INTRODUCTION
TO MISSIONAL COMMUNITIES
WHAT SHAPES THE CHURCH?

HOW SHOULD WE DEFINE THE CHURCH?

Many people define the Church primarily by what she does, not who she is. Unfortunately, this leads to an understanding of the Church that defines her not by God’s work, but by man’s work, leading to a view that man builds the Church instead of Jesus.

With this understanding, anybody who simply implements the forms or activities of church can call what they do the Church of Jesus Christ. This is church based upon works of man and not Church based upon the work of Jesus Christ. Jesus said He would build His Church, not us. This sometimes stems from a man-centered gospel (It is my decision—my work—that saves me) OR can lead to a man-centered church (It is all about what we do that defines us, not what Jesus has done).

We must remember: We are who we are because of what Jesus has done and is doing. Our being comes out of His doing, and our doing proceeds from our being in Christ.

However, some people mainly define the Church by what God has done, not also who He saved her to be and what He saved her to do. In this case, the Church is a confessional people primarily but not an obedient people who do what God commands and display what God is like.

We need to define the Church in light of: 1) who God is and what God has done, 2) who He has made the Church to be, and 3) what He has saved and created her to do.

Think about it in familial terms. Do we define a family based only upon what they do? We are a family because we sleep in the same house, eat together, do dishes, share a budget, etc. (defined by activity). By who they are? We are a family because we have the same parents, the same last name, belong to one another, etc. (defined by being). Because of how we came into being? We are a family because our parents gave birth to us or adopted us (defined by origin). A healthy family would be defined in all three ways: 1) Our parents birthed us or adopted us, so we belong to them. 2) We are all related and share identity, so we belong to each other. 3) We do what families do together—life lived together defined by love.

The same is true of the Church: 1) We are the Church because the Father has made us His children through the life and work of Jesus, giving us new birth by His Spirit. 2) We have a new identity as children of God. 3) We live lives of love and good deeds because we are His children who are deeply loved.

We aren’t defined by what we do. We are defined by what God has done in the person and work of Jesus Christ. What we do is based upon and motivated by what God has done and who God has made us to be. This is all the outworking of faith in God. We must distinguish defining a Church based upon what God has done and who we are because of His work and describing how a healthy church lives out God’s purposes, showing herself to be God’s chosen and redeemed people.

The Church is God’s people (who we are) saved by God’s power (what He has done and is doing) for God’s purposes (the good works He created us in Jesus Christ to do).
For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, "The righteous shall live by faith." —Romans 1:16–17

THE STARTING POINT: THE GOSPEL MESSAGE

A gospel-centered missional church doesn’t first ask the question, “What works best?” Instead it asks, “How do we fulfill the mission of Jesus to make disciples who believe and live out the gospel by displaying and declaring who God is and what He has done in and through Jesus Christ, teaching and training others to do so as well?”

Our goal is not to convert people to our church. Our goal is to see them converted and discipled to Jesus through the gospel so they can BE THE CHURCH on mission that truly declares and demonstrates the gospel in all of life.

Our starting point in thinking through what our churches should be like must be informed by the gospel: the power and purpose of the gospel.

TWO GOSPEL PERSPECTIVES

You can read the Bible across the grain (thematic), and you can read it with the grain (storyline). Each one is necessary, and each one leads to a different way of seeing the gospel.

1. Thematically

The MEANS of salvation—the gospel power

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In this case, the Good News is that God, in and through the work of Jesus Christ and the power of His Spirit, accepts us, empowers us, and is changing us.

We have been saved from the penalty of sin, are being saved from the power of sin, and will be saved from the presence of sin because of God’s power and work, not our own. (Ephesians 2:8–9; Colossians 1:27–29; 2:6–7; Philippians 2:12–13; 1 Peter 1:3–5)

Luther said the first commandment in the gospel (“You shall have no other gods before me”) is the same as, “You shall have no other justification for your life, your righteousness, your significance, your security, etc., other than me.”

How is your life reflecting that you believe Jesus did enough to save you at the cross? Where in the leadership or life of your church are you demonstrating that God is the power and authority for ongoing life change? How or where is this not being demonstrated?

2. As a Story

Here we come to know the REASON for salvation—the gospel purpose

CREATION ➔ FALL ➔ REDEMPTION ➔ RESTORATION

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In this case, the *Good News* is that God sent His Son to redeem the world and create a new humanity. Eventually the whole world will be renewed. Death, decay, injustice, and suffering will all be removed. God is saving a people and sending them out for His mission so Christ will be glorified in all things.

The Church has been saved BY God's work FOR God's work (Ephesians 1, 2:10,14–22; 2 Corinthians 5:15–21; Revelation 21).

The Gospel is not just about my individual happiness or God's plan for my life. It is about God's glory and His plan for the world.

There is a movement afoot. God is doing something, and we have been called to His purposes. The people of God are participating within God's redemptive plan by being a display people, offering a foretaste of what the future will be like under God's rule (Jeremiah 29; Matthew 5:3–16; Luke 6:20–36; 1 Peter 2:9–12).

We are like a trailer to a movie, giving a foretaste of the kingdom fully consummated by Jesus that makes people long for the future redemption of all things under Jesus as King. The difference is that unlike a movie trailer, we are a poor reflection of a far better future.

How is your church or ministry living out the purposes of God in salvation?
How is the leadership modeling this?
How is the part of the body that you lead regularly sending believers out for the mission of the Gospel?

**WHOSE STORY IS IT ANYWAY?**

Everyone is part of the story and is walking out this story in their lives. The real question is whose story is it?

We either see the story primarily as God's story or primarily as our story. Our point of view is directly connected to our belief in the gospel.

**GOD'S STORY**

If we believe it is primarily God's story:

—Creation—He is the Creator and Originator of all things. I exist because of Him.
—Fall—We rebelled against Him, and His word stands. We really die.
—Redemption—He saves us by His work, and we put our faith in Him to save by grace.
—Restoration—He has work for us to do, for which He prepared and enables us.

