of the church and its place in God's mission? Do we need to reconsider the way we think about church planting? Are there "design" factors that we need to rethink to achieve the outcomes we desire?

The strategies and techniques that fit previous eras of church history don't seem to work any longer. What we need now is a new set of tools. We need a new vision of reality, a new paradigm—a fundamental change in our thinking that leads to a fundamental change in our behavior, especially as it relates to our understanding of the church, mission, discipleship, leadership and church planting. Let the journey begin!

## **ACTION**

1. Write down examples of both organizational changes and cultural changes that a typical church might consider. How would you frame these differences in your church?
2. List possible paradigm shifts that you and your church plant team may need to experience to be more fully engaged in mission.

## **REFLECTION**

“Forget the former things; do not dwell on the past. See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it?”

– Isaiah 43:18-19

1. What do you, or your church, need to stop dwelling on from the past? What new thing do you sense God is doing in your church and community?
2. What do you think your greatest challenges will be in addressing the paradigm shifts listed above? Who can help you address these challenges? What resources can you use?

## CHAPTER TWO

# RETHINK THE NATURE OF THE CHURCH

*Mission is not primarily an activity of the church, but an attribute of God.*

– David Bosch

*If mission defines who Christ is, and if Christ sends us as he was sent, then mission defines who we are.*

– Albert Curry Winn

## **THE MISSIONARY NATURE OF GOD**

The first shift in thinking that must take place relates to our understanding of the missionary nature of God and the church. When we think of the attributes of God, we often think of characteristics such as holiness, sovereignty, wisdom, justice, or love. Rarely do we think of God's missionary nature. But Scripture teaches that God is a missionary God—a sending God.

The missionary nature of God is framed in two primary ways. The first involves the grand narrative of Scripture. When we con-

sider the meta-narrative of Scripture, we discover it is about God's redemptive purposes. All the great sections of Scripture, all the great stories of the Bible and all the great doctrines of the biblical faith connect around God's grand plan and purpose for the whole of creation. Mission is the central theme describing God's activity throughout all of history to restore creation. The mission of God is what unifies the Bible from creation to new creation.<sup>1</sup>

A second way to recognize God's missionary nature is to examine the "sending language" throughout the Bible. From God's sending of Abram in Genesis 12 to the sending of His angel in Revelation 22, hundreds of examples of sending language portray God as a missionary-sending God. In the Old Testament, God is presented as the sovereign Lord who *sends* in order to express and complete His mission of redemption. The Hebrew verb "to send", *shelach*, is found nearly 800 times in the Bible. While it is most often used in a variety of non-theological sayings and phrases, it is employed more than 200 times with God as the subject of the verb. In other words, it is God who commissions and it is God who sends.

In the book of Exodus, there is a fascinating dialogue surrounding God's prompting of Moses to confront Pharaoh. God is sending Moses to convince the king of Egypt to release the Israelites from bondage. There are five references to sending in these six verses. The Lord says:

So now, go I am *sending* you to Pharaoh to bring my people the Israelites out of Egypt. But Moses said to God, 'Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of

Egypt?’ And God said, ‘I will be with you. And this will be the sign to you that it is I who have *sent* you: When you have brought the people out of Egypt, you will worship God on this mountain.’ Moses said to God, ‘Suppose I go to the Israelites and say to them, The God of your fathers has *sent* me to you, and they ask me, What is his name? Then what shall I tell them?’ God said to Moses, ‘I am who I am. This is what you are to say to the Israelites: I am has *sent* me to you.’ God also said to Moses, ‘Say to the Israelites, The Lord, the God of your fathers—the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob—has *sent* me to you’

– Exodus 3:10-15

The prominence of sending language is not only seen in the books of Genesis and Exodus, but throughout all of the historical books, God is a sending God. Throughout the poetic books, God is a sending God. Throughout the prophetic books, God is a sending God. Moreover, when you consider the books of prophecy in the Old Testament, it is easy to see that the prophets were first and foremost people sent by God to participate in His redemptive purposes.

Perhaps the most dramatic illustration of sending in the Old Testament is found in Isaiah 6. In this passage, we catch a glimpse of God’s sending nature in its Trinitarian fullness: Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, Whom Shall I *send*? And who will go for *us*? To this Isaiah responds, “Here am I! *Send* me (Isaiah 6:8).

Later in the book of Isaiah, there is a fascinating passage where the prophet recognizes that God’s Spirit has anointed him to “proclaim good news to the poor” and that he is *sent* to “bind up the brokenhearted” (61:1). In the larger passage of Isaiah 61:1-3, it is

interesting to note that there are no fewer than six acts of redemption that proceed from, or are dependent upon, the Hebrew verb “sent” or the phrase “he has sent me.” To emphasize how central the sending theme is, the passage could be rendered this way:

He has *sent* me, to bind up the brokenhearted,  
He has *sent* me, to proclaim freedom for the captives,  
He has *sent* me, to release from darkness for the prisoners,  
He has *sent* me, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor and  
the day of vengeance of our God,  
He has *sent* me, to comfort all who mourn,  
He has *sent* me, to provide for those who grieve in Zion—  
He has *sent* me, to bestow on them a crown of beauty  
instead of ashes, the oil of joy instead of mourning, and a  
garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair.

– Isaiah 61:1-3

It is this passage that Jesus applies to His own ministry in Luke 4:18-19 as He claims to be the human fulfillment of Isaiah 61:1-2. This passage becomes, in a sense, the closest thing to a personal mission statement for Jesus.

Further, in the prophetic books, it is interesting to note that the Old Testament ends with God promising, through the words of the prophet Malachi, to send a special messenger as the forerunner of the Messiah: “I will *send* my messenger” (Malachi 3:1). Then the New Testament begins with the arrival of that messenger in the person of John the Baptist, described in the Gospels as a man sent by God (John 1:6).

In the New Testament, sending language is not only found in the Gospels, but also throughout the book of Acts and each of the

Epistles. The most comprehensive collection of sending language, however, is found in the Gospel of John, where the word *send* or *sent* is used nearly 60 times. The majority of these uses refer to the title of God as “one who sends” and of Jesus as the “one who is sent.” All the way through John’s Gospel, we see God the Father sending the Son. God the Father and the Son sending the Spirit. And God the Father, Son and Spirit sending the church. In the final climactic-sending passage in John’s Gospel, Jesus makes clear that He is not only sent by the Father, but now He is the sender, as He sends the disciples: “As the Father has sent me, I am sending you” (John 20:21).

With this sentence, Jesus is doing much more than drawing a vague parallel between His mission and ours. Deliberately and precisely, He is making His mission the model for ours. Our understanding of the church’s mission must flow from our understanding of Jesus’ mission as revealed in the Gospels.

## **THE MISSIONARY NATURE OF THE CHURCH**

But why does it matter that we recognize God’s mission as the grand narrative of Scripture? Why is it important to see the “sending language” throughout every book of the Bible? Here is why: *The nature and essence of the church, is rooted in the missionary nature of God.*

In other words, if God is a missionary God (and He is!), then we as His people are missionary people. Therefore, the church

doesn't just *send* missionaries; the church *is* the missionary. Individually and collectively as the body of Christ, we are a sent, missionary church. We should be sending the people in the church out among the people of the world rather than attempting to attract the people of the world in among the people of the church. The reason we start with this crucial distinction as the first paradigm shift is because the vast majority of people in the church today do not think of their congregation in a sending, missionary manner.

## **REFORMATION HERITAGE VIEW**

People today understand church in two prominent ways. The first view is what some call the “Reformation heritage” perspective.<sup>2</sup> The point with this understanding of the church is that Protestants have inherited a particular view of church from the Reformers, which emphasizes the right preaching of the Word, the right administration of the ordinances and the proper exercise of church discipline. Historically these have been referred to as the “marks” of the church.

While each of the three marks are important aspects of church life, this view has left us with an understanding of the church as a *place where certain things happen*. In other words, a person *goes to church* to hear the Bible taught “correctly,” to participate in the Lord’s Supper and baptism and, in some cases, to experience church discipline. Once again, all very good things, but is that the way we want to define the church? Does a *place-where-certain-things-happen* understanding speak to the real essence and nature of the church?

## CONTEMPORARY VARIATION VIEW

The second view is a slight variation on the Reformation heritage definition. This “contemporary variation” view is perhaps the most prevalent way people in America understand the church today—that it is a *vendor of religious goods and services*. From this perspective, members are viewed as customers for whom religious goods and services are produced. Churchgoers expect the church to provide a wide range of religious services, such as great worship music, preaching, children’s programs, small groups, parenting seminars and so on.

One of the major issues with both of these views is that the church is seen as an institution that exists for the benefit of its members.

The alternative vision of the church is to see it as a people *called* and *sent* by God to participate in His redemptive mission for the world. The nature of the church—rooted in the very nature of God—is missionary. Rather than seeing ourselves primarily as a *sending* body, we must see ourselves as a body that is *sent*. Of course, the church still gathers, but the difference is that we don’t simply gather for our own sake, but instead for the sake of others, or better yet, for the sake of God’s mission. We come together as a collective body of followers of Jesus to be equipped through prayer, worship and study and then to be *sent* out into the world. The church is to be a gathered *and* scattered people. Missionary Lesslie Newbigin stated it this way:

The church is the bearer to all the nations of a gospel that announces the kingdom, the reign, and the sovereignty of God ... It is not meant to call men and women out of the world into a safe religious enclave but to call them out in order to send them back as agents of God's kingship.

## WHY THIS ALL MATTERS

To grasp the importance of understanding the church as missionary, consider the idea of cultural distance. This is a simple missionary tool to help discern just how far a person or a people group is from a meaningful engagement with the gospel. In order to determine this, we can see it on a scale like this:



Each numeral with the prefix *m* indicates a significant cultural barrier to the meaningful understanding of the gospel. Barriers include such things as language, race, history, worldview, traditions, beliefs, political affiliation, etc. The greater the number of cultural barriers there are, the increased complexity there will be in communicating with another person.

In the book *The Forgotten Ways*, author Alan Hirsch offers a description of how each section of the scale might look in a local church context:

**m0–m1** Those with some understanding of Christianity who speak the same language, have similar interests, probably the same nationality, and are from a sim-

ilar class grouping as you or your church. Most of your friends would probably fit into this bracket.

**m1–m2**

Here we would include the average non-Christian in our context: A person who has little real awareness of, or interest in, Christianity and is somewhat suspicious of the church. This category might also include those previously offended by a bad experience of church or Christians.

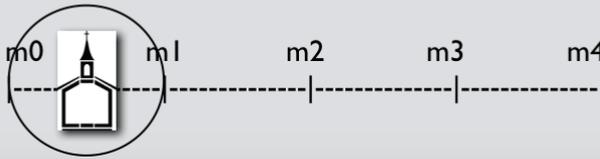
**m2–m3**

People in this group have absolutely no idea about Christianity. Or they might be part of some ethnic group with different religious impulses or some subculture. This category might include people marginalized by Evangelical Christianity, for example, the LGBT community. But this group will definitely include people actively antagonistic toward Christianity as they understand or have experienced it.

**m3–m4**

This group might be inhabited by ethnic and religious groupings such as Jews or Muslims. The fact that they are in the West might alleviate some of the distance, but just about everything else gets in the way of a meaningful conversation. They are highly resistant to the gospel.<sup>3</sup>

The reason this discussion is important for this particular chapter is because the church in the U.S. operates *almost exclusively* in the sphere of m0–m1, as shown in the following illustration.



In other words, too many churches in North America function in a sort of Christian bubble where there are little or no cultural barriers. This is a significant problem because as we have stated previously in this chapter, it is *we* who are the called, sent missionary people of God, which will sometimes mean we must go to where people are. If we fail to go to the people, then to encounter the gospel meaningfully, they must come to us. This is the inbuilt assumption of the attractational (vendor of religious goods and services) church, and it requires that the nonbeliever do the cross-cultural work to find Jesus, and not us! And make no mistake, for many people coming to a church service involves some serious cross-cultural work. When we ask them to come to us, we are in essence asking *them* to be the missionaries!

Instead we must see that we are missionary people, sent to participate with a missionary God, who desires to reconcile all of creation to Himself, for His glory. We, the church, are a chosen people to bless and reach the nations.

## **ACTION**

1. Identify at least two people groups or geographical locations in your city or neighborhood to which God is looking to “send” someone.
2. List the areas in your life that may need to change for *you* to be able to say, “Here am I. Send me!” What is the first step you will take to overcome each hindrance?
3. Identify at least two people groups or geographical locations in your city to which God is looking to “send” your church.
4. List the areas in the life of your church that may need to change for the church to be able to say “Here are we. Send us!” What is the first step your church might take to overcome each hindrance?

## **REFLECTION**

1. What reflections do you have on the missionary nature of God?
2. How does this chapter influence the way you think about your own life?
3. What thoughts do you have on the three views of the church? Do you find them helpful? Why? Which of the views describes your perspective of the church best?
4. What thoughts do you have on the concept of cultural distance? How does this help you understand the importance of the missionary nature of the church?

