**WHAT IS MISSION**

By Jeremy Stephens

One part of our ecclesial minimum is to overlap mission with community and worship. But what are we overlapping community and worship with? What does it mean to be ‘missional’ to have ‘mission’ to go on a ‘mission’? Sometimes we define mission too narrowly often frustrating our micro church as they fail to fit within our narrow definition. Sometimes we define mission too broadly allowing for our micro churches to never really engage in mission because everything has mysteriously become mission. To help your micro church eliminate both extremes, take a few minutes to unpack how you perceive mission, define it and seek to embody it as the church.

**To get the discussion going, here are a few definitions. Which one do you like the most? Why?**

Mission is ‘an acting out of fundamental belief (ie in the Triune God) and at the same time, a process in which this belief is being constantly reconsidered in the light of acting it out in every sector of human affairs and in dialogue with every other pattern of thought by which men and women seeks to make sense of their lives.’- Lesslie Newbigin

“mission means proclaiming the kingdom of the Father, sharing the life of the Son and bearing the witness of the Spirit.” Newbigin

“Mission refers to “everything the church is sent into the world to do”. Jesus says in John 20:21 ‘as the Father has sent me, I am sending you.’ if anything is clear, it is that Jesus both preached and healed. Jesus explicitly said that he came both to proclaim the Gospel and to serve (mark 10:45). If we are sent in the same way as Jesus, then our mission in the world includes both evangelism and social responsibility.” Ron Sider

“Mission comes from the Latin “mission”, meaning “I send”. It is the task on which the church is sent into the world. If you prefer, it is the church’s job description.

Mission is a comprehensive word encompassing everything that Jesus sends his people into the world to do and accomplish in his name. Jesus himself drew a parallel between the commission with which the Father had sent him into the world and the way he was sending the disciples. “As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.”

Mission is intrinsic to the church. The church cannot properly be called such unless it is missionary.” Nigel Wright

**Spend time as a group developing a definition for what it means to be missional.**

In preface to the book, *Transforming Mission*, an editor suggests that “**Mission….is a passage over a boundary between faith in Jesus and its absence.”** Bosch later states in all mission there is a *boundary breaking dimension*. Apostles, missionaries, sent ones, always look to jump the fences in this world to witness the extension of God’s glory. This happens in a thousand wonderfully contextualized ways but they all jump fences.

**How does this help shape your definition further?**

**Take some time to dig deeper in understanding breaking boundaries as mission by studying John 4.**

**STUDY JOHN 4**

**John 4** New International Version (NIV)

**Boundaries Broken**

Take time to list the boundaries that Jesus crossed during this encounter.

**4**Now Jesus learned that the Pharisees had heard that he was gaining and baptizing more disciples than John — **2**although in fact it was not Jesus who baptized, but his disciples.**3**So he left Judea and went back once more to Galilee.

**4**Now he had to go through Samaria. **5**So he came to a town in Samaria called Sychar, near the plot of ground Jacob had given to his son Joseph. **6**Jacob’s well was there, and Jesus, tired as he was from the journey, sat down by the well. It was about noon.

**7**When a Samaritan woman came to draw water, Jesus said to her, “Will you give me a drink?” **8**(His disciples had gone into the town to buy food.)

**9**The Samaritan woman said to him, “You are a Jew and I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink?” (For Jews do not associate with Samaritans.**[**[**a**](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=John%204&version=NIV#fen-NIV-26166a)**]**)

**10**Jesus answered her, “If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water.”

**11**“Sir,” the woman said, “you have nothing to draw with and the well is deep. Where can you get this living water? **12**Are you greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did also his sons and his livestock?”

**13**Jesus answered, “Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, **14**but whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life.”

**15**The woman said to him, “Sir, give me this water so that I won’t get thirsty and have to keep coming here to draw water.”

**16**He told her, “Go, call your husband and come back.”

**17**“I have no husband,” she replied.

Jesus said to her, “You are right when you say you have no husband. **18**The fact is, you have had five husbands, and the man you now have is not your husband. What you have just said is quite true.”

**19**“Sir,” the woman said, “I can see that you are a prophet. **20**Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain, but you Jews claim that the place where we must worship is in Jerusalem.”

**21**“Woman,” Jesus replied, “believe me, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. **22**You Samaritans worship what you do not know; we worship what we do know, for salvation is from the Jews. **23**Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in the Spirit and in truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. **24**God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in the Spirit and in truth.”

**25**The woman said, “I know that Messiah” (called Christ) “is coming. When he comes, he will explain everything to us.”