**OUR STORY**

If we believe it is our story:

—Creation—I become what I actualize or determine to be. I believe I am god.
—Fall—I am good, and others are evil. I am not good, but it is not my fault; it is because of some outside influence. It's not my rebellion and sin. In this case I am deceived/dishonest.
—Redemption—It is through my work that I am saved, healed, and made acceptable. I must perform. In this case I determine or someone else I determine is savior.
—Restoration—I can fix me and this place if I will just work harder and more effectively. In this case I am all wise and almighty.

**WE NEED BOTH GOSPEL PERSPECTIVES**

We must know the gospel means (God/sin/Christ/faith) . . .

. . . and the gospel story (creation/fall/redemption/restoration) . . .

. . . and see them both as God’s story together—synchronously and diachronically.

If we only focus on the **gospel power** but do not know the gospel purpose (the storyline of the gospel—where it is going and what Jesus is doing through the Church), we will tend toward a gospel that is only about saving individuals and miss the mission of the gospel. In this case, the gospel is *all about us.*

If we only focus on the **gospel purpose** but miss the gospel power (the work of God in Jesus Christ to save), we will tend toward doing good works and acts of service without the power of God. We believe it is up to us to change the world, and we become more acceptable and significant to God by doing more. In this case, the mission of the gospel is now *dependent upon* us.

THE GOSPEL IS GOD’S WORK FOR GOD’S WORK.

THE STORY IS ALL ABOUT HIM—IT’S NOT ABOUT US!
WHO IS THE CHURCH?

OUR IDENTITY AS GOSPEL PEOPLE

Not too long into our journey as a new church plant, we realized we were doing a good job of calling people to the mission and even seeing people actively engage in serving our community in tangible forms. However, we observed many of our people were being driven to missional activity from non-gospel motivation. They were active because of guilt, shame, performance-driven hearts, or their belief they needed to justify themselves before God or man (the leadership, their peers, the community). This dichotomy between the gospel message and our actual lives ultimately leads to burnout, disillusionment with the gospel, and outward moralistic actions, which lack any supernatural power.

This led us to take a closer look at how Paul motivated the churches he wrote letters to. In most cases, Paul (whether addressing a messed-up situation or trying to encourage those who were being faithful) starts his letters with who God is, what He has done in and through the person and work of Jesus, and then moves on to who we are in Christ. He does all of this before he begins to instruct them on how they should live.

This is the pattern you see throughout the Scriptures. First comes the indicative, which is followed by the imperative. (You even see this in the very beginning: In the beginning was God. He creates. We have our existence as image-bearers, and then He tell us what to do.) The eternal God and His work precede our existence and our obedience. Our doing does not justify our existence or give us identity. Rather His work gives us our existence, identity, and meaning—our being. Then our doing proceeds out of our being, which proceeds out of His being and His work.

This led us to clarify we were not leading a church based upon a set of core values but instead based upon our core gospel identities: who we are because of who He is and what He has done. Our motivation for what we do must come out of who He is and what He has done, or we will be leading people into lives that are not grounded upon, lived within, and walking in line with the gospel of Jesus Christ. The gospel message leads to gospel motivation grounded in our new identity in Jesus Christ. Then, out of our love and gratitude to God for who He is and what He has done and now who He makes us to be, we work out our gospel methods.

What would you say are the key identities of the Church?
What are people most motivated by or implicated with?

Core values that tell us what we’re committed to together
OR
Core identities that inform who we are based upon the gospel?
**THE CHURCH MAKES DISCIPLES/LEARNERS**

**LEARNER IDENTITY STATEMENT:** We are disciples of Jesus who take responsibility for our growth in the gospel and the growth of others.

As a young man Jesus grew in both height and wisdom. He learned from local religious teachers, by living in community, and through regular times of listening to God. Jesus called others to follow His ways, to be His disciples, and to live in obedience to all that God commands. He then sent these followers out to make new disciples. We believe we are also called to be followers of Jesus who take responsibility for our own development and the development of others. This includes being personally formed by the truth of the gospel and regularly speaking the gospel to others so they can be rescued from sin and selfishness and grow up into maturity in Jesus Christ (Luke 2:52; Matthew 28:18–20; Ephesians 4:11–13; 2 Timothy 2:2).

**Baptize into the Name of**

Jesus’ commission was to make disciples. This begins with us leading people to faith in Jesus and all He had accomplished on our behalf. To accomplish this we must be a people who are continually submitting our lives to the gospel and growing in our ability to speak the gospel fluently. As the gospel is shared and the Holy Spirit brings about repentance and faith, people become Jesus’ disciples who now have a new identity. We need to establish people in this new identity as God’s gospel people. The way Jesus commanded us to do this is through baptism; we are to baptize into the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Baptizing people into the name of is about establishing them into their new Trinitarian identity. In Christ, God is our Father, and we are His family. Jesus is our Lord, and we are His servants. The Holy Spirit is our Guide and Sender, and we are His missionaries.

*But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.* —1 Peter 2:9

Peter also reminded the church of their identity before he exhorted them to the work of the gospel. He states that the church is God’s chosen race—God’s family, a royal priesthood sent as missionaries and ministers of reconciliation (cf. 2 Cor. 5:17–20), and a holy nation of servants with Jesus Christ as Lord.

Jesus also commanded that these new disciples be taught to obey everything He had commanded these first disciples. This certainly included the command to make disciples. It also included all the other commands that Jesus had given. We believe the order of this commission gives us the order of formation for a follower of Jesus. We make disciples by leading people to faith in Jesus (EVANGELISM), forming them in their new Trinitarian
identity (ESTABLISHING), and training them to obey Jesus’ commands out of love for God (EQUIPPING).

All three of these identities define our vertical relationship to God as worshipers who submit to God and our horizontal relationship to people as disciples who make disciples. We submit to God in light of who He is (Father, Son, Holy Spirit), what He has done and is doing (loves us, saves us, sends us), and who we are in Christ (sons, servants, sent ones).

THE CHURCH IS GOD’S CHOSEN FAMILY

FAMILY: We are all children of God who care for each other as a family.