## CHAPTER THREE

# RETHINK MISSION: INCARNATIONAL PRESENCE

*In the incarnation of Jesus, God revealed himself as the One who is with and for his creation. Now, as the Risen Lord sends his Spirit to empower the church, we are called to become God's people present in the world, with and for the world.*

– Darrell Guder

*Seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare.*

– Jeremiah 29:7

The last chapter examined the missionary nature of God and the “sentness” of the church. God is a missionary God who *sends* a missionary church. However, being sent is only part of the story. The second paradigm shift is about moving from seeing mission as something we do “over there” to something we do where we have already been sent. The language of “incarnational presence” rep-

resents rooting of our lives and the gospel into the places we are already doing life. If the essence of missional living is sending, then the heart of incarnational presence is staying.

## **THE INCARNATION**

The word incarnation comes from a Latin word that literally means “in the flesh.” It refers to the act whereby God took on human flesh and entered into our world to bring about reconciliation between Himself and humanity. The incarnation is God’s ultimate missional participation in creation (John 3:16-17). When God entered into our world in and through the person of Jesus, He came to live among us (*eskenosen*—literally, “set up a tent”): “The Word became flesh and blood, and moved into the neighborhood” (John 1:14, *The Message*).

## **INCARNATIONAL MISSION**

The Incarnation not only qualifies God’s acts in the world, but must also qualify ours. If God’s central way of reaching His world was to incarnate Himself in Jesus, then our way of reaching the world should likewise be incarnational. Now it is important to recognize that the incarnation of Jesus was a special, unrepeatable event. Further, as we enter into the world of others, we certainly cannot take on another’s identity in the fully integrated way that Jesus did. But we can make a distinction between *the* Incarnation with a capital “I” and incarnational ministry.

Obviously, there is nothing wrong with inviting believers to model their lives after the life of Jesus. The apostles encouraged

Christians to imitate Christ as a way of identifying with Him. Both Peter and Paul insisted that Jesus is to be the model for Christian living.

“To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps”

– 1 Peter 2:21

“Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ” (1 Corinthians 11:1).

Peter makes clear that Jesus’ life is to be our example. And Paul simply states that we can follow his way of life because he is so closely following the way of Jesus. Missiologist Michael Frost elaborates on the theme of following Christ’s example from the book of Philippians:

Paul makes this point even more strongly in Philippians, in which he tells us that our ‘attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus’ (Philippians 2:5). We often assume that this passage then commends to us Jesus’ humility, which is clearly present in the text. But Jesus’ humility is commended to us insofar as it is expressed in his commitments to *identification* and *relinquishment*. First, to follow Jesus’ example means that we should share his profoundly humble identification with sinful humankind (Philippians 2:7b-8a). Second, those of us who wish to emulate Jesus should be aware of his equally humble willingness to empty himself and make himself nothing for the sake of God’s redemptive purposes (Philippians 2:6-7a). . . . To embrace an incarnational ministry, then, involves a willingness to relinquish our own desires and interests in the service of others.<sup>4</sup>

Frost's examination of the Philippians passage speaks to two very important ideas related to incarnational mission—the concepts of *proximity* and *presence*.

Incarnational mission must involve living in close proximity with others. We cannot love and serve those God has sent us to from a distance. Just as Jesus took on flesh and blood and moved into the neighborhood, we must do likewise. This may require moving geographically to be closer to those to whom God has sent us. At the very least, it will demand creating time and space to be directly and actively involved in the lives of people we are seeking to reach.

The concept of *presence* moves beyond mere proximity to identification and surrender. Jesus identified *with* and advocated *for* those to whom He was called. As the Philippians passage makes clear, He humbled Himself. He literally *emptied Himself* for the sake of others. This realization suggests an incarnational approach that calls us to relational identification with our neighbors that will lead to tangible acts of love and sacrifice.

It is helpful to recognize that Jesus' words from John 20:21, "As the Father has sent me, I am sending you," are most often used to emphasize the sending of the disciples, and subsequently the church. But we must not neglect the first half of the passage. Jesus says, "*As* the Father has sent me." The word translated "as" (or in some translations "just as") means "like" or "in a similar manner." In other words, we need to be sent *like* Jesus was sent. To whom, and in what manner was Jesus sent? He was sent to the down-and-

outers of society. He was *with* and *for* tax collectors, the oppressed, the poor and the diseased (Luke 5:31). Again, taking Jesus as our example, we are called to do likewise.

In an excellent book titled *The Incarnation and the Church's Witness*, theologian Darrell Guder provides a very helpful summary on the incarnation of Jesus and its relationship to what it means to be a Christian:

We arrive at the concept of incarnational witness as one way of expounding on the character of our missionary vocation. In the incarnation of Jesus Christ, God revealed himself as the One who is *with and for* his creation. Now, as the Risen Lord sends his Spirit to empower the church, we are called to become God's people present in the world, *with and for* the world, like St. John pointing always to Christ. The most incarnational dimension of our witness is defined by the cross itself, as we experience with Jesus that bearing his cross transforms our suffering into witness.

Incarnational witness is, therefore, a way of describing Christian vocation in terms of Jesus Christ as the messenger, the message, and the model for all who follow after him. To speak of the incarnation missionally is to link who Jesus was, what Jesus did, and how he did it, in one great event that defines all that it means to be Christian.<sup>5</sup>

## **NUTS AND BOLTS**

So, what does all this talk of identification, proximity and presence have to do with daily living? It may sound like a cliché, but it really is all about relationships. It's about getting close enough to people to listen, understand their hopes and dreams, and actually come to like and love them.

The Gospels tell us that Jesus was a friend of sinners. Hear that—a friend. What constitutes a friend? When another person invites you to meet their friends, you are in. The Bible is full of examples of people inviting Jesus to meet and spend time with their friends. A sense of whimsical holiness about Jesus drew people to Him. Someone once said that people who were not like Jesus, liked Jesus. As followers of Jesus, shouldn't that also be true of us? That doesn't happen without living with and among people. So, what will it take for you to incarnate the life of Jesus, living through you in your local community? What will it take for you to really move into your neighborhood, perhaps for the very first time?

## **SEEKING THE WELFARE OF YOUR CITY**

A fascinating passage in the prophetic book of Jeremiah, provides a picture of what it looks like to live out incarnational presence. It actually gives practical instructions for digging into the places we live. It is especially helpful when Christians sense they are living in a world that is hostile toward their beliefs, or perhaps when we find ourselves living in a place that doesn't really feel like home.

In Jeremiah 29, we read how the nation of Israel had forsaken God's Law and, as a result, found themselves taken into captivity and exiled far from their Jerusalem homeland. God had sent the Babylonian empire to discipline His people. As they were relocated to a foreign, idolatrous land, they began to hear that their time there would be short. False prophets were telling the nation of Israel that God would soon deliver them and that settling into this new,

strange land was foolish. God's Word through the prophet Jeremiah to the exiles was quite different.

Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, to all the exiles whom I have sent into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon: Build houses and live in them; plant gardens and eat their produce. Take wives and have sons and daughters; take wives for your sons, and give your daughters in marriage, that they may bear sons and daughters; multiply there, and do not decrease. But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare.

– Jeremiah 29:4-7

The words of Jeremiah were shocking. The premise of his message was that the exiles would be in Babylon for several generations—at least 70 years, a time period that included not only the reign of King Nebuchadnezzar but of his son and grandson (Jeremiah 25:11; 27:7; 29:10), and that the Israelites would simply need to come to terms with this fact. God was telling them to settle down and get used to being in this hostile, ungodly place.

It was toward this end that Jeremiah counseled his community not to be nostalgic for the past, for the past could not be recovered. Nor did he advise them to plan for insurrection, for there was no promise of their restoration in Jerusalem, at least not any time soon. Nor yet was the community's survival tied to the remnant that remained in Jerusalem (Jeremiah 24:5-10). For Jeremiah, exile did not mean that God had abandoned Israel. Rather, exile was the place where God was at work. God's purposes with Israel, in other words, were served by the Babylonian invasion.

Jeremiah's instructions were more counterintuitive than they might at first seem. Jeremiah tells the Jews in exile to "seek the welfare" of their captors, to pray for the very people who destroyed their homeland, because the welfare of the exiles and the captors were bound together. If God's purposes with Israel were really being fulfilled through their captivity, then as the exiles pursued the shalom of the home of their captors—Babylon, God would provide shalom for those in exile.<sup>6</sup>

It would have seemed reasonable for the Jews to be hostile to their captors. It also would have been natural for them to withdraw from the world around them. By the same token, it would have been easy for them to simply assimilate with the culture that surrounded them. Any of these three options would have made sense in human terms. However, God was calling the Israelites to something radically different—not to be defensive against, isolated from, or absorbed into the dominant culture, but instead to be incarnated within it.<sup>7</sup> He was calling them to dig into the place that He had sent them, to stay where they would be doing life for a long time.

Furthermore, what God instructs the exiles to do is actually rather ordinary. Consider the list from Jeremiah 29:

- Build houses and live in them
- Plant gardens and eat their produce
- Have children
- Marry off your children so they have children
- Seek the welfare of the city
- Pray for the welfare of the city

There is nothing in this list that is dramatic or miraculous. It is a list of normal, everyday activities. It could represent any person, regardless of income, social status, education, vocation or geographical location. The way the kingdom of God takes root in the lives of people and ultimately changes a city is by exiles living normal, everyday lives as citizens of the King in every neighborhood and public place that makes up a city. We build houses. We plant gardens. We have children. We seek the welfare of our city. Far more often than not, the ways of Jesus are indeed local and ordinary.

Are you willing to commit to the welfare of your city? Will you allow your imagination to see a movement that begins with the local and ordinary, but over time becomes global and extraordinary? If your answer is yes, then together let's seek the welfare of our neighborhoods, and then let us strive for it to spill over into every nook and cranny of our city. Let's dig in, incarnate into the places we are already doing life and display to a fragmented and isolated world a new way to be human.

## **ACTION**

1. Ask yourself: Am I in close proximity to those to whom God has called me? What will I do this week to encourage proximity? Identify one way to experience greater proximity and act upon it.
2. Ask yourself: Am I experiencing incarnational “presence” with those I live near? Do I identify and understand the fears and concerns of those around me? Identify one way to experience a greater level of presence and act upon it.
3. Pray for the welfare of your city. Where are the broken places that need to be restored? Pray for those places. Who are the people that are most affected by the broken systems in your city? Pray for those systems. Pray for those people.

## **REFLECTION**

1. What does it mean for us to pattern our lives on the Incarnation of Jesus? Where do you see the Incarnation informing your daily life?
2. In light of the Guder quote at the beginning of this chapter, what does it mean for the church you lead to be “with” and “for” the world?
3. Read Jeremiah 29:4-7. Reflect on the list of actions God was telling the exiles to do: build houses and live in them, plant gardens and eat their produce, have children, marry off your children so they have children, seek the welfare of the city, and pray for the welfare of the city. How do you see each of these instructions fitting the theme of incarnational presence shared in this lesson?

## CHAPTER FOUR

# RETHINK THE MISSIO DEI

*The main business of many mission committees is to determine how to spend the mission budget rather than view the entire congregational budget as an exercise in mission.*

– Darrell Guder

The third key paradigm shift in missional theology deals with the concept of *missio Dei*. An English rendering of this Latin phrase speaks to the “mission of God.” It is God who has a mission to set things right in a broken, sinful world; to redeem and restore it to what He has always intended.

Therefore, the shift that needs to take place focuses on understanding that mission is not the invention or program of the church. Instead, it flows directly from the character and purposes of a missionary God. In the words of South African missiologist David Bosch, “It is not the church which undertakes mission; it is the *missio Dei* which constitutes the church.”<sup>8</sup> Or stated in a slightly different way “It is not so much that God has a mission for His church in the world, but that God has a church for His mission in the world.”<sup>9</sup>

So it is not about human ingenuity, or even our strategies or techniques, but instead it is about discovering what God is doing and then discerning how He wants us to participate. Simply put, it is all about God's mission.

It is not only crucial to understand that God has a mission, it is equally important to understand that His mission is larger than the church. We in the church often wrongly assume that the *primary* activity of God is in the church, rather than recognizing that God's primary activity is in the world, and the church is God's instrument *sent* into the world to participate in His redemptive mission. Instead of thinking of the church as an entity that simply *sends* missionaries, we instead need to view the church *as* the missionary. Among other things, this shift in perspective will bring about radical changes in two particular areas.

## **GOD'S MISSION AS THE ORGANIZING PRINCIPLE**

First a *missio Dei* perspective will shape our thinking in the manner we understand the form and function of the church. Typically, congregations view "missions" as simply one program or activity among many other equally important functions of the church. Therefore, the missions *program* is seen alongside that of worship, small groups, men's and women's ministries, youth and children's ministry, etc. When missions is viewed in this way, the main business of many mission committees is, in the words of Darrell Guder, "to determine how to spend the mission budget rather than view the entire congregational budget as an exercise in mission."<sup>10</sup>

However, when the church begins to define itself as an agent of God's mission, it will begin to organize *every* activity of the church around the *missio Dei*.