**26**Then Jesus declared, “I, the one speaking to you—I am he.”

**27**Just then his disciples returned and were surprised to find him talking with a woman. But no one asked, “What do you want?” or “Why are you talking with her?”

**28**Then, leaving her water jar, the woman went back to the town and said to the people,**29**“Come, see a man who told me everything I ever did. Could this be the Messiah?” **30**They came out of the town and made their way toward him.

**31**Meanwhile his disciples urged him, “Rabbi, eat something.”

**32**But he said to them, “I have food to eat that you know nothing about.”

**33**Then his disciples said to each other, “Could someone have brought him food?”

**34**“My food,” said Jesus, “is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work.**35**Don’t you have a saying, ‘It’s still four months until harvest’? I tell you, open your eyes and look at the fields! They are ripe for harvest. **36**Even now the one who reaps draws a wage and harvests a crop for eternal life, so that the sower and the reaper may be glad together. **37**Thus the saying ‘One sows and another reaps’ is true. **38**I sent you to reap what you have not worked for. Others have done the hard work, and you have reaped the benefits of their labor.”

**39**Many of the Samaritans from that town believed in him because of the woman’s testimony, “He told me everything I ever did.” **40**So when the Samaritans came to him, they urged him to stay with them, and he stayed two days. **41**And because of his words many more became believers.

**42**They said to the woman, “We no longer believe just because of what you said; now we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this man really is the Savior of the world.”

Share the boundaries you observed being crossed by Jesus in this passage.

How did people respond to his crossing boundaries?

What were all the results of Jesus breaking boundaries?

“He crosses the boundaries of oppressed and oppressor, sinners and the devout. He has many sayings, parables and stories that demonstrate the provocative, boundary-breaking nature of Jesus.” – David Bosch

**How would you say your life is “boundary breaking”?**

**Evaluate your micro church’s mission in the light of John 4.** How does your mission compare with the boundary breaking mission of Jesus?

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| How do we reflect Jesus in crossing boundaries? | How do we not reflect Jesus in crossing boundaries? |

**REPENT**

After looking at the way Jesus engages his mission we recognize we have all been influenced by a non-Jesus centered method of mission. In too many ways we have conformed to the patterns of this world and have befriended the method of empire building with glorious leaders and efficient programs. And if we are honest we want to look good and sound right and have the nice brochures, websites and lots of people at our events. If we are honest we want to build our own kingdom; bunkers that keep us safe and secure from the chaos of this dying world. And in our adoption of non-biblical mission there are barriers and borders we refuse to cross. We must be honest about this.

Our only response is to repent and turn away. Romans 12 exhorts us to not be conformed to the pattern of this world but be transformed by the renewing of our minds. Jesus came for the whole world and sends us into the whole world. But too often we have conformed our lives and our micro churches to the patterns of this world. And it does not honor the Lord.

Let us return to Jesus, realign ourselves to him and be sent by him to live an apostolic/missional life.

Like Peter needing a vision from Jesus to reach the Gentiles, we too need a fresh vision of God’s Kingdom that destroys dividing walls, breaks borders and sends us to the edges of the world.

**Prayer**

Spend time in prayer identifying and repenting for the ways your mission does not reflect the mission of Jesus.

**MISSION MANUAL**

*“Mission is understood as being derived from the very nature of God. It is thus put in the context of the doctrine of the Trinity, not of ecclesiology or soteriology. The classical doctrine of the Missio Dei as God the Father sending the Son, and God the Father and the Son sending the Spirit is expanded to include yet another “movement: Father, Son and Holy Spirit sending the church into the world.” Bosch*

In the diagram above, Alan Hirsch implores the church to calibrate itself based on the mission that is determined by Jesus. Jesus defines his mission and the church is then defined by that mission. Hirsch puts it this way, “The church does not have a mission, the mission of God has a church.” This helpful diagram illustrates how our micro churches need to evaluate the way we do mission. We need to recalibrate no matter how successful or unsuccessful we are. We need to emulate Jesus in the mission he sends us on.

Below is an exercise to help us think through the missiology of Jesus. Take time flipping through a gospel as if it was a “mission’s manual”. What does it teach you about mission, the methods to do mission, who to engage and how to love them?

As a group, make a list of the missionary principles you find in the gospel, how it challenges contemporary mission and how you possibly can live out this principle in your micro church.

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| Citation | Mission principle | Challenge to contemporary mission | Possible contextualization of this principle for today |
| Matt 9:9-12 | Refuse to exclude people from fellowship based on cultural preferences. We should hang out with freaks more often | We normally hang out and reach people who feel comfortable to us. | Relocating to “that” part of town, classroom, school, etc… |
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