We are God’s chosen people—His family—set apart to live in such a way that the world would know what He is like. Through faith in Jesus we believe we are children of God and brothers and sisters with each other. As God’s family, we see it as our obligation to care personally for the needs of one another, both physically and spiritually. We disciple, nurture, and hold each other accountable to gospel life together. We do this through regularly gathering together for celebration, consistent involvement in a DNA group, and loving others in the path of our life as the Father loved us (Genesis 12:1–3; John 1:12–13; Romans 12:10–16).

We submit to God as our Father and love one another as brothers and sisters.

WORSHIPERS: We worship God as Father.

We are God’s children (John 1:11–13) who are adopted and fully accepted and loved apart from any good behavior. When I believe the gospel I know I have a perfect Father who loves me and accepts me not because of what I’ve done but because of what Christ has done. This leads me to worship God as Father and obey His word because I love Him. I don’t obey God in order to be loved by Him. I obey God because He loved me while I was still His rebellious enemy.

DISCIPLES: We show ourselves to be Jesus’ disciples by our love for one another.

As children of God we love one another as brothers and sisters. Jesus said this is the way the world will know we are His disciples: by our love for one another. Paul said we were to be imitators of God as dearly loved children who love one another (Eph 5:1–2). The primary means by which we show the world what God is like and give tangible proof of the gospel’s power to save is through our love for one another. If we don’t love one another, we show we don’t know and love God (1 John 4:7–21).

THE CHURCH IS MADE UP OF JESUS’ SERVANTS

SERVANT: We are servants of Jesus who serve Him by serving others around us.

Fully God, fully human, Jesus took on the posture of a servant. He gave His life, even unto death, so others could experience salvation, peace, and restoration. Jesus said, “I am among you as one who serves.” All those who follow Jesus are called to serve in the same humility. For us this means joyfully submitting to Jesus as Lord, to the leaders He has placed over us, and to each other as we also serve whomever God brings into our lives. We

*We submit to Jesus as Lord and serve one another as though we are serving Jesus.*

WORSHIPPERS: *We submit to Jesus as Lord.*

If I believe the gospel, I am being set free from slavery to false gods that keep me imprisoned, don't feed me, and eventually beat me to death. All of us are serving a master or many masters. The question isn't “Am I a slave?” but “To whom am I a slave?” When I believe and live out my gospel identity as a servant of Jesus, He is my master, and He sets me free to live life as it should be lived. I now belong to Him as His servant, and whatever I do, I do as unto Him (Matt. 25:40). My service and sacrifice for Jesus my Lord unto others is my spiritual act of worship.

DISCIPLES: *We lead people to Jesus by living as servants displaying His rule and reign in our lives.*

As the servants of Jesus we are a holy nation, a city within a city. We give a foretaste of what the eternal city will be like under the rule and reign of Jesus Christ. Living as servants who serve others as the King served us presents a tangible witness to Jesus’ kingdom and to the power of the gospel to change us. We serve in such a way that it demands a gospel explanation—lives that cannot be explained in any other way than by the gospel of the Kingdom of Jesus. Our humility points to His ultimate humility. Our servanthood is led by the Servant of all. Our sacrifice is motivated by the one who gave up His life for us. If we don't serve others as Jesus served us, it is because we have forgotten how we have been served by Him or we don't really know Him in the first place (Matt 25:31–46).

**THE CHURCH IS SENT BY THE HOLY SPIRIT AS MISSIONARIES**

We submit to the Spirit as our Sender and Leader and are empowered to show and share Jesus to others.

MISSIONARIES: *We are sent by the Spirit to restore all things to God through Jesus Christ.*

God sent Jesus to Earth to take on human form and live within the culture. He worked, ate, and interacted among the people, living in such a way that those around Him could see and experience what God was truly like. Jesus came so that all people, places, and things could be restored to a right relationship with God. In the same way, we believe we are missionaries sent by God’s Spirit into our culture to restore all things to God through Jesus. We live this out through involvement in a missional community (John 1:14; 20:21; Colossians 1:19; 2 Corinthians 5:16–21).

WORSHIPPERS: *We submit to the sending and leading of the Spirit.*

If I believe the gospel and can call God my Father, it is because God has given me His Spirit (Romans 8:14–17). After Jesus said to His disciples, “As the Father sent me I am sending you,” He breathed on them the Holy Spirit. Then, when He commissioned His disciples to be His witnesses, He told them to wait for power from on high (Acts 1:8). He was referring to the Holy Spirit that the Father and Son would send (John 14:16; 16:7). Just as Jesus was sent
by the Father, empowered, and led by the Spirit, now we are sent as His missionaries by the same power and leading of the Spirit (Matt. 3:16–4:1; John 20:21). If we have the Spirit of God, it is so we might be the children of God who accomplish the mission of Jesus by the same Spirit that sent and empowered Him.

**DISCIPLES:** *We are sent and empowered by the Spirit to share and show Jesus to others.*

As missionaries we are sent to share the truth about God’s love for the world through the sending of His Son. The Spirit has been given to us so we can know what is true of Jesus (John 14:26; 16:12–15), live fruitful lives as evidence of the gospel’s power to change (Gal. 5:16–24), be empowered to share it boldly (Acts 4:23–31), and trust He is the one who convicts the heart and gives new life (John 3:4–8). All fruitful missionary work is a result of being people who are born of, filled with, and led by the Spirit. If we are not living lives as missionaries fulfilling Jesus’ mission, it is either because we don’t have the Spirit or we are grieving the Spirit, living in disobedience to what He is leading us to do.
EVERYDAY GOSPEL RHYTHMS

THE ATTRACTIONAL-MISSIONAL CHURCH

Dear friends, I urge you, as aliens and strangers in the world, to abstain from sinful desires, which war against your souls. Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us. —1 Peter 2:11–12

WHAT ARE WE ATTRACTING PEOPLE WITH AND FOR?

Presently, we find ourselves having a polemical debate around attractional vs. missional church as mutually exclusive emphases. The issue really isn’t about whether we are for or against attraction. The issue regards the source and means of the attraction.