Mission as the organizing principle means that mission goes way beyond being some sort of optional activity or program for our churches. It actually is the organizing axis of the church. The life of the church revolves around it. This is not to say that we don't do corporate worship, develop community, and make disciples, but that these are catalyzed by and organized around the mission function. Only in this way can we be truly missional. Merely adding serving events or special outreach days to our church schedules will not develop missional people nor make a missional church.<sup>11</sup>

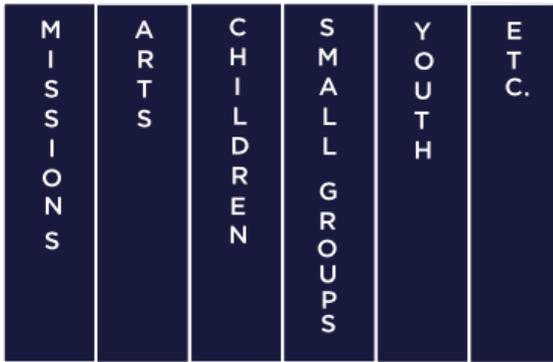
To ensure clarity on this issue of God's mission as the organizing principle for all other activities of the church, let me state again that this does *not* minimize the need and importance of the other functions of the church. It is simply stating that no other function of the church can rightly be the organizing principle—or another way of saying it—the reason we come together in the first place. Worship should not be the organizing principle. Community should not be the organizing principle. Even discipleship and evangelism should not be the organizing principle.

Instead, worship, community, discipleship, evangelism and every other important activity of the church are properly understood and initiated only when viewed through the lens of mission.

The images below provide an illustration for the move from “missions” as one, among many functions of the church, to “mission” being the organizing principle for all other activities or ministries of the church.<sup>12</sup>

If you were to ask someone in your church to list the programs and activities of the church they would typically name things such as small groups, youth and children's ministry, arts or worship, missions, etc. However, one of the problems with such a list, is that "missions" is simple one program of the church, alongside several other equally important programs.

But if the organizing principle is really God's mission, then God's mission should inform, or shape everything else the church does. Therefore, the second image illustrates the need to take the "s" off of "missions" and move the word "mission" (or it could also say "God's Mission" or "*missio Dei*"), at the top of the image to picture the need for God's mission to influence all the other programs of the church.



## GOD'S MISSION AS THE STARTING POINT

Determining where and how we engage in God's mission is the second way a *missio Dei* theology influences our activity. If the mission is God's—and it is—then how do we step into it? How do we truly participate in what God is doing? Author Geoffrey Harris provides these helpful words:

The average church member may be reassured to know that mission is instigated by the simple act of praying, and of listening to God, and following God's guidance. In such fundamental activities all Christians can participate. In addition, it is reassuring to know that God's Spirit is at work in the world prior to our engagement in any relationship or any work of mission. The presence of God in the world means that anyone embarking upon God's mission already has an ally and accomplice in the work. It becomes "mission alongside" rather than mission alone.<sup>13</sup>

But practically speaking, what does it look like to do mission alongside what God is already doing? If it is about God's mission and not ours, then how do we know where, when and how to participate? The answer, at least in part, is that we must look for God's activity in a local setting as the place to begin our missional engagement.

Mission, therefore, cannot be decided beforehand, but it must be discerned in relationship to God's activity in a local context. Instead of "front loading" mission strategies with what we *think* a community needs, we begin by listening and learning what God is already doing. Only after discovering what God is doing in a particular setting do we then ask how He wants us to participate.

Consider the "Four D's" of missional engagement.

## **DISCOVER**

If it is truly God's mission and not ours, then we must first discover how God is at work. The first step in discovering what God is doing

is through listening. Individually and collectively. We must cultivate our ability to listen well on three fronts; to the Spirit, the local community and to each other. It is simply impossible to ascertain the movement of God without carving out significant time to listen to His voice through prayer and Scripture, as well as the voices of those we desire to serve. If the first step is about discovering, then the first question has to be, “What is God doing in this place?”

## **DISCERN**

In addition to listening, participating in God’s mission will involve the difficult task of discernment. Not only will we need to discern what God is already doing, but we will need to ask the follow-up question, “In light of my (our) gifts and resources, how does God want me to participate in what He is doing?” The fact is we can’t do it all, which is true for both individual followers of Jesus, as well as local congregations. But it is also true that God has gifted us all to do something! The point of discernment is to determine where and how to participate in God’s mission.

## **DO**

This may seem obvious, but the process of discovery and discernment is useless if we do not obey what God is calling us to do. We must acknowledge that following Jesus will often be costly. Therefore, we need to ask: Will we be obedient to costly discernment? Or, will we put conditions on our obedience? Someone once said, don’t ask God to guide your steps if you are not willing to move your feet.

## **DEBRIEF**

Throughout the process of engaging God's mission, we must create opportunities to reflect on our missional involvement. Sometimes this may simply mean we need individual "down time" to reflect upon our activities. We may need to ask God to affirm our involvement, or to ask for clarity of direction. But it will also mean carving out time to reflect with others among our faith community. We need to hear what others are seeing and sensing concerning God's activities and to hear the stories of how others are engaging God's mission. It is important for us to be in position to offer feedback on what we are sensing.

The four D's help to put the emphasis on the context God has sent us and on how God has already been working in that place long before we ever arrived.

## **ACTION**

Throughout the week, identify at least three situations where you ask the following questions:

1. Where do I see God at work? Where and how is God working in the lives of those around me? Where and how is God working in my neighborhood? What about my place of vocation?
2. In light of my gifts and resources, how does God want me to partner with Him in what He is doing?

*How might you respond to these same questions from the perspective of your church?*

1. What specific and unique gifts and resources has God given your church?
2. In light of the gifts and resources of the people that are a part of the church, how might God be calling your group to participate locally in the *missio Dei*?

## **REFLECTION**

1. Begin asking how certain programs or activities of your church would change if informed by God's mission.
2. How might small groups operate differently if shaped by God's mission? How would the corporate teaching of Scripture be different? How might worship change?
3. What are the implications for you and your church if you start with God's mission rather than the mission of the church?

CHAPTER FIVE

# RETHINK CULTURE: THE POST- CHRISTENDOM SHIFT

*In Christendom the emphasis was on maintaining a supposedly Christian status quo, but in post-Christendom it is on mission within a contested environment.*

– Stuart Murray

*The myth of a Christian culture continues to set the mind of the Western church at ease. This myth assumes that the West is, or once was, a Christian culture. If the culture is Christian, there is no need to analyze its assumptions or develop a counter-cultural instinct.*

– Michael Goheen

Remember the famous line from the 1939 film *Wizard of Oz*, when Dorothy first arrives in Oz and realizes she is now in a world that is strangely different. “Toto,” she says to her little dog, “I’ve a feeling we’re not in Kansas anymore.” Dorothy’s surroundings were now

unfamiliar. The people and places she was used to seeing no longer existed. She had no idea where she was, but one thing was certain—everything around her had drastically changed.

A place that is strangely different describes the setting for the church today. The world has seemingly changed so quickly and radically that many churches feel like exiles in a foreign land. Like Dorothy, many churches no longer recognize their surroundings. They don't completely understand the changes that have taken place; they only know that things are not like they used to be.

## **CHRISTENDOM TO POST-CHRISTENDOM**

Numerous factors have influenced the change we see today in Western culture. Issues such as globalization, urbanization, post-modernism and the rise of the information age have all had significant influence on the church. However, nothing has shaken the foundations of the church over the centuries as much as the rise and fall of Christendom.

In 313 A.D., the Roman Emperor Constantine adopted the Christian faith as his own and decided to replace paganism with Christianity as the official imperial religion. He brought the church in from the margins of society, where it had been operating for the previous three centuries, and united it with the empire. Giving great resources and favors to the church, Constantine set in motion a process that would eventually bring all of Europe into a church-state relationship known as Christendom. It is difficult to overstate the impact Constantine's decision had on the Christian faith. A

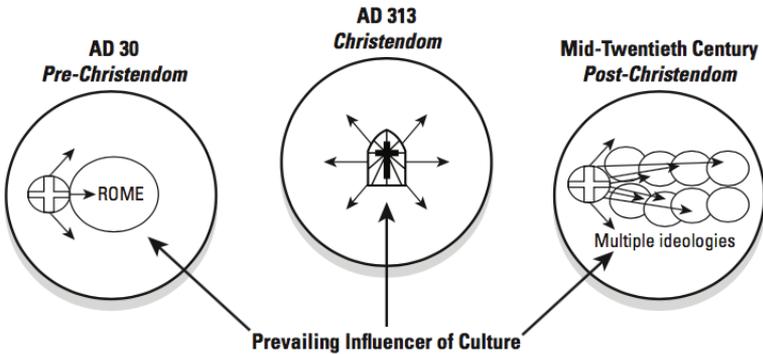
few of the changes that took place included:

- The assumption that all citizens were Christian by birth
- Infant baptism as the symbol of necessary incorporation into the Christian society
- Sunday as the required day of church attendance, with penalties for noncompliance
- The definition of “orthodoxy” as the common belief shared by all, which was determined by powerful church leaders supported by the state
- The construction of massive and ornate church buildings
- A strong distinction between clergy and laity, and the relegation of the laity to a largely passive role
- The increased wealth of the church and the obligation of required tithes to fund the system
- The division of the globe into either “Christendom” or “heathendom” and the waging of war in the name of Christ and the church
- The use of political and military force to impose the Christian faith<sup>14</sup>

The net effect of Christendom over the centuries was that Christianity moved from being a dynamic, revolutionary, social and spiritual movement to being a static religious institution with its corresponding structures, priesthood and rituals. The Christian faith moved from being an integrated way of life that was lived out seven days a week to being an obligation that was fulfilled by attending a service at a set time.

By the middle of the twentieth century, however, it was becoming clear in Europe that Christendom was in serious decline. People began to use the term “post-Christendom” to describe the church’s loss of social privilege. Others used it to refer to Western civilizations that no longer considered themselves to be Christian.

In this era of post-Christendom, the church once again returned to the margins of society. It had lost its position of prominence and control. While once the majority, in post-Christendom the church was in the minority. The shift from once being on the margins of society, then elevated to a place of control, and then back again to the margins can be illustrated in the following diagram.<sup>15</sup>



The image shows that before Constantine, the dominant influence in society was the Roman Empire, and the church was a marginalized sect, located on the outskirts. However, while the church operated on the margins, we know from Paul’s epistles and from early church history that the church was making serious inroads into the Roman empire. The second circle represents the time of

Christendom when the church became the dominant seat of culture, albeit corrupted with political and military power. Today, the picture is of a church that has been relegated back to the margins. Author Reggie McNeal refers to this time of transition as “30 [A.D.] all over again.”

However, it is important to note that while those outside the church understood that Christendom was fading, many inside the church struggled to realize the church was losing its footing. Consequently, much of the church was at a loss as to how to reach into the changing pluralistic, postmodern culture that had little interest in the church.

## **WHAT DIFFERENCE DOES IT MAKE?**

Here is the important point in this whole discussion. The difficulty the church is experiencing today at relating to the current culture is in large part due to the Christendom heritage of the North American church. Many in the church today still believe that Christianity is in a place of influence and significance. Many still operate under the false assumption that Christendom is alive and well. While there may be *some* parts of the country that still cling to Christian values, the vast majority of the population is rapidly moving away from the things associated with the church. In the eyes of many outside the church, the church has become completely irrelevant.

The decline of Christian influence in the United States can be seen in multiple ways. The most prominent is the continual drop in church attendance. But it doesn't end with attendance. In fact, every indicator that can be used to measure church health is headed in

the wrong direction. Look at it anyway you like: Conversions. Baptisms. Membership. Retention. Participation. Giving. Religious literacy. Effects on the culture. They are all in decline.<sup>16</sup>

This creates the setting for an enormous problem. At the same time that the church is less and less effective at reaching a changing world, many in the church continue to believe that the church maintains a central role in the life of culture. So, instead of leaning toward the missionary vision of the church as discussed in earlier chapters, we default to church as a “place where certain things happen,” and we wrongly assume that those outside the church will be interested.

Going back to the *Wizard of Oz*, there is a scene later in the film where Dorothy reaches up to pick an apple from a tree, and the tree grabs the apple and slaps her hand. “Ouch!” Dorothy shouts. “What d’ya think you’re doing?” says the tree. “We’ve been walking a long way and I was hungry,” replies Dorothy. The tree responds, “Well, how would you like to have someone come along and pick something off of you?” Dorothy answers, “Oh, dear! I keep forgetting I’m not in Kansas!”

Like Dorothy, we must not forget that the religious landscape around us has drastically changed. We are in a new land. At times we may feel like exiles in an unknown foreign land, but unlike many exiles, let us not yearn for what once was. Instead, let us seek to bring life and vitality to the land where God has placed us. Let us pray and toil for God’s kingdom to come to the cities and neighborhoods in which we live.