Who or what are we attracting people with and to?
Is the gospel attraction we are displaying for people an event or the gospel people?
For what purpose are they being drawn? To remain in the place they came, or to leave the place equipped and sent, prepared for ministry and mission?

The people of God have always been called to be a display people for God’s glory AND a sent people to the nations.

Where do we see both attractional and missional throughout the Story of God?
In what ways were the people of God called to display the glory of God?

The people of God were supposed to be a display people for the nations in the everyday stuff of life so the nations might see and experience the goodness and glory of God and be drawn to Him. The attraction was never merely an event but the glory of God being displayed in the everyday life of God’s people.

Church is not an event. It’s a community. Mission is not an event. It’s a lifestyle. We are called to live ordinary life with gospel intentionality. —Tim Chester

The forms and activities that the Church equips for and leads her people into must be the stuff of everyday life, or the Church will merely be events and programs we attend as we fit them in and around the rest of life. This often leads to a de-sacredization of the majority of life, robbing our people of living the gospel out in the everyday, or it often leads to a life packed with “church” programs pulling people out of the missionary context.

Every believer is called to full-time paid ministry:
God just chooses to route our paychecks through different sources.
We are called and sent to BE the Church on mission for God’s glory ALL the time whenever we gather, wherever we go, and in whatever we do. Every part of life is supposed to be dedicated to the ministry and mission of the gospel.¹

To walk in line with the gospel means that the truth of the gospel gets worked out in the stuff of everyday life through everyday activities. Although it may seem strange to a world that is perishing, it should not seem strange or abnormal for us to live our lives with gospel intentionality on gospel mission because of our gospel identity.

CONSIDER THE ELDER AND DEACON REQUIREMENTS

These are not some high and lofty ideals, but rather what we would hope for everyone who is leading a home and growing in the gospel. It’s the stuff of the everyday life.

How would the people in your missional community define full-time ministry?
In what ways are you demonstrating that ministry is done in the everyday stuff of life?
How are your people living out the mission of God in the everyday?

A Holistic Approach to Ministry

To lead our people to see all of life as ministry and mission, we must equip them to live out the gospel in everyday activities—everyday rhythms.

We have found some transferable patterns or rhythms of life that we see throughout the Story of God and in every culture in every part of the world.² Through each of these rhythms people have the opportunity to walk by faith—walking in line with the truth of the gospel—³—or walk in fear or prideful rebellion to God—walking in unbelief.⁴

When we come to understand and believe the gospel, we realize we are saved by faith, not works, and we are being saved by faith, not works. We know the righteous live by faith,⁵ and every moment is pregnant with the opportunity to walk by faith and therefore in line with the truth of the gospel. Training ourselves and others to walk in line with the truth of the gospel is really all about learning to walk by faith in the Son of God who loved us and gave up His life for us⁶ in every part of life.

These everyday rhythms we have identified can be easily observed in the very beginning of the Story before the fall of man, and through the Story we can see how they can be lived out in faith or in fear or prideful rebellion.

¹ 1 Corinthians 10:31; Colossians 3:17
² We believe we are called to equip people for gospel mission in such a way that it can be done in any context in the world. That is why we have not merely adopted a model of ministry but gospel rhythms of life that are lived out in every context in the world.
³ Galatians 2:14
⁴ Romans 11:17; Galatians 3:11
⁵ Galatians 2:20
⁶ Galatians 2:20

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THE EVERYDAY RHYTHMS

What everyday rhythms of life do you observe in the Garden, including the fall of man, that are also present in every culture in the world?

STORY-FORMED

*We know and submit our lives to the Story of God while also becoming familiar with one another’s stories and the stories of our culture.*

God has been unfolding His Story since before time began. We believe we are participants in the Story, and our only hope for redemption and restoration from our fear and prideful rebellion is when by faith we submit our lives to the overarching Story of God. Therefore, we regularly reacquaint with and submit ourselves to the Story by interacting with God’s Word. We look for ways and times to tell the Story often. We also take time to listen to others’ stories and lead them to submit their lives to God’s Story.6

All people on the planet are living their lives inside of and in light of a larger story shaped by the country they live in, the cultures surrounding them, the family they were raised in, and the worldview they believe. Until they understand all of this in light of the redemptive Story of God, they will give themselves to lesser stories that do not work.

*Where do we see this rhythm in the Garden and fall of man? How could they have lived by faith, and how did they NOT live by faith? What does “walking in line with the truth of the gospel story” produce?*

The Story

We are a story-formed people who are living our lives based upon and within a story. All of our beliefs, identity, and actions are connected to the dominant story. This is why we need to know it and talk about it when we sit, stand, walk along the way, eat, lie down, etc.7

My Story

I need to continue to grow in the gospel of grace and truth. I need to be self-aware and let the Spirit and the Word show me where my life, past and present, is not in line with the gospel story.

Our Stories

We need to get to know each other’s stories and pay close attention to where we are not believing the gospel. As we hear each other’s stories, ask:

*Where in your story are you struggling to believe the gospel? OR What about your identity in Christ are you struggling to believe, and how does the gospel answer your need?*

The Culture or Community’s Story

To be an effective missionary, we need to know the story of our culture (what has shaped it, what is the dominant storyline, what are the idols, where are the open doors for the

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6 Genesis 11:1–2; John 11; Psalm 1; 2 Timothy 3:16–17
7 Deuteronomy 6:6–9
gospel), both demonstrated and declared, and be prepared to show how the gospel story fills in the gaps, corrects the lies, or successfully completes its story.

What are some next steps your missional community should take to be a story-formed people?

LISTEN

We submit to God through consistent backward and forward listening

Jesus listened to God in prayer to know His Father's will. We listen to God because through the gospel we are now aware of our ongoing need for Him. We listen “backward” by regularly interacting with God's Word—the Story and the Son. We also listen “forward” to hear what God is saying to us today. We believe He declares to all people what He is like through His creation and specifically speaks to those who belong to Him through His Spirit.8

All people are listening to someone or something as the primary voice or voices they submit their lives to an expert or teacher they follow. These might include a school of thought, a leader or charismatic personality, demons, or lies from the past. Until the Creator is THE Expert and THE Teacher to whom they compare all other voices, they are prone to deceit, lies, and worship of self or others.

Where do we see this rhythm in the Garden and fall of man?
How could they have lived by faith, and how did they NOT live by faith?
What does “walking in line with the truth of the gospel” through listening produce?

To God

The gospel reminds us we are fully dependent upon God's Spirit to teach us the truth, convict of sin, and show us the way to go and empower us to do everything God wants. We must walk in submission to the Spirit if we are going to live as God intends.

To Myself

Pay attention to what you say to yourself. C.J. Mahaney states in his book, Living the Cross Centered Life, that when listening to ourselves, we should speak the gospel to ourselves. To realign ourselves regularly to the truth of the gospel, we need to listen closely to what we say to ourselves and compare that to the gospel and our gospel identity. When what we are hearing doesn't match up to the gospel, we should preach the gospel again to ourselves. Ask the Spirit:

Where is my self-talk out of line with the truth of the gospel?

To Each Other

We need to listen to each other carefully to discern where others are not yet gripped by the gospel, paying careful attention to whether their stories are about them and dependent on something other than God. Listen for the fruit of the Spirit and the works of the flesh.9

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8 Mark 1:35–37; John 16:7–15; Hebrews 1:1–3; Romans 1:20
9 Galatians 5:16–24
To Our Culture and Community
The people in our community are telling us what they believe and why. We need to ask questions and listen. If we are to be prepared to give an answer for the hope we have, we must spend less time just preparing answers and as much time listening for the questions. Listening to others first is prerequisite for gospel engagement. We should be listening constantly to know what story they believe in and where that story has proven weak and ineffective to save.

What are some next steps your missional community should take to grow in gospel listening?

CELEBRATE

We gather together to celebrate God's extravagant blessings in Jesus

God calls people to celebrate His goodness and grace regularly. We gather weekly in missional communities and regularly as a larger family to share stories and celebrate all that God is doing in and amongst us. We invite everyone to these celebrations as a way of displaying and declaring God’s glory, exhorting each other in the gospel and encouraging each other in mission.10

We are created to worship, and one of the ways is through celebration. Every person in every part of the world celebrates. The question is, To whom or what is the celebration directed? Because of sin and idolatry, we are prone to celebrate the creation instead of the Creator.

Where do we see this rhythm in the Garden and fall of man?
How could they have lived by faith, and how did they NOT live by faith?
What does “walking in line with the truth of the gospel” through celebrating produce?

God’s Grace

If we truly understand and believe the gospel, we should be the most celebratory people on the planet. God regularly called His people to celebrate through feasts and parties because He did not want them to forget His grace and abundant provision. The very celebration wasn’t just a response; it was also a demonstration of what God is like and has done. We must enter into a regular rhythm of celebrating God's extravagant blessings.

In My Life

Part of my ability to live out the gospel is dependent upon my regular reflection on the gospel. I need to set my affections regularly on things above—the work of God in Jesus Christ and what is now true of me because of Him. I should ask myself:

How is gospel celebration a part of my everyday life? How should it be?

With Each Other

We are called not to give up meeting together so we might spur each other on to love and good deeds. Jesus Himself demonstrates this through His first recorded miracle: at a wedding feast where He affirms the celebration of life together because celebrating life


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together demonstrates the working out of and one of the purposes for the gospel. Ask yourselves:

How often are we gathering together to celebrate, and how does the gospel inform it?

With Our Culture and Community

The people God has sent us to are also celebrating. They happen to be celebrating a different god and a different story. We need to enter into their celebrations and do it unto the true God, fully aware that even this celebration is within His Story. Within the celebration we are to look for ways to serve, redeem, bring gospel light, etc.

As a missional community what celebrations should you be participating in as you seek to bring the gospel to bear within the culture God has sent you to? What celebrations should you be creating to invite others into the celebration of the gospel?

BLESS

We intentionally bless others through words, gifts, or actions

God desires that all people would be blessed through Jesus. As His Body, we believe we live out this mission as we bless others. We intentionally seek God’s direction for whom He would have us tangibly bless each week.11 We all have talents, resources, and time. Some of us believe we have earned these things and therefore are entitled to them. This leads to greed and selfishness stemming from pride and causes fights, quarrels, divisions, and anxiety.12 When we believe all we have is from God’s gracious hand—gifts given not due to our own work—then we selflessly share what we have for the sake of others leading us to acts of service, sacrifice, and love.

Where do we see this rhythm in the Garden and fall of man? How could they have lived by faith, and how did they NOT live by faith? What does “walking in line with the truth of the gospel” through blessing produce?

Blessed By God

Just like Abraham we have been blessed. We have received unmerited favor and provision. This is not because of anything we have done, but because of all God has done for us in Jesus Christ. We are co-heirs with Christ and blessed with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly realms.

Take some time to write out and meditate on all God has blessed you with in Jesus Christ

To Be a Blessing

We are not blessed just for our own good. We have been given what we have so others might also receive. We must regularly take account of what has been given to us and realize it is not ours, but God’s, to steward. In light of the gospel that reminds us He became poor so that in His poverty we might become rich, we are freed up to pour out our lives and things so others might be blessed and taste and see that the Lord is good.

11 Genesis 12:1–3; Ephesians 1:22–23; 2:8–10; 1 Peter 2:12
12 James 4:1–6 13
Identify all that God has given you to bless others with, and ask Him to show you what to do with it.

Each Other
When we believe the gospel and realize we didn’t gain what we have nor do we really own what we have, we then come to see that our Father in heaven provides for His children, and we share what He has given us with each other. Then we come to see we don’t really own anything, yet at the same time we have more than we ever dreamed (brothers, sisters, fathers, mothers, houses, cars, clothes, food, etc.). All we have is His, and all that is His is ours.

Identify the needs of your family as well as the resources given to the family, and then ask God how you are to take care of each other.

Our Culture and Community
God’s intent in blessing His people has always been so that those who don’t know Him and His grace might see Him at work in and through us and come to Him through our lives. We must direct our eyes outward and begin to believe He has given us everything for life and godliness. He has resourced us with what we need to do the gospel work of blessing others who don’t know Him yet.