It may be a hard pill to swallow for many, but the reality is that North America is *not* a Christian place. And the sooner we can come to grips with that reality, the sooner we can return to the revolutionary, missional movement that is exemplified for us in the early church. We must see that it really is 30 A.D. all over again!

## **ACTION**

Someone has said that until we fully grasp the fact that we live in a post-Christendom, post-Christian country, the church will be incapable of making the necessary changes.

1. This week, be mindful of examples you see that illustrate a post-Christendom culture. What do you hear in people's conversations? On television? In movies? In other media? List them here.
2. List the changes that you may need to make in your life in order to live as a missionary in a foreign land. What steps will you take to incorporate the first change?
3. List the changes that your church may need to make in order to connect with those who are no longer interested in things of the church. What steps will you take to help the church incorporate the first change?

## **REFLECTION**

1. Of the list of changes that took place from Constantine's decision to make Christianity the official religion, which do you think were most damaging? Why?
2. In what ways do you see the lingering effects of Christendom today? How does the Michael Goheen quote at the beginning of this chapter speak to the lingering effects?
3. How might this chapter influence the way you live your life? How might it influence the life of your church as it interacts with the world?

CHAPTER SIX

# RETHINK VOCATION

*To get to a robust, deep, rich theology of work we have to cross the chasm that is the sacred/secular divide.*

– John Mark Comer

*Believers participate in Christ's priesthood not within the walls of the Church but in the daily business of the world.*

– Leslie Newbigin

To illustrate the need to rethink vocation, think about what you did yesterday. Just take a couple of minutes to think about your day. Now answer this question: What percentage of what you did yesterday was spiritual, and what percentage was secular?

Consider this follow-up question. Does selling insurance, running a coffee shop, driving for Uber, teaching at a public school or waiting tables at the local restaurant matter to God? If we attempt to answer that question by simply listening to the vast majority of the preaching in North America, the answer would unfortunately have to be, “Not much.” In one survey, over 90% of Christians said they had never heard a sermon that applied biblical theology to work.<sup>17</sup> Yet, Christians may spend more than half of their lives in

work-related activities.

The idea of rethinking vocation must start with considering this sacred/secular divide, or what some people refer to as the problem of dualism. Dualism, simply put, is wrongly dividing something that should not be divided. The Greco-Roman thought was that the world is divided into two competing domains: the sacred (spiritual) and the secular (material). Such a worldview tends to assume that the spiritual is the higher realm, and the secular, or material world, is lacking of deep meaning. Dualism leads to multiple divisions in thinking; including the division between the clergy (spiritual) and the laity (secular), the church (spiritual) and the world (secular), and between so-called religious practices (Bible study, prayer, worship) and so-called secular practices (work, play, eating).

Where this form of dualism happens often, and actually becomes harmful to our understanding of ministry, is in our view of vocation. The word vocation comes from the Latin *vocatio*, meaning a call or summons. It is normally used to refer to a calling or occupation that a person is drawn to or for which they are particularly suited.

The problem of work dualism goes back to the fourth century when Augustine compartmentalized the way people lived when he spoke of the *contemplative* life and the *active* life. For Augustine, the contemplative life was given to sacred things and was seen as a higher calling, while the active life was given to secular things and regarded as a lower calling.

However, during the Protestant Reformation in the 1500s, Martin Luther rejected this division between sacred and secular vo-

cations. He broadened the concept of vocation from a very narrow church focus (the priesthood, nuns or monks) to describe the life and work of *all* Christians in response to God’s call. Luther argued that regardless of the vocation that God called someone to, it was sacred because it was God who did the calling. Therefore, it can be said that the doctrine of “the priesthood of all believers did not make everyone into church workers; rather, it turned every kind of work into a sacred calling.”<sup>18</sup> Bottom line—all work matters!

But unfortunately, many Christians still see their work as nothing more than a necessary evil. They don’t understand how their “ordinary” everyday life is part of the mission of God. For example, the language of “full-time Christian work” or “full-time ministry” is commonly used to describe the calling to be a pastor, missionary or parachurch worker. However, a proper and biblical understanding is that all Christians are called to “full-time ministry,” doing good work well for the glory of God, *regardless* of their specific vocation (1 Corinthians 10:31).

If God reigns over all things (and He does), then all things are sacred. Too often people leave their homes on Monday morning and somehow think they leave God behind. Instead, the church needs to help people recognize that regardless of what God has called them to do, they are contributing to, and participating in, God’s redemptive mission.

But not only does this dualistic view of vocation harm our general understanding of calling, it also affects the way we the work of bi-vocational church leaders. Historically the phrase “bi-vocational pastor” was used to refer to a leader who served a church that was

unable to compensate a pastor with a full-time salary. Therefore, the pastor would work a second, or third job to supplement what the small salary the church could provide. In many cases, it was out of necessity rather than preference. Often the language of “tentmaker” (the Apostle Paul’s trade described in Acts 18) has been used to define this type of church leader.

One of the problems with the language of “bi-vocation” is that it often invokes the thought of two distinct vocations. We bifurcate, (divide into two) or compartmentalize, seeing little, if any, overlap between what a leader does to earn a living and his or her full-time ministry.

To begin to overcome this sacred/secular division it may be best to use the language of “co-vocation.” The prefix “co” means “together” or “in common.” English words like cofounder, copilot or companion are examples of words that denote partnership and equality. Co-vocation embodies the reality that if a person is called to be a dentist, a teacher, a plumber or a web-designer; and at the same time called to start or pastor a church, the different callings are not isolated from one another. Instead, they are actually interlinked and equal. The language of co-vocation pushes against the temptation to compartmentalize different aspects of our lives. When we begin to understand that each of our callings are legitimate and necessary aspects of God’s mission, they can be leveraged together for His purposes.

To further assist the body of Christ to see how vocation fits into the mission of God, visit *The Calling Lab* ([www.callinglab.com](http://www.callinglab.com)), a

free online resource. *The Calling Lab* is a tool designed to help a person discern the voice of God in regard to vocation. Throughout the Lab, you work through various aspects that will enable you to understand the unique calling God has for you. Some have completed *The Calling Lab* with an understanding of simple next steps they need to take in order to get closer to what God is calling them to. While others were able to discern a real sense of life calling as they walked through the resource.

Regardless, as you engage the content of the Lab, it will not only help you understand the multifaceted aspects of vocation, but it will also equip you to better assist others on this important journey. Unfortunately, the majority of people do not have a grid to think well about how God has wired them and how to best use their gifts for God's missional purposes. *The Calling Lab* will provide that framework.

At the very least, I encourage you to view all 12 of the videos on the site and process them with another person. Better yet, download *The Calling Lab* manual which is provided for free on the site. This 45-page manual will walk you through every step of the process and provide excellent reflection questions as well as space to journal your discoveries.

## ACTION

1. List three to four of the most significant learnings from your participation in *The Calling Lab*. What are your next steps in discerning God's calling?
2. Read:

“The doctrine of vocation is a theology of the Christian life having to do with sanctification and good works. It is also a theology of ordinary life.... The Christian life is to be lived in vocation, in the seemingly ordinary walks of life that take up nearly all of the hours of our day. The Christian life is to be lived out in our family, our work, our community and our church. Such things seem mundane, but this is because of our blindness. Actually, God is present in them—and in us—in a mighty, though hidden, way.”

– Gene Veith Jr., *God at Work: Your Christian Vocation in All of Life*

## REFLECTION

1. In light of the Veith quote, how can you begin to overcome the “blindness” of seeing God in the ordinary? What might you have to change in the way you participate in daily activities? What about in your vocation?
2. In what ways do you recognize the problem of dualism in regard to vocation? How have you been guilty of creating a sacred/secular divide?
3. How does understanding what work can be in light of the gospel change the way you inhabit your workplace? How is the gospel transforming the way you do your work?
4. What does the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers

have to say about how you do your work? Reflect on the Newbigin quote shared at the beginning of this chapter. How might you participate in “Christ priesthood” in your daily activities in the world?

## CHAPTER SEVEN

# RETHINK APEST

*Especially crucial for the missional ecclesiology today is the recovery of the apostolic function in the church. It is this ministry that ensures that the church is always centered on its calling to be the agent and instrument of God's mission and that everything it is and does relates to and demonstrates that calling.*

– Darrell Guder

In this chapter I want to challenge you to move beyond ministry being framed by the traditional pastor-teacher (twofold) model of the church to a fivefold understanding of ministry giftings as described in Ephesians 4:1-16. This fivefold framework, or topology, is often referred to as APEST: Apostle, Prophet, Evangelist, Shepherd and Teacher. Expanding the application of the Ephesians 4 passage does *not* diminish the irreplaceable roles shepherds and teachers play in the life of the church, but it does, or should, expand our view of ministry and help the church engage God's mission more fully.

Let's begin by examining the Ephesians 4 passage. But before reading the text, consider a rarely discussed aspect of this passage. In the vast majority of cases, we have read this passage as a leadership text. In other words, we normally understand the gifts that are

mentioned as leaders given to the church for the purpose of equipping the rest of the people of God. However, one of the most revolutionary aspects of Ephesians 4 is that it is not a leadership text—it is a text about the ministry of the church. Rather than a leadership text, it is a body of Christ text. Paul is stating that the gifts given to the church are actually given to the *laos*—the whole people of God.

As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

But to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it. This is why it says: “When he ascended on high, he took many captives and gave gifts to his people.” (What does “he ascended” mean except that he also descended to the lower, earthly regions? He who descended is the very one who ascended higher than all the heavens, in order to fill the whole universe.) So, Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.

Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of people in their deceitful scheming. Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ. From him the whole body, joined

and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work

– Ephesians 4:1-16

The first thing to keep in mind is that Paul is giving his best thinking about the nature and function of the church. At the heart of his letter is his understanding and description of the essential ministry of the church. Paul presents the logic of the church's ministry. Consider it this way:

- In verses 1-6, Paul calls us to realize our fundamental unity in the one God.
- In verses 7-11, he says that APEST has been given to the church by Christ.
- In verses 12-16, he says why APEST is given. So that we might be built up, reach unity and become mature.

Paul is outlining in simple terms the core ministries that make up the body of Christ. He clearly states that Christ has “given” certain gifts to “each one of us” and distributed them throughout the body as He sees fit. The ministry of the church is unmistakably stated as being at least fivefold in form. This fivefold form finds expression in the giftings of apostle, prophet, evangelist, shepherd and teacher. And it is through the diversity of APEST that the church is able to operate in the fullness of Christ's ministry.

The word “equip” (v. 12) in this passage is an interesting word. It was often used to describe the setting of a broken bone (alignment). Paul is saying that each of the ministries within APEST somehow

adds capacity to the rest of the body and helps it function properly. Our ability to grow and mature into the church that Jesus intended us to be is directly linked to the ministries within APEST.

Unfortunately, most churches have traditionally operated with only two out of the five: namely shepherding and teaching. In most cases, the ministries of the apostle, prophet and evangelist (APEs) have been minimized, if not completely relegated, out of the vocabulary and ministry of the church. According to Ephesians 4, the church essentially cuts off three-fifths of its capacity to grow and mature as the body of Christ, which has done serious damage to the church's ability to be the fullness of Christ in the world.

Before examining each of the Ephesian 4 gifts more closely, consider a point of clarification. Often people will ask how the APEST gifts differ from gifts listed in other New Testament passages, namely 1 Corinthians 12 and Romans 12. One helpful distinction is to notice that each of the gift lists are preceded by a particular word that helps us understand each unique list.

The key word in 1 Corinthians 12 is *manifestation*. This list of gifts, given by the Spirit, manifests the power of the Spirit through the giving of gifts like healing, speaking in tongues, faith and miracles. The key word in Romans 12 is *praxis*, because these are action-oriented skills. The key word for the Ephesians 4 list is *calling* (4:1), because these are *people* gifts, or we might use the word *vocational* gifts. (Remember, vocation means *calling*.) The gifts in 1 Corinthians 12 and Romans 12 are gifts given to us personally, while in Ephesians 4 the people themselves are the gift. “We find

our calling in the fivefold typology, and the other gifts are given to us by God to enable us to live out our vocation.”<sup>19</sup>

## **APEST SUMMARY**

To gain a better understanding of each of the gifts/functions mentioned in Ephesians 4, here is a brief summary.<sup>20</sup>

### **THE APOSTLE**

*“One who is sent and extends”*

The word “apostle” literally means “sent one.” The Latin form of this word is *missio*, which is where we get our English word “mission.” The apostle is the one most responsible to activate, develop and protect the missionary “sentness” of the church. This sent quality gives the apostle’s life a catalytic influence, often playing the role of entrepreneur at the forefront of new ventures. They are cultural architects who are concerned with the overall extension of Christianity as a whole throughout culture and society. As such, they are often drawn to issues related to design, systems and overarching organizational structures. Above all, they have a missional (sent) focus to their ministry.