What does the culture or community you are sent to really need, and how has God blessed your missional community or the larger expression to display the grace of the gospel to them?

EAT
We regularly eat meals with others to invite them into gospel community

Meals are a daily reminder of our common need for God and His faithfulness to provide both physically and spiritually. Jesus called us to remember Him and His sacrifice for us through a meal. When we eat together, we commune around this truth. We regularly eat meals with those not in our immediate family or circle of close friends, discipling them toward a life of dependence on God.

In every part of the world, hunger is a daily reality—whether they have plenty or lack. We all get hungry more than once a day. God gave Adam and Eve the opportunity to demonstrate their faith through the eating of food. They choose to eat unto themselves out of unbelief and rebellion. God has likewise given every person in every part of the world a regular reminder of their need and an opportunity to eat unto themselves in unbelief and rebellion or unto God in faith and with thanksgiving.

Where do we see this rhythm in the Garden and fall of man? How could they have lived by faith, and how did they NOT live by faith? What does “walking in line with the truth of the gospel” through eating produce?

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14 Leviticus 23; Matthew 6:11; 26:17–30; Acts 2:46–47; Romans 12:13
Unto God

Whatever we do, whether we eat or drink, we do it unto God. Every meal really is a demonstration of the gospel. We come hungry (a real need), and our need is graciously met (whatever we have is from God). Since we eat three times a day, we get a gospel reminder over and over again IF we eat unto God. It’s interesting that throughout the Story, food continues to be the prime example of God’s provision meeting their need. In every case, they ate unto God or unto themselves.

*How might you eat differently if your eating was informed by the gospel and unto God in faith?*

With Each Other

When we eat together, we commune over our common need and God’s provision. In doing this we proclaim the gospel to each other over and over again. That is why it is important to eat together regularly—a loving community of believers communing around the work of Christ is the best apologetic of the gospel, and eating together is one of the ways we are commanded to do this.

*Consider how you might “preach” the gospel to each other through our “common” meal—the Lord’s Supper.*

With Unbelievers

The table for the Jews, as also in our day, is very symbolic AND communicative; whom we eat with demonstrates whom we love. This is why Jesus was called a friend of sinners. He ate with people who were dirty, unreligious, and visibly or sociably unacceptable. The table is one of the most powerful displays of God’s love and acceptance of sinners.

*How often do we eat with those who don’t believe what we do? How should your missional community shape its life around communing at the table with unbelievers?*

RECREATE

*We take time to rest, play, create, and restore beauty in ways that reflect God and the work of the Gospel to others.*

After powerfully and joyfully creating the universe, God rested. We were created in His image and therefore were made to create joyfully and rest as well. We regularly take time to rest, play, create, and restore beauty in ways that reflect what God is like to our community.

In every culture and with every person we witness the desire to rest and create. Although the means by which people work it out might be different, we find a universal and historical practice of “ReCreating.” However, apart from the gospel, people remain restless in their work and labored in their rest. The gospel enables people to rest while working because the work that justifies them was accomplished in Jesus; they don’t need their work to give them significance any longer. The gospel also enables people truly to rest when not

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15 Genesis 1–2:3; Deuteronomy 5:12; Mark 2:23–28; Hebrews
working because they know God is always working—they don’t have to worry their lack of work will stop the world from spinning.

*Where do we see this rhythm in the Garden and fall of man?*
*How could they have lived by faith, and how did they NOT live by faith?*
*What does “walking in line with the truth of the gospel” through ReCreating produce?*

**We Rest in God’s Work**

Because God has accomplished everything necessary for our justification and is the one who will finish the work He started in us, we can rest. Whether working, playing, sleeping, or creating, we rest in His work and His abilities and His power. Our rest then is not only a result of the gospel, but a demonstration to the world not at rest in the gospel.

*How and where in your life are you at rest in the gospel?*
*Where are you restless, and what about the gospel are you not believing?*

**We Work, Rest, Create, and Play**

We now approach work not needing validation or security. We can truly work unto the Lord and be free to do it as worship (not worshipping the job, the boss, the paycheck, or the credibility we obtain). We can also truly rest—vacation or not, sleeping or not, etc.—because the world is held together and run by Him, and it will be restored by His work in and through us, not our work apart from Him. We can also create freely, not dependent on the quality of the creation or the validation of others to say it is good, but rather because we are already called good in Jesus Christ. Finally, we are free to play because our Father is in charge and gives us all we need.

*How could our work be a better reflection of the gospel to the world around us?*
*In what ways could we be “playing” and “creating” such that it would be an appropriate display of the Gospel to our culture?*

**With Each Other**

We recreate together as a way of preaching the gospel to one another. We also become a display together of the truth of the gospel to a watching world. Our resting, creating, working, and playing all proclaim that our God is Creator, Sustainer, Provider, and Redeemer.

*How could your missional community reshape its weekly, monthly, and yearly rhythms to live out this rhythm?*
*Where in your culture do they need to see the creative, playful work of the gospel?*
BUILDING MISSIONAL COMMUNITIES

MISSIONAL COMMUNITIES DEFINED

A missional community is a gospel community (FAMILY) that lives out the mission of God together (MISSIONARIES) in a specific area and to a particular people group by demonstrating the gospel in tangible forms (SERVANTS) and declaring the gospel to others—both those who believe it and those who are being exposed to it (LEARNERS).

To clarify, a missional community is NOT primarily:
- A small group
- A Bible study
- A support group
- A social activist group
- A weekly meeting

FORMING A MISSIONAL COMMUNITY

1. Start with shared leadership:
   - **Prophetic type**—an emphasis on the unchanging truths of God's character, the gospel message, and the mission of the Church
   - **Priestly type**—an emphasis on the care of the soul and caring for one another
   - **Kingly type**—an emphasis on the tangible working out of the mission through structures, strategic thinking, and hands-on activity

   (NOTE: If you do not have a team to share this in the core of a group, you may want to supplement leadership through coaching, mentoring, or itinerant leaders.)