### **THE PROPHET**

*“One who questions and reforms”*

Prophets are sensitive to God and what is important to Him. They often have a sense of what truth needs to be emphasized for their time and place. Essentially, prophets are guardians of the covenant relationship. Whether it is in the church, society or some orga-

nizational setting, prophets are quick to recognize the gap between “what is” and “what should be.” The weight of this tension leads prophets to question the status quo as well as initiate efforts of reform. Ultimately, they are not satisfied until they see a “closing of the gap” between God’s demands and our covenantal faithfulness. This desire to see the truth of God’s reality fleshed out in concrete and tangible ways gives an incarnational quality to their ministry.

## **THE EVANGELIST**

*“One who recruits and gathers”*

Evangelists communicate the message of the Good News in joyous, infectious ways. They tend to enjoy meeting new people and wooing them into a relationship. They are avid communicators of ideas and often share their thoughts and feelings in convincing ways. They are recruiters to the cause and find great fulfillment in helping people get caught up into the driving narrative of the church/organization—the gospel of the kingdom. As people who are bearers of good news, they have an attractional quality to their ministry.

## **THE SHEPHERD**

*“One who protects and provides”*

Shepherds have a natural instinct to protect the community from danger and provide for its needs on both an individual and communal level. They often notice when people are alone or hurting and feel drawn to nurture the spiritual and communal health of the church. They have a sense of loyalty to the organization and the

people within it. They ensure the community is experienced as a safe and loving environment, giving their ministry a distinctly communal focus.

## **THE TEACHER**

*“One who understands and explains”*

Teachers find great satisfaction in helping people learn truth and wisdom. As the more philosophical types, they grasp complex, systemic truths and then help people understand them. They often formulate curriculum and pathways of learning. They ensure the truths of Scripture are passed along from generation to generation. Their ministry could be said to be primarily instructional in nature.

## **FULLY FUNCTIONING AS THE BODY OF CHRIST**

Having given some definition to the various APEST ministries, we can now see the spiritual power as they are brought together in the church. It is hard to see how the church could possibly thrive, without a fully functioning fivefold APEST ministry.

In fact, serious dysfunction will inevitably occur when one form of ministry becomes dominant. This is because one form cannot possibly represent the whole ministry of Christ in the world. For example, when one form of APEST leadership is disconnected from the others, it will tend to dominate the culture and have a negative effect in the long term. The one-leader type of church is most at risk in this case, but we can recall organizations that demonstrate the truth of this. For instance:

**A/PEST:** If an apostolic leader dictates, the church will tend to be hard-driving, dictatorial, with lots of pressure for change and development and will leave lots of wounded people in its wake. It is not sustainable and will tend to dissolve with time.

**P/AEST:** If the prophetic leader dominates, the organization will be one-dimensional (always harking back to one or two issues), will likely be factious and sectarian, will have a “super spiritual” vibe, or, somewhat paradoxically, will tend to be either too activist to be sustainable or too quietist to be useful.

**E/APST:** When an evangelistic leader dominates, the organization will have an obsession with numerical growth, will create dependence on charismatic leadership and will tend to lack theological breadth and depth. This type of organization will not empower many people.

**S/APET:** When pastoral leadership monopolizes, the church or other organization will tend to be risk-averse, codependent and needy, and overly lacking in healthy dissent and, therefore, creativity. Such an organization will lack innovation and will not be able to transfer its core message and tasks from one generation to the next.

**T/APES:** When teachers and theologians rule, the church will be ideological, controlling and somewhat moralistic. A rationalistic, doctrine-obsessed Christian Gnosticism (the idea that we are saved by what we know) will tend to replace reliance on the Holy Spirit. These types of organization will be exclusively based on ideology.

A church that is able to bring together, encourage and capture the gifting of a *fully functioning team* will succeed in whatever it is

seeking to achieve. Each of the APEST vocations adds a necessary ingredient to the overall missional-incarnational fitness and maturity of the church, but each vocation needs to be informed and shaped by the others in order to anchor the church in the fullness of Christ's nature and mission.

## **ACTION**

1. To better understand your own gifting in regard to APEST, take the personal profile assessment. You can find that test here: <http://5qcentral.com/tests>
2. Have each member of your church planting team, or leadership team take the assessment. After every person has received his or her results, make time to discuss, with special emphasis on team dynamics.

## **REFLECTION**

1. Which one of the five APEST ministry roles is easiest for you to associate with Jesus? Which is the most difficult to associate with Him?
2. If the APEST gifts are indeed given “to each one of us,” how does this change the way you see your role in the body of Christ?
3. If God were to use your team to start a movement in your city, what do you think it would look like? Describe some of the things that would be different if your church had a revolutionary impact in your city.
4. Why is it important to recognize that the APEST giftings have been given to the entire body of Christ and not just a group of leaders?

CHAPTER EIGHT

# RETHINK LEADERSHIP

*The first responsibility of a leader is to define reality.*

– Max De Pree

Before moving into the major areas we need to *rethink* in regards to leadership, let's consider where the change needs to take place first—in you! Change in the way we think and behave, as laid out in the first 7 chapters, *has* to be embedded in you first as a leader.

If you have not at least started to experience the paradigm shifts we have dealt with so far, you will not be able to clearly and passionately articulate the need for change. Moreover, if you have not experienced these shifts in thinking in your own life, you more than likely will not be modeling the change for others. There is an old adage that says, “You cannot teach, what you do not know; and you cannot lead, where you will not go.” As a leader, you need to begin the change process in the life of your church by modeling to others what the change looks like in real-life examples.

Now let's consider two primary ideas on leadership that we may need to unlearn and relearn.

## POSTURE OF LEADERSHIP

Author Flannery O'Connor's first novel, titled *Wise Blood*, features a central character named Hazel Motes, who comes back from a stint in the army to start a new church, called "The Church of God Without Christ." Following his experiences at war, Motes has become an atheist and intends to spread a gospel of anti-religion. He unfortunately has some success. He discovers that many people are more concerned with philosophical debates than truly following the ways of Jesus.

Hopefully, there has never been a Christian leader who openly removed Christ from the church he was leading. But the point of O'Connor's fiction is to remind us how easy it can be to get so focused on the details that we forget our overarching purpose. We stop making the main thing, the main thing. Or, to pose it in the form of a question, are there times we "lead" the church in such a way that we run the risk of leaving Christ out of our leadership?

Readers familiar with the *King James Version* will note O'Connor's usage of the word "motes" in her character's name. A mote is something lodged in our eye that prevents us from seeing properly. Today, we call them "splinters," and they are the primary reason we need to be open to the possibility of paradigm change in all areas of our lives. Where we stand determines what we see, but what we have in our eyes determines what we don't see. The point of Jesus' teaching about "motes" is the good news that we can remove them ourselves. Seen in this way, the practice of "rethinking" or "paradigm shifting" is really the old-fashioned act of repentance. "Think-

ing again about how you've been thinking" is how Dallas Willard frames repentance, which, in many church settings, is needed when it comes to Christian leadership.

What often goes unnoticed in the church is that most leadership strategies are borrowed from CEO-style organizations rather than the story of Jesus and the early church. The growth of most Fortune 500 companies is offered as a strategy for success. Many of the teachings of leadership practices that have dominated the best-seller's list over the past several decades are examples of the kinds of *motes* we might need to dislodge. It's not a question of throwing out the word "leadership" from our vocabulary. Instead, it is about bringing all our terms and ideas into submission under the Lordship of Jesus. In other words, it's not a question of whether what we do is good leadership; it's a question of whether what we do looks like Jesus.

In the New Testament, the word "leader" is generally avoided. The apostle Paul avoided elevating himself over others and instead used terms like co-laborer and co-worker (1 Corinthians 3:9; Philippians 2:25). Christian leadership is not intended to be a one-man show with everyone else as spectators. Instead the New Testament writers used the term *diakonia*, meaning "servant" or "service," to identify people in leadership.

In asking the question of when leadership looks like Jesus, it is sometimes easier to start with examples of when leadership does not look like Christ. In the book *Unleader*, author Lance Ford based his central claim—that how we have been doing leadership

in the church is often radically un-Christian—on the teaching of Jesus in Matthew 20:25-28:

Jesus called them over and said, “You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and those in high positions act as tyrants over them. It must not be like that among you. On the contrary, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first among you must be your slave; just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”

So, one of the central problems is what we might call “un-Christian” leadership. It is the acquisition and use of power in manners that do not conform to the servant ways of Jesus. We have all seen examples of this, in business and sadly in the church, when leadership is expressed through attitudes and actions that leave others feeling used and submissive to the personal vision of the leader. If you are building something presumably for Jesus, and the people working alongside or underneath you in the organization are feeling dominated and at odds with your approach to leadership, then this should be a warning that something isn’t right.

There is a more servant-centered approach to leading that may go by the language of mutual, shared or polycentric (simply means having more than one center) leadership, that not only provides a more biblical model of leadership, but is necessary in a changing context.

Instead of a solo approach, leadership is shared. It revolves among several leaders, and at times it even includes those who are

not a part of the formal leadership structure. The beauty of shared, polycentric leadership is that it includes a relational group of people who learn to distribute responsibility, engaging in both leading and following, giving time for each leader to be on mission.

In the book *Church as Movement*, the authors share a theological foundation for such leadership:

Polycentric leadership models the interrelations of the Trinity, an interdependent, communal, relational, participatory, self-surrendering and self-giving approach to leadership. Polycentric leadership lends itself to a relational approach to leadership, a communal approach to spiritual formation and being the church, an incarnational and distributive approach to mission, and a multiplication approach to movement.<sup>21</sup>

But practically, what does this look like? Again, from *Church as Movement*, the authors provide two helpful analogies.

Think about a jazz band with four or five skilled players who trust one another. When they get into the groove, they rotate the lead instrument. Of course this takes mature players who understand, trust and know how to play with each other. In the same way, polycentric leadership requires people who have developed the character and skills of leadership and have a proven track record of working with a team.

Geese fly long distances in a V formation. There is always a lead goose, but the leadership rotates because one goose cannot bear the physical load of continually being in front. They can fly long distances because they share the job of being on the point. In the same way, if we want the church we serve to make it in the long run, it would serve us well to rotate the point of leadership.<sup>22</sup>

Mutual leadership is an effort to share influence and authority among a Jesus-centered team. It does not undermine authority, but instead offers it accountability and more well-rounded functions. The pattern in the New Testament church was a plurality of leaders, depending on one another, accountable to one another and submitting to one another for the sake of the mission. The church today likewise needs a plurality of gifts and input in its leadership.

## **PRIORITY OF LEADERSHIP**

After considering how we might need to rethink the posture of leadership, let's now move to a brief discussion on the priority of church planting leadership in a rapidly changing context. In chapter 1, we noted that in the book *Leadership Without Easy Answers*, Ronald Heifetz makes a distinction between *organizational* change and *cultural* change. Heifetz states that organizational change typically involves restructuring of some type, along with the use of new programs, processes and techniques. Cultural change, on the other hand, looks at how to create a new culture or environment, which will in turn require a completely new set of skills and capacities.

In a later book by Heifetz, titled *The Practice of Adaptive Leadership*, he addresses two different types of leadership that are required for cultural and organizational change. He refers to these leadership types as operational leadership and adaptive leadership. Heifetz notes:

Operational leadership works best when the problems faced can be dealt with by drawing upon a pre-existing repertoire. Operational leadership goes hand in hand with the tenets

of social engineering. A solution is devised from above and rolled out through the ranks. If an organization is in crisis; if downsizing, restructuring, or reducing costs is called for; if sharpened execution is the key to success then operational leadership is probably the best bet.<sup>23</sup>

Operational leadership describes the prevalent approach to church leadership today, with its emphasis on church growth, strong visionary leadership and pastoral care, alongside its strong emphasis on strategy, management and programs.

We saw in chapter 5 how the “attractional” Christendom model worked in a context where everyone was considered Christian and church attendance was practically required, but it doesn’t work in situations that require a missional-incarnational approach. This is not to say that the more mechanical, operational form of leadership does not have its place. But we must recognize that the tools and methods generally associated with operational leadership work well only when the solution is known in advance and an established collection of choices exists to implement it. They are not appropriate for situations of unpredictability, which require innovative thinking and adaptive forms of leadership.<sup>24</sup>

What Western Christianity desperately needs at the moment is adaptive leadership: people who can help the church transition to a different, nimbler mode of church. Such leaders don’t necessarily have to be highly creative innovators themselves, but they must be people who can move the church into adaptive modes—people who can create the conditions for change and innovation.<sup>25</sup>

Adaptive challenges include the kind of work more typical to

church planting and mission. Things like creating, growing and reproducing healthy communities, the work of racial reconciliation in a given neighborhood, and leadership development of younger Christians are all adaptive challenges. These types of challenges are rarely accomplished with a linear, step-by-step approach. Though they might include some technical components within them, the larger adaptive challenge is only solved through a process undertaken by a group of people with various roles.