2. Build a foundation on the gospel
   - Gospel power—saved from penalty of sin; being saved from power of sin; will be saved from the presence of sin
   - Gospel people—new identity in Christ
   - Gospel purpose—making disciples who make disciples
   - Gospel practices—live out the gospel in everyday rhythms

3. Live with gospel intentionality
   - Lead into prayerful dependency
   - Make sure the group knows the Story of God

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Become familiar with each other’s stories
Become proficient in the four Gs and practice *gospeling* each other’s hearts

4. Have a clearly defined mission
   - Ask God to clarify your mission—who you are called to make disciples of
   - Identify the difference between reactive mission and proactive mission
   - Begin to pray intentionally for the mission
   - Leaders clearly state the mission and call others to participate in it

5. Begin to adjust the life of the community around the mission
   - Shape the weekly schedule to flow with the cultural schedule
   - Strategically place meetings to make space for missional engagement
   - Pay close attention to "seasons" and patterns in the culture of the mission field
   - Join in the rhythm of life of the community, bringing gospel distinctiveness to it
   - Develop pathways of engagement in the gospel—demonstrate and declare
   - Consider forming a covenant together around the mission (see Appendix A)

6. Display and declare the gospel
   - Clarify the gospel barriers
   - Identify the gospel “doors” or “pathways”
   - Prepare and train the group to address cultural idols
   - Begin by “showing” good news, and be prepared to give an answer for your hope
   - Consider engagement in one of the seven pillars

7. Stay connected to an overseer/coach
   - Coaching for ongoing development of leadership
   - Assessments to identify ongoing training needs
   - Develop strategic plans together
   - Supplement for areas of weakness

8. Plan for multiplication
   - Regularly sow seeds of multiplication into everything (from the beginning)
   - Identify apprentice leaders (2 Timothy 2:2)
   - Intentionally share leadership of the community (leadership development is best in community)

9. Birth new missional communities
   - Talk openly about the future sending of some to start new missional communities
   - As leadership is identified and being equipped, release some to start a new community
   - Keep in mind the mix of emotions—celebration (newborn baby) and grieving (children leaving home)

10. Form new expressions/equipping centers
    - Groups will need to come back together for ongoing encouragement, equipping, and mutual exhortation

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The gathering of them together becomes a unique and diverse expression of the Church within a particular context. This all leads to the development and appointing of Biblical qualified overseers (elders) and servants (deacons) in a new local expression of the church.

**LEADING A MISSIONAL COMMUNITY**

**Key Leadership Posture**
As a leader of a missional community you need to think like a church-planter with a core group.

Ask yourself, "If this group eventually were to become a core group of a new church plant, what would I do?"

Keep in mind that you will need to train and prepare for the ministry of making disciples and the leadership of new missional communities. Prepare them to be a new expression of the Church some day.

**Key Role of Missional Community Leaders**
Shepherd a gospel community.

Think of yourself as a pastor over a small church.
Regularly pray for and consider how best to shepherd those under your care.
Keep in mind the call to disciple the people under your care intentionally.

**Key Responsibilities**
Oversee the MC *gospel* one another in their identity in Christ and *gospel* the community through the rhythms of everyday life.

*To view a guide for a committed group of Christians to form a plan together for being Jesus’s disciples on mission, check out a Missional Community Covenant Template: [https://saturatetheworld.com/resource/mc-covenant/](https://saturatetheworld.com/resource/mc-covenant/)*

**MISSIONARIES**

**Listen**
Carefully and submissively listen to God alone and together to gain clarity on the mission He has called you to lead people toward.

**ACTIONS:**
Take some extended time to listen, pray, and journal.
Do pray walks or prayer drives to discern what God is saying.
Pay attention to His calling as demonstrated through personal convictions, passions, ongoing leadings.
Listen to the “cry” of your community and the people you’re being sent to.

**Story-Formed**
As you gain clarity on the mission God has called you to, begin doing the work to understand the story of that context and how best to bring the gospel to bear within it.

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ACTIONS:

Do a historical study of the neighborhood, city, people groups, etc.
Look for things that already exist that demonstrate the story of the culture.
Identify things that exist that are open doors for the gospel and demonstrations of gospel barriers.
Overall, look for where the Story of God and the story of the culture can intersect.

Celebrate

Identify and join the celebrations that already exist where God is sending you and look to develop new forms of celebration that bring the gospel to bear in a culturally appropriate way.

ACTIONS:

Identify celebrations the culture is engaged in that you can participate with and still display the gospel.
Identify the celebrations that exist that need redemption and look for ways to enter in and redeem them.
Identify the celebrations that do not exist, ask God if they should, and, if so, ask how you should go about developing culturally appropriate forms for celebrating.
With a team of leaders/workers begin to engage in present celebrations and prayerfully plan out culturally appropriate ones for the community.

Bless

Determine the most appropriate forms through which the community you’re called to would feel blessed and it would be “good news.”

(Consider one of the seven pillars as a starting point: education, business, media/arts, health care, government, service organizations, disenfranchised.17)

ACTIONS:

Determine what is broken or missing in your community.
Find out what exists to deal with those things and determine how you could serve.
If it doesn’t exist, discern with God and in community whether you are supposed to start something and who you should work with to see it started.

Eat

Begin to identify the “watering holes” in the community God is sending you to and frequent them often.

ACTIONS:

Determine where the people you’re sent to hang out often to eat and drink.
Regularly eat/drink there, and pay attention (listen to others, ask questions, learn).
Become known as people who live out good news (tip well, bring more business, etc.).
If a good gathering spot does not exist, prayerfully consider starting one.

ReCreate

Learn about the work habits of the community and what they do for rest and play.

**ACTIONS:**

- Get to know the kinds of work people are doing and what connection points you might have with them.
- Discover their weekly/monthly/yearly rhythms of work/rest/play, and begin to align with them.
- Consider how you might demonstrate creation/rest to your culture so they might see gospel.
- Look for places or situations where restorative work needs to be done and creatively bring that about.
- Pick up some recreational hobbies that would connect with the mission.