This adaptive mode of leadership will involve, at least in part, three things:

## **1. CORRECTLY ASSESSING REALITY**

As noted in the quote by Max De Pree at the beginning of this chapter, leaders effectively define reality for those they lead. Leaders, for good or for ill, are the guardian of the organizational paradigm. Leaders are the key to the organization's future. Leaders in this situation have basically two roles to play: They are the keys that either open the doors or lock them up tight. They are either bottlenecks or bottle openers; they are either good or blind guides.<sup>26</sup> Leaders therefore must understand the current reality of the church once again living in a missionary context and how to best crack open the missional imagination of its people to engage God's mission more fully.

## **2. CREATING CULTURE**

We cannot overemphasize the significance of an organization's culture. Culture is like personality. In a person, personality is made up

of the values, beliefs, underlying assumptions, interests, experiences and habits that motivate a person's behavior. Culture creates the environment where those behaviors are legitimized, and meaning and significance are transferred. Culture is like an invisible force field that influences everything we do. We are often blind to the forces of culture around us, but they directly affect our every thought and action.

Leadership guru Peter Drucker once said that culture eats strategy for breakfast, lunch and dinner. In other words, regardless of how strategic our plans might be, if those plans run counter to an organization's culture, or personality, the culture will win every time.

An adaptive leader needs to be mindful of the aspects within the community that create the right culture, including things such as language, missionary behaviors, daily rhythms, scorecards, symbols and stories. Each of these items will help create a congregational environment where God is the center of conversation and He shapes the focus and work of the people.

### **3. ACTIVATING ALL THE PEOPLE OF GOD**

Adaptive leaders need to activate *all* the people of God to engage in God's mission. We need to give people the *language* and *license* to get into the game. No one sits on the bench. Everyone gets to play. However, there is a general view of leadership that in many ways has kept the majority of the church from fully realizing its calling. We are referring to what is considered the clergy-laity divide.

The word *laity* comes from a Greek word (*laos*) that means “people.” Today we often use the related term “layperson” in distinction from the word “professional.” A layperson is someone in a particular discipline who is seen as an “amateur”—someone who dabbles in a certain area but doesn’t operate with a high level of skill or expertise. The professional, on the other hand, is the expert. He is the one “in the know.” She has the expertise to operate at a high level. While there may be a place for this division in the business world or the area of sports, there is no biblical basis for such a distinction in the church. In *The Jesus Way*, Eugene Peterson articulates his disdain for such language when he states,

Within the Christian community there are few words that are more disabling than “layperson” and “laity.” The words convey the impression—an impression that quickly solidifies into a lie—that there is a two-level hierarchy among the men and women who follow Jesus. There are those who are trained, sometimes referred to as “the called,” the professionals who are paid to preach, teach, and provide guidance in the Christian way, occupying the upper level. The lower level is made up of everyone else, those whom God assigned jobs as storekeepers, lawyers, journalists, parents, and computer programmers.<sup>27</sup>

Ministry, therefore, is not set aside for some professional class within the church, but instead all the people of God are called and commissioned. In the classic book, *The Community of the King*, author Howard Snyder speaks to this issue:

The New Testament doctrine of ministry rests not on the clergy-laity distinction but on the twin and complementary pillars

of the priesthood of all believers and the gifts of the Spirit. Today, four centuries after the Reformation, the full implications of this Protestant affirmation have yet to be worked out. The clergy-laity dichotomy is a direct carry-over from pre-Reformation Roman Catholicism and a throwback to the Old Testament priesthood. It is one of the principal obstacles to the church effectively being God's agent of the Kingdom today because it creates a false idea that only "holy men," namely, ordained ministers, are really qualified and responsible for leadership and significant ministry. In the New Testament there are functional distinctions between various kinds of ministries but no hierarchical division between clergy and laity.<sup>28</sup>

We need to "de-professionalize" ministry and give it back to the people of God. However, this does not mean that we don't have leaders. Any significant movement that makes an impact has definite leadership. We simply shouldn't confuse leadership with ministry. Not all are leaders, but all are ministers.<sup>29</sup>

As we discussed in the previous chapter, Ephesians 4 tells us that when all the members are properly working together, the body grows up into maturity, to the stature of the fullness of Christ (4:15). Such maturity is not possible if only 10 percent of the body exercises their calling. Fullness will be found when the other 90 percent activate their gifting.

Therefore, in missionary churches, the effectiveness of the leaders is not measured by what they do or do not accomplish, but by how the people of God are equipped, enabled, organized and inspired to participate in God's mission in the world.

## **ACTION**

1. Review the first six paradigm shifts covered in chapters 2 through 8. On a scale of 1 to 10 (1 for no change; 10 for maximum change), evaluate how rooted each of the shifts are in your life. What level of “shift” do you need to experience?
2. Brainstorm and list ways you can begin to shape a mission-al-incarnational culture within your church. Consider aspects like language, behaviors, rhythms, scorecards, symbols and stories.

## **REFLECTION**

1. How does our typical approach to leadership form us in positive and negative ways?
2. How would you describe your current approach to leadership?
3. Have you ever experienced shared, polycentric leadership? If so, what was your experience like? If not, why not?

CHAPTER NINE

# RETHINK DISCIPLESHIP & EVANGELISM

*Jesus' call to discipleship was an invitation to choose a direction—"follow me"—and not a command to adopt a doctrinal manifesto or align with a set of religious rites.*

– Reggie McNeal

*I believe that the key to the health, the maintenance, the extension and the renewal of the Church is not more evangelism, but more discipleship.*

– Alan Hirsch

Like many aspects of the Christian life—church, mission, evangelism and even the gospel—we have reduced the concept of discipleship. In most church settings, discipleship is seen as an activity for believers. Many people think of evangelism as something you do with lost people, while discipleship is for those who have already made a decision to follow Christ.

As a result, discipleship has largely been limited to issues relating to our own personal morality and worked out in the context of the four walls of the church. We certainly don't want to neglect

issues of personal morality. To strive for holiness and maturity in our own lives is extremely important, but it is only half the picture. The other half is our God-given responsibility to the world around us. In reducing discipleship to being just about us, we have severely neglected our biblical mandate to go and “make disciples.”<sup>30</sup> Therefore, we need to *rethink* discipleship and broaden our understanding of disciple-making. A kingdom perspective begins with people wherever they are on the belief continuum, often even before they know who Jesus is.

## **REFRAMING DISCIPLESHIP AND EVANGELISM**

Put aside your normal understandings of evangelism (remember paradigm shifts), and let’s reexamine the relationship between evangelism and discipleship, using the Great Commission as our guide.

We would all agree that if you are a disciple, then you are called to be a disciple-maker, which should mean we will disciple people anywhere and everywhere. Jesus clearly states that we are to make disciples “as we are going” (Matthew 28:19).

Discipleship isn’t simply something we do with believers after conversion, but instead it is *all* about discipleship, both pre-conversion discipleship and, if the Spirit does His thing, post-conversion discipleship. We know conversion is the work of the Spirit; our part is to be disciple-makers who devote time and commitment to apprentice whoever wants to go on the journey with us. In other

words, anytime we point people to the person, work and ways of Jesus, they are being disciplined, if they know it or not.

Now evangelism undoubtedly still takes place, but it happens within the context of discipleship rather than the other way around. We need to put evangelism back where it belongs, as part of the Great Commission given to the church to make disciples of the nations. We will examine the topic of evangelism more fully later in this chapter.

As we rethink discipleship in this way, consider how Jesus disciplined his followers in the Gospels. Scholars continue to debate the question of when the disciples were actually “born again.” Some say John 20:22, where Jesus breathes the Spirit on them, and others say that it was actually at Pentecost (Acts 2). Regardless, no one would say it took place before that. So, even “the Twelve” (and “the Seventy”) were all what we might consider “pre-conversion disciples.”

Moreover, the standard practice in the church in its first three centuries was that people had to prove their faithfulness to Jesus in discipleship *before* they were allowed to become part of the church. This was the original purpose of the catechisms. Therefore, discipleship started long before a person actually became a convert. Discipleship was an ethos—a way of life—not just an optional extra for the more dedicated Christians.<sup>31</sup>

Reframing evangelism around discipleship in this manner also creates better space for long-term, authentic relationships with the various people in our lives. We ought to have multiple different kinds of discipling relationships. We will have pre-conversion dis-

cipling relationships where we are pointing people toward Jesus by sharing, in both word and deed, why we orient our lives about the person of Jesus. At the same time, we should also have post-conversion relationships where we are doing life with other people, growing together toward maturity in Christ.

## **BOUNDED SET (FENCES) AND CENTERED SET (WELLS)**

To give you another framework to think differently about discipleship, consider the idea called *social set theory*, which is simply a model for *how* and *why* people gather together. When discussing the difference between groups of people and how they organize, some use the language of “bounded set” and “centered set.” Here is the basic difference:

The **bounded set** (or sometimes called “closed set”) describes a relational system that has clearly defined boundaries but no complete agreement on a set of ideas in the center. It is, therefore, hard at the edges and soft at the center. The existence of the boundaries, however, makes it very clear who is “in” and who is “out.”

The **centered set**, on the other hand, is open. In many ways, a centered set is the exact opposite of the bounded ones. They have very clear ideas and vision at the center but have no real boundaries that people have to cross in order to join. Centered-set organizations are hard at the center and soft at the edges. It is more of an open invitation to join on the basis of values.

Missiologist Paul Hiebert applied this way of thinking about how people gather as the church.

Hiebert argued that when we understand the church as a “bounded-set” organization, we develop hard edges or boundaries. In the case of the church, that usually means we focus on external characteristics, such as belief in a defined doctrinal statement or adherence to certain moral behaviors, like language or a dress code, or both. Therefore, a person’s *belief* and *behavior* determines if they get to *belong*. Viewed in this way, it is easy to see that most established institutions, including denominational systems, are bounded sets.

Hiebert then discusses the concept of the church as a centered set. From this perspective, Christians primarily define themselves as followers of the biblical Christ as the defining center of their lives. Hiebert notes that while there is still a clear separation between Christians and non-Christians, the emphasis, however, would be on encouraging people to follow Christ, rather than on excluding others for the sake of preserving the purity of the set.

A sort of bottom line would be that bounded-set groups organize around a shared set of beliefs and values that are used as a “boundary” to determine who is in and who is out of the group. A bounded-set perspective is in many ways about a *destination*. A centered-set view, on the other hand, is more about a *direction*. It is defined by relationship and direction relative to a center. Those moving toward the center are considered part of the set, whereas those who are moving away from the center are not.

A centered-set perspective aligns much better with the broader view of discipleship as discussed in this chapter. The center must be Jesus Himself. When He is at the center, a church will be con-

cerned with fostering increasing closeness to Jesus in the lives of all those involved. A centered-set church must have a very clear set of beliefs, rooted in Christ and His teaching. Our job is to point people to the center, both in our pre-conversion and post-conversion relationships.

And when one gets closer to the center, the more Christlike one's behavior should become. Therefore, core members of the church will exhibit the features of Christ's radical lifestyle (love, generosity, healing, hospitality, forgiveness, mercy, peace and more), and those who have just begun the journey toward Christ (and whose lives may not exhibit such traits) are still seen as "belonging." Belonging is a key value. The growth toward the center of the set is the same as the process of discipleship.<sup>32</sup>

## **INPUTS AND OUTPUTS (OR FAITHFULNESS AND FRUITFULNESS)**

But practically speaking what does this journey towards the center look like? What kinds of activities are involved in becoming more and more like Jesus? One helpful way to think about the behaviors of discipleship is to consider *inputs* and *outputs*.

Inputs are those activities or habits that we adopt today when desiring a particular change in the future. For example, when we have a goal to lose weight, an input might be to count calories or to exercise on a daily basis. We exercise (input) so we can lose weight or feel better physically (output). We engage in certain input activities to see some kind of output in the future. The two are unmis-

takably linked. Input goals are the things that you can do *today* that will produce the results that you want *tomorrow* (output goals).

In the book *No Silver Bullets*, author Daniel Im argues that most churches use output goals, such as attendance and giving, when measuring whether someone is a mature disciple. Because outputs are often difficult to measure (more on the topic of measuring in the next chapter) the church defaults to simply counting how often members attend programs of the church and how much money they give. However, counting attendance and giving is clearly not an adequate way of knowing if someone is becoming more like Jesus.

To make the point that the church needs to focus equally on input goals, Im presents the results of a major study conducted by LifeWay Research that examined the state of discipleship in the church today. The study included interviews with 28 discipleship experts, a survey of 1,000 Protestant pastors, as well as 4,000 lay people throughout North America.

One of the more interesting aspects revealed in the research was the existence of certain *behaviors* that consistently showed up in the lives of maturing disciples. These habits included behaviors like consistent engagement with the Bible, serving others, sharing Christ, exercising faith, obeying God and building relationships. The research showed that when people regularly engaged in these activities, they eventually exhibited the attributes of a maturing disciple. In other words, *faithfulness* to these behaviors (inputs) lead to *fruitfulness* of becoming more like Jesus (output).

The research is clear that at the very least our disciple-making inputs must include consistent reading of the Bible. Therefore, discover the best way for your church to engage Scripture reading. Perhaps it involves individual Bible reading plans? Different types of group Bible studies? Reading of Scripture in all corporate gatherings? Or all of the above. The point is that you have to discern the best way to incorporate Bible reading (input) into your church.

However, in light of the research, we should also ask what input goals can get people serving others? How can people in your church better exercise their faith by engaging in God's "risky" mission? How can they build deeper relationships, that include both pre-conversion and post-conversion relationships? How can they step out of their comfort zone and point a broken world toward the person, work and ways of Jesus? If we want people to exhibit the evidence of maturity in Christ we must help them engage in consistent disciple-making behaviors.

Remember, input goals are the things that you can do *today* that will produce the results that you want *tomorrow*.

## **RETHINKING EVANGELISM**

Now that we have dealt significantly with rethinking discipleship let's turn our attention to the related topic of evangelism. As we have shared in an earlier chapter, the *missio Dei* is far bigger than simply evangelism. Certainly, evangelism is one of the aspects of our engagement in the mission of God, but not the only one. South African missiologist David Bosch is well known for stating, "Mission is more than and different from recruitment to our brand of

religion; it is alerting people to the universal reign of God through Christ.”<sup>33</sup> We alert with words *and* deeds. We illustrate with both *proclamation* and *demonstration*. We must see evangelism in this broader context.

Having said that, we need to be careful not to assume that unexplained action (demonstration) is evangelistic. As it’s used in the New Testament, the term “evangelism” describes a verbal announcement. It is a declarative activity. Words are required.

But part of the problem with evangelism is many Christians feel they need to get the “whole gospel” out in one brief conversation. One of the primary reasons for this is many Christians are only ever in a position to “evangelize” strangers, because all their friends are Christians. When the only “evangelism” we do is with strangers on airplanes or at the bus stop, we feel an understandable pressure to get all the bases covered, because this might be the only opportunity we (or they) get. “Evangelizing friends and neighbors, gradually, relationally, over an extended time, means that the breadth and beauty of the gospel can be expressed slowly without the urgency of the one-off pitch.”<sup>34</sup> Therefore, part of *rethinking* evangelism is placing it into its relational, pre-conversion discipleship context.

In the book *Road to Missional*, evangelism professor Michael Frost paints a picture of what genuine relational evangelism ought to look like,

When we understand what it is to be truly missional—incarnated deeply within a local host community—we will find that evangelism is best done slowly, deliberately, in the context of a loving community. It takes time and multiple engagements.

It requires the unbeliever to observe our lifestyle, see our demonstrations of the reign of God, test our values, enjoy our hospitality. And it must occur as a communal activity, not only as a solo venture. Unbelievers must see the nature and quality of the embodied gospel in community. And all the while, conversations, questions, discussions, and even debates occur wherein we can verbally express our devotion to the reign of God through Christ. No more billboards. No more television commercials. No more unsolicited mail. If evangelism is like a meal, think of it as being prepared in a slow cooker and served over a long night around a large table. It can't be microwaved. It can't be takeout.<sup>35</sup>

Seeing evangelism in this broader environment helps us to understand that the experience of conversion is not ultimately a matter of knowing certain truths *about* Jesus; instead, it is the fruit of an immediate encounter *with* Jesus. Therefore, evangelism, in large part, is about fostering and cultivating opportunities for a person to meet Jesus. It is not about persuading people to accept certain truths, but it is about meeting Jesus in person and in real time. In the end, evangelism is *all* about Jesus.

## **EVANGELIST OR EVANGELISTIC?**

When considering the topic of evangelism, it is helpful to make a distinction between the “gift of evangelism” and being “evangelistic.” Contrary to the false idea that every believer ought to be an evangelist, the apostle Paul seems to assume a twofold approach when it comes to the ministry of evangelism. First, he affirms the gifting of the evangelist (interestingly, not the gift of evangelism, but that the evangelist himself or herself is the gift, especially in the

context of Ephesians 4 on the APEST typology). And second, he writes as though all believers are to be evangelistic in their general orientation.

Paul clearly places himself in the first category, seeing his ministry as an evangelist. But it doesn't appear that he believes all Christians bear the responsibility for this same kind of bold proclamation to which he has been called. Note his description of this twofold approach in his letter to the Colossians:

Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful. And pray for us, too, that God may open a door for our message, so that we may proclaim the mystery of Christ, for which I am in chains. Pray that I may proclaim it clearly, as I should. ...

Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity. Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone

– Colossians 4:2-6

For evangelists, Paul asks for opportunities to share Christ and for the courage to proclaim the gospel clearly (vv. 3-4). But he doesn't suggest the Colossians need to pray this for themselves. Rather, Paul says that they should pray for the evangelists (people like Paul) and for them to be wise in their conduct toward outsiders and to look for opportunities to answer outsiders' questions when they arise (vv. 2,5-6). "When it comes to the spoken aspect of their ministries, evangelists are to *proclaim* and believers are to *give answers*."<sup>36</sup>

It seems as if Paul assumed that the number of gifted evange-

lists wouldn't be great, and he believed that the gifted evangelists could be local (like Timothy—see 2 Timothy 4:5) or trans-local (like himself). He also seems to assume that some gifted evangelists would occupy a leadership function in local churches (see Ephesians 4:11), building up the church to be increasingly evangelistic. So, while it is an essential gifting for all churches, it isn't a gifting given to every single believer. Rather, the "normal" believers' function was to pray and conduct themselves, in word and deed, in such a way as to *provoke* unbelievers to question why they lived the way they did and, therefore, enter into an evangelistic dialogue.<sup>37</sup> Peter is in agreement with Paul when he writes in a well-known passage in 1 Peter:

Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect, keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander.

– 1 Peter 3:15-16

To summarize, the biblical model is for leaders to: (1) identify, equip and mobilize gifted evangelists, and (2) inspire all believers to live "questionable lives." If all believers are leading the kind of lives that arouse curiosity and questions from the people around them, then opportunities for sharing the story of Jesus will flourish and chances for the gifted evangelists to boldly proclaim are increased.

# INCARNATIONAL EVANGELISM FRAMEWORK

What does it look like to live a “questionable life”? A life that evokes curiosity. One that is countercultural to the way most people live. I have discovered a very helpful framework to *rethink* evangelism in a book titled *Flesh: Bringing the Incarnational Down to Earth*.

There are five key words that form a relational progression to remind us of the proper model of Jesus when it came to sharing the good news in both word and deed. The five words are: incarnation, reputation, conversation, confrontation and transformation. Let’s examine each of these words and consider how they link together in the broader process of evangelism.

## INCARNATION

In chapter 3, we discussed rethinking mission from an incarnational perspective. I shared that the incarnation is God’s ultimate missional participation in creation (John 3:16-17). When God entered into our world in and through the person of Jesus, He came to live among us (*eskenosen*—literally, “set up a tent”): “The Word became flesh and blood, and moved into the neighborhood” (John 1:14, *The Message*). If God’s central way of reaching His world was to incarnate Himself in Jesus, then our way of reaching the world should likewise be incarnational. You may want to go back to the earlier chapter to review the importance of having *the* incarnation inform our posture towards our context, which should certainly involve our relationships with lost people.

The Gospels tell us that Jesus was a friend of sinners. Hear that—a friend. The Bible is full of examples of people inviting Jesus to meet and spend time with their friends. There was a sense of whimsical holiness about Jesus that drew people to Him. Someone once said that people who were not like Jesus liked Jesus. As followers of Jesus, shouldn't that also be true of us? Do you see why, in most cases, evangelism needs to start by being informed by the incarnation? We need to be in close proximity to people. We need to do life *with* people.

## **REPUTATION**

If we truly incarnate and do life in close proximity with people, one of the results is that we should begin to develop a good reputation. Evangelistic mission is most effective when we are living generous, hospitable, Spirit-led, Christlike lives as missionaries to our own neighborhoods. This is, of course, also true in our workplaces, as well as any of the social spaces we inhabit. Really anywhere we are around people, we have an opportunity to display a new way to be human. We have the opportunity to extend the love, grace, mercy, hospitality and generosity of Jesus.

However, this is not only true for us individually; it is also true corporately, as a church or missional community. Missiologist Lesslie Newbigin is known for saying that “the only hermeneutic of the gospel is a congregation of men and women who believe it and live by it.”<sup>38</sup> In other words, as a faith community truly lives out the ways of King Jesus, people will take notice. They will begin to

see firsthand that the way genuine Jesus followers live is beautiful, intriguing and life-giving.

But unfortunately, in many cases Christianity in North America doesn't always have the best reputation. People haven't had the opportunity to observe up close how a genuine Jesus follower lives. Instead, a person may have seen a poor example of a Christian on television, or perhaps they work with someone who professes to be a Christian but doesn't live out the ways of Jesus, so they have a negative view of Christianity.

Think about it this way. The Incarnation of Jesus is ultimately about *representing* and *revealing* the *real* God to people. So, for us to be in a position to represent the real Jesus to people and develop a good reputation, we need to be *with* people. We need to incarnate into the places God has sent us and show people with our lives what it really means to follow Jesus.

## **CONVERSATION**

The point with the word *conversation* is that when we do life with people and actually develop a good reputation, we *will* have meaningful conversations. Others will seek the truth in our lives. Author Hugh Halter argues that Jesus had opportunities for conversations because of the way He treated people.

Jesus was God and thus the most holy, true, and perfect being. And He was the most nonjudgmental person you would have ever met. People should have been intimidated and afraid to even approach Him, yet they came toward Him. People wanted to hear what He had to say about their broken lives. And when He finally spoke, they listened and changed.

Jesus showed that you don't need to condemn a person before that person will change—and that's why He said He did not come into the world to condemn but to save (John 3:17). And He did exactly that. People around Him didn't feel condemned, and they responded to His truth. He was chock-full, buckets overflowing, oozing out both grace and truth at the same time.<sup>39</sup>

And when we do have those conversations, we need to talk about the King and His kingdom. We need to share that while we live in a broken world, full of chaos and pain, there is good news. From the book *Kingdom First*,

Although brokenness abounds within individuals, institutions, and structural systems, there is good news. Jesus, our triumphant King, wants things to be much different in our damaged world. He desires to bring the peace of His atonement and His eternal victory into all the manifestations of brokenness in our world (according to Colossians 1:19-20). While we now live in the tension that we will not wholly see the fullness of Christ's peace until the new heaven and the new earth, there is a promise of peace where sorrow currently abounds. This is the gospel of the Kingdom. ...

According to Jesus, who is the Gospel, He Himself proclaimed the good news, liberated captives, healed the sick, freed the oppressed, and brought the Lord's favor to the least. All of this was Jesus' activity on this earth and His fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy. This work of our King is what brings the Kingdom of God to the dark and broken realities of a desperate world. Peace where there was chaos. Healing where there was pain. Comfort where there was deep sorrow. Wholeness where there was systemic fragmentation.<sup>40</sup>

Unfortunately, many Christians don't have the opportunity to share this broader story of Jesus simply because we don't have

friends who are not Christians. Therefore, when offered the chance to “share the gospel,” we have to rely on a sort of artificial, reduced summary of the work of Jesus. In other cases, we have to create ways to “turn” conversations in a spiritual direction, because we are not doing life with lost people. If we were, there would be frequent opportunities to talk about the King we follow and share the story of how He has changed our perspective, not only on death but on life in the here and now.

We need to be prepared to share in very natural, relational conversations what it means to follow King Jesus. To follow Him through His atoning work on the cross. To follow Him in a cruciform-shaped life of discipleship. And to follow Him into the good news that through Christ, the in-breaking kingdom of heaven is at hand.

## **CONFRONTATION**

If we have done the work of incarnation, reputation and conversation, we will have the opportunity to share the good news about the kingdom and its King. And we need to be prepared for the gospel (with the work of the Spirit) to confront. It will confront a person’s sin. It will confront a person’s worldview. It will confront their attitudes and assumptions about themselves as well as others. The gospel of the kingdom is so countercultural to the ways of the world that it will confront a person’s sensibilities on every level. In most cases, that will not happen overnight. But if we are in a genuine relationship with people, there will be opportunities to have ongoing honest conversations about the reign of God through Christ. Ulti-

mately, the goal of confrontation is to help people take ownership of their sin and let God reign over every single aspect of their lives.

## **TRANSFORMATION**

When the Spirit does His work, the ultimate outcome is transformation. Notice the word *transformation* is used, not *conversion*. Now conversion is a starting point, but transformation is the full heart of the incarnation. Jesus came to change *everything* in us. “Whoever says he abides in him ought to walk in the same way in which he walked” (1 John 2:6, ESV). The apostle Paul shared with the Galatians that he was in anguish until “Christ was formed” in them (Galatians 4:19). This is a call far beyond conversion. It is the call to transformation.

However, it is also important to recognize that God designed us to be transformed *primarily* in community. Although we are all individual people and can relate to God without anyone else, we are not designed to grow by ourselves. Real transformation is a communal activity.