Adapting a theology of mission from missiologist Leslie Newbigin, George Hunsberger developed three relationships that must occur between the church, gospel, and culture:

**FAMILY**

**Story-Formed**

Know the life-stories of the people you are on mission with and on mission to so you know how to shepherd and develop them effectively.

**ACTIONS:**

- Become familiar with one another’s stories.
- Grow in speaking the truth in love to each other (gospeling each other’s hearts).
- Develop pastoral care skills within the group.
- Make sure everyone is in a discipleship, nurturing, and accountability triad (DNA group).

**Listen**

Regularly listen to God on others’ behalves to discern how to care for each other.

**ACTIONS:**

- Regular times of listening through prayer with a journal.
- Develop shepherding plans as you hear from God and listen to one another.
- Direct members toward next steps for spiritual growth and development.
- Create space to listen to God and pray together.

**Celebrate**

Regularly gather to celebrate God’s extravagant blessings.

**ACTIONS:**

- Regularly gather in a local expression for community worship through teaching, singing, sharing, eating, etc.
- Meet weekly as a missional community to encourage one another.
- Throw parties and events to demonstrate to the community what abundant life is like (birthdays, anniversaries, baby showers, wedding receptions, holidays, etc.).
Bless
Love one another through tangible acts such as encouragement, gifts, time spent, acts of kindness, etc.

ACTIONS:
- Make an inventory of what your community has been given by God and make this known to each other.
- Intentionally and tangibly bless a DNA member every week.
- Intentionally and tangibly bless a missional community member weekly.
- Extend blessing to someone not yet IN the family weekly.

Eat
Break bread together regularly together to remember Christ’s work on our behalf.

ACTIONS:
- Remember our Lord’s death regularly through communion.
- Practice preaching the gospel to each other through communion.
- Share a meal with your missional community weekly.
- Share another meal with another Christ-follower weekly (DNA, mentor, or MC member).

ReCreate
Take regular times to create, rest, and play together as a community.

ACTIONS:
- Work on projects together.
- Take a vacation together or do a focused retreat together.
- Share hobbies or recreational interests.

LEARNERS

Story-Formed
Know your own story and how God’s story is redeeming and re-storying yours, becoming gospel-saturated.

ACTIONS:
- Study and be prepared to teach others the gospel story (power, people, purpose, and practices).
- Become aware of the barriers to the gospel in your own life.
- Regularly work through the four Gs together (God is great, glorious, good, and gracious).

Listen
Regularly listen to God through times of Scripture reading, journaling, solitude, book-reading, fasting, and prayer.

ACTIONS:
Take time to work through the contemplative disciplines and journal what God shows you.

Listen to good gospel teaching/preaching, and submit to what the Spirit tells you to do.

Take spiritual retreats alone or with others when necessary.

Try activities like Lectio Divina together as a missional community.

**Celebrate**

Know the gospel well and how it informs and changes all of life so we are leading gospel celebrations from a gospel foundation.

**ACTIONS:**

- Grow in knowledge of and purposes for hospitality.
- Learn how to connect hospitality and the gospel creatively and contextually.
- Train others to be hospitable and share responsibility for hospitality.
- Rehearse daily evidences of God’s grace in your life.

**Bless**

Embrace the ongoing development of your own life as a means to bless others.

**ACTIONS:**

- Grow in understanding what gifts you have been given by God and work toward sharing them effectively to build others up.
- Learn the real needs in your community, and find ways to bless out of who you are.
- Teach and lead others to understand blessing and live out being a blessing.

**Eat**

Learn more about intersection of the Biblical feasts and the gospel.

**ACTIONS:**

- Study the Biblical feasts and learn to identify and articulate the gospel in all of the feasts.
- Be prepared to proclaim the gospel through meals (appropriately within each context).
- Be prepared to lead others in remembering our Lord’s death through communion.
- Teach others to know and do these things as well.

**ReCreate**

Understand and learn to walk in the rhythms of create and rest/play.

**ACTIONS:**

- Become aware of gospel rest throughout creation, fall, redemption, and restoration.
- Become self-aware of what prevents you from resting/playing.
- Discover what patterns you need to build this rhythm into your life.
- Help others walk out this rhythm as well through teaching and equipping.

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**SERVANTS**

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Story-Formed
Know the stories of the community so you can embody good news.

ACTIONS:
Ask questions of neighbors and community leaders, looking for real and felt needs.
Discover the hopes the community has and gaps in resources available.
Pay attention to the stories of your missional community and where the needs in the community intersect with the passions, gifts, talents, and experiences of the MC.

Listen
Regularly ask God to show you the community needs and how you can serve.

ACTIONS:
Take prayer walks/drives to discern where God is leading you to serve.
Journal what God tells you during your prayer times.
Ask God together to show you where and how to serve as a missional community.
Train your MC to be alert and in prayer listening for God’s direction.

Celebrate
Regularly provide parties/events that coincide with community needs.

ACTIONS:
Identify the regular celebrations in your community and serve at them.
Connect meeting needs to celebration (i.e. a park clean-up day with a BBQ at the end).
Volunteer to plan and lead the celebrations.

Bless
Identify at least one way/area to express the gospel tangibly on a regular basis through serving, and stick with it long enough to move beyond tasks to relationships.

ACTIONS:
As you become aware of the community needs and the MC resources, identify a specific area or issue you will lead the MC to serve in regularly (one of the seven pillars).
Make serving in that area a regular focus of your MC.
As you serve in one area, look for bridges to the other areas.

Eat
Regularly provide or pay for meals for others in your community.

ACTIONS:
Eat at least one meal a week with someone who doesn’t yet believe the gospel.
Pay for or provide the meal, and tip well to demonstrate the gospel to the servers as well.
Teach your community about what serving looks like over meals, and call them to it.

ReCreate
Regularly provide opportunities for rest, play, and creative restorative work.
ACTIONS:

Take time off when your community is taking time off, and try to rest/play with them. Engage in restorative work (i.e. community garden, community meeting, school of life, etc.). Look for opportunities to display and declare what has been done for us that allow us to rest in the gospel.