## **TWO FINAL THOUGHTS ON EVANGELISM**

There are two additional topics to briefly consider before concluding this chapter. First, the entire “incarnational evangelism framework” must be bathed in prayer. We need to be praying through each of the five “phases” mentioned above. Particularly we should be praying for deepening relationships with those who do not know Jesus. We must pray that God gives us opportunities to incarnate

into our context, live questionable “Jesusy” lives in front of a dying world, and have life-changing conversations.

Second, while the most effective form of evangelism takes place through genuine relationships, we should acknowledge that there are times when the Spirit prompts us to share with others when the time we have with them may be limited. In those cases, we need to be prepared to explain the gospel in a summarized version. A tool designed to do just that is called “3 Circles.” For more information search “3 Circles” at [www.namb.net](http://www.namb.net)

## **ACTION**

1. Begin to disciple a not-yet-believer. Try the approach suggested in this chapter of simply beginning to invest in the lives of your neighbors and/or workmate. Try to see them as disciples of Jesus who have not yet encountered Jesus, and see your task as to disciple them to become more like Jesus.
2. Review the “twofold” approach suggested in this chapter: (1) identify, equip and mobilize gifted evangelists, and (2) inspire all believers to live “questionable lives.” Share how you will go about doing both of these tasks.

## **REFLECTION**

1. When you think of “making a disciple,” whom do you think of first? The pool of potential men and women in your church who already believe or someone outside the faith?
2. How will you incorporate the idea of inputs and outputs in your church? How will you articulate this idea with others?
3. What is your overall assessment of the “incarnational evangelism” framework? Work through each of the five words and share how you can help those in your church cultivate a posture of each.

CHAPTER TEN

# RETHINK SCORECARDS

*Measurement is fabulous. Unless you're busy measuring what's easy to measure as opposed to what's important.*

– Seth Godin

When it comes to “keeping score,” churches in North America have typically focused on three metrics: buildings, budgets and butts. While there is nothing inherently wrong with counting each of these things, we do need to ask if keeping score of how big our buildings are, how much money people give and how many people show up when we meet is the best indicator of how a church is doing?

The fact is these three metrics really give us no real sense on the influence a church is having on its community. Do the number of people who attend a Sunday morning gathering give you any indication of the impact the church is having on individual neighborhoods or the city? The answer has to be a resounding NO! There is *absolutely* no correlation between the number of people who show up for an event and the difference those people are having where

they live. The same is true with how much money people give to the church and how large a church's buildings are. The reason we "count" those three things is because they are easy to count. But we must be challenged to not *count* what is easy, but instead *measure* what is important.

## **COUNTING (QUANTITATIVE) AND MEASURING (QUALITATIVE)**

While we often use the language of "counting" and "measuring" interchangeably, there is actually a difference between the two. It is important to make the distinction because the church has largely been in the counting business, which has negatively influenced the way we think about the nature of the church and limited our impact in the world. We need to move to measuring more and counting less. Let's make the distinction this way:

*Counting* is giving attention to numbers. When counting, the question to be answered is: "How many?" It is quantitative. Conversations about "How many?" are most frequently conversations about resources but can also be about activities. Conversations about resources, in a time of limited resources, are commonly conversations about sufficiency, "Do we have enough?" or, "How can we get more?" Examples could include finances or people. We ask questions like, "Do we have enough money for that mission?" or "Do we have enough volunteers for that ministry?" A quantitative question about activities might be, "How many Bible studies were conducted?"<sup>41</sup>

*Measuring* is giving attention to change. When measuring, the question is not about “How many?” but rather about “How far?” Conversations about “How far?” are frequently about the change that can be measured over a particular time, as in, “How far have we come over the past year?” Measuring is about qualitative change. Has the quality of something changed over time? In other words, has something gotten better, or worse, since the last time we measured?

There is, of course, a need for both counting and measuring. In all complex organizations, multiple tools are needed. However, like all tools, the right tool must be chosen for the job at hand. So, what sorts of things should we count? And what should we measure?

We hesitate to be too prescriptive in giving suggestions for what your church plant could count and measure, because contexts are different. But let us suggest some possibilities that will hopefully crack open your imagination for metrics that fit your community more specifically.

## **COUNTING**

In light of the fact that the church is a missionary entity—we are the sent, missionary people of God—one of the things we should count are missionary behaviors. You should be asking and counting things like: How many neighbors have I gotten to know by name in the past month? How many coworkers have I gotten to know on a deeper level? How many significant conversations have I had in my favorite Third Place? How many people have I had in my home this past month? How many meals have I shared with people out-

side my church family this week? How many times this week have I intentionally been a blessing to someone?

Not only does counting the right things give us a better indication of a church's engagement in the community, and ultimately its impact, but it also illustrates to the congregation what is important. The reality is what gets measured gets done *and* what gets measured gets repeated.

In the book *Missional Renaissance: Changing the Scorecard for the Church*, author Reggie McNeal suggests developing new scorecards around six resources of the church: prayer, people, time, finances, facilities and technology. Here are just a few ideas of questions in each of those categories that will help move the church to think outside the church walls:

## **PRAYER**

- Number of specific people being prayed for both inside and outside the church
- Number of people prayed with during the week by church members
- Number of prayer meetings conducted off church property
- Number of prayer answers reported back to the church
- Number of community leaders adopted and prayed for each week
- Number of prayer walks taken in the community/neighborhoods
- Number of prayer cards received from community prayer boxes

- Time spent in prayer in staff meetings for community needs
- Number of times each week school teachers are prayed for/over

## **PEOPLE**

- Number of people engaged in financial planning
- Number of people growing in financial giving to kingdom causes
- Number of people engaged in daily spiritual formation
- Number of people pursuing an intentional learning agenda
- Number of people reporting increased friendships over time
- Number of people sent into trailer parks, apartments, retirement centers
- Number of community ministries adopted by church groups/classes
- Number of people serving other people in some venue
- Number of people serving as mentors
- Number of people practicing intentional blessing strategy

## **TIME AND CALENDAR**

- Amount of time spent debriefing people engaged in community service
- Time spent in mentoring people in the community beyond the church
- Number of hours people spend in direct ministry to community needs

- Amount of time spent in gatherings celebrating stories of community involvement
- Hours spent each week building relationships in Third Places
- Number of hours each week members open their homes to others
- Hours each week spent supporting/ministering to single parents
- Amount of time staff spends developing relationships with community leaders

## **FINANCES**

- Number of people reporting personal debt retirement
- Number of people increasing in their generosity through charitable giving
- Number of people reporting they have developed a personal budget
- Percent of church budget moving toward externally focused ministry
- Reduction of church debt to free up dollars for people investment
- Amount of money invested in microeconomic development

## **FACILITIES**

- Number of schools using the church facilities for their activities
- Number of community organizations using the church facilities (Big Brothers, Boy Scouts, AA, other churches)

- Space devoted to conversation-friendly areas
- Use of church land for soccer/baseball fields, basketball court, skateboard park
- Number of hours the facilities are used during the week by people for personal growth such as exercise classes, tutoring, life skill seminars, etc.

## **TECHNOLOGY**

- Number of podcast interviews with community leaders
- Space on church website dedicated to community events and engagement
- Number of webinars to educate people of missional opportunities
- Number of graphics or videos telling the stories of missional engagement by members

Not only does counting the right things give us a better indication of a church's engagement in the community, and ultimately its impact, but it also illustrates to the congregation what is important. The reality is what gets measured gets done *and* what gets measured gets repeated. When we count the things we have suggested in the above list, people know what is valued; they, therefore, know the target for which they need to be aiming.

## **MEASURING**

While all of the suggestions listed above can certainly help a church begin to move in the right direction, these questions are still *ac-*

*tivities*. They are more about “inputs” rather than “outcomes.” Let’s say that again. They are more about inputs, rather than outcomes. Unfortunately, most often in the nonprofit church world, we stop with inputs.<sup>42</sup>

What do we mean by a “measurable” that is outcome-based? First, they are primarily about change. If we can describe the change that we desire to see or make, then we can also have conversations about whether we are moving toward that change over time. Measuring relates not so much to what *is*, but rather what *could be*. It is more about possibilities. Second, the best questions associated with measuring ask both about change and about time. For example, we might ask, “How have the test scores changed over the past six months in the elementary school where the church provides tutors?”

In the context of the church, measuring is about determining transformational change (discipleship) in both people and in the neighborhoods where we live. Ask yourself, “What changes would you like to see in the lives of the people, but also in the life of your community?” That is an outcome. But then ask the follow-up question, “What will it take to get to that place?” Then begin to ask measurement questions toward that change. “How will we know if we are making progress in the right direction?” “What will we measure to determine transformational change?” Measuring is *definitely* more difficult than counting, but in almost every single case, it is essential if we are serious about making a difference.

## **ACTION**

1. Articulate in your own words the difference between *counting* and *measuring*.
2. Create your own scorecard that reflects the need to both count and measure. Either build your own list or choose some from this lesson that would fit your context.

## **REFLECTION**

1. What are your thoughts on the suggestion that the typical counting of buildings, budgets and butts is a poor indicator of the effectiveness of a church? Is that a fair assessment?
2. What things do you presently count and/or measure in your church? After engaging this chapter, are you reconsidering how you keep “score”?
3. Which of the questions from the prayer, people, time, finances, facilities and technology list stand out for you? Which would be a good fit for your church? What other questions come to mind in each of these categories?

# CONCLUSION

## THINK LONG HAUL, NOT QUICK FIX

As stated at the beginning of this book, the answer to the crisis of the church in North America will not be found by making minor adjustments. Simply doing more of the same will not get us where we need to be. Instead, we *must* be willing to rethink deeply held assumptions about the nature of the church, mission, discipleship and leadership. Without these needed paradigm shifts in the way we think, we will not be capable of making the necessary changes to activate all the people of God and engage His mission more fully.

The late Austrian philosopher, Ivan Illich, was once asked about the most revolutionary way to change society. He answered the question this way:

Neither revolution nor reformation can ultimately change a society, rather you must tell a new powerful tale, one so persuasive that it sweeps away the old myths and becomes the preferred story, one so inclusive that it gathers all the bits of our past and our present into a coherent whole, one that even shines some light into our future so that we can take the next step... If you want to change a society, then you have to tell an alternative story.<sup>43</sup>

The church needs to tell an alternative story. Yet, it will be one that will often run contrary to the story many evangelicals have been told. It is a story of being sent rather than being served. It is a story of incarnating into local contexts. It is a story of activating *all* the people of God, not just a few. It is a story of embracing the posture of a servant, rather than being in a place of power and privilege. I would argue that at least in part, the story is tied up in the realization and application of the shifts laid out in this book.

However, for many these shifts will not come easy. Be patient. Remember the deeply held assumptions we have discussed throughout this book are indeed *deeply held*. Seventeen hundred years of Christendom will not be extracted from your church quickly. Paradigms shifts rarely happen overnight. Most people will need to visit and revisit these ideas. They will need to process with other people over time. In other words, a pastor can't preach a 4-week sermon series and somehow think everyone in the congregation is going to magically "get it."

Instead teach and talk about each of these paradigm shifts, not just from the pulpit, but one-on-one and in small group settings. Perhaps walk through this book with a group of early adopters who intuitively know there *must* be an alternative story. A story where God is calling the body of Christ to join Him in the restoration of all things.

## **SUMMARY OF THE 9 PARADIGM SHIFTS**

- Shift # 1: From Church Served to Church Sent
- Shift # 2: From Excarnate Mission to Incarnate Mission
- Shift # 3: From Church with a Mission to Mission with a Church
- Shift # 4: From Place of Privilege to Posture of a Servant
- Shift # 5: From Secular Vocations to Sacred Callings
- Shift # 6: From Twofold to Fivefold
- Shift # 7: From Equipping Some to Activating All
- Shift # 8: From Evangelism then Discipleship to Discipleship then Evangelism
- Shift # 9: From Church Activities to Kingdom Impact

## **SUGGESTED READING ON PARADIGM SHIFTS FOR CHURCH AND MISSION**

- *Transforming Mission* by David J. Bosch
- *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* by Lesslie Newbigin
- *A Light to the Nations* by Michael Goheen
- *The Mission of God's People* by Christopher J.H. Wright
- *The Missional Church* ed. by Darrell Guder
- *The Forgotten Ways* by Alan Hirsch
- *The Next Evangelicalism* by Soong-Chan Rah
- *The Church as Movement* by J.R. Woodward and Dan White Jr.

- *Creating a Missional Culture* by J.R. Woodward
- *Missional Renaissance* by Reggie McNeal
- *Kingdom Calling* by Amy Sherman
- *Kingdom First* by Jeff Christopherson
- *Apostolic Church Planting* by J.D. Payne
- *The Permanent Revolution* by Alan Hirsch and Tim Catchim
- *Exiles* by Michael Frost
- *The Shaping of Things to Come* by Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch
- *The Missional Quest* by Brad Brisco and Lance Ford
- *Faithful Presence* by David Fitch
- *Global Church* by Graham Hill
- *5Q* by Alan Hirsch

## **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

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