

MISSIONARY PRACTICES

“As You sent Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world.”

John 17:18

Life is lived in a series of tangible actions. It's one thing to have a theory of the values that will define your existence, but it's a far different and more important matter to put these values into play in practical ways.

For example, it's common to hear a father say that he loves his wife and children. Yet, translating that to practice can be difficult. He might busy himself with vocational pursuits or waste time through mindless hobbies rather than do the hard work to invest in these relationships. If this happens, then there is a gap between his stated belief—"I love my family" and his actual practice which says, "Many things are more important than my family."

The same is true for the Christian. You'll meet few Christians who will not agree that they should be making disciples, yet most struggle to translate this to practice. As a result, many squander their lives in mission-less living. Paul warns against such a life when he writes, "*Making the most of the time, because the days are evil. So don't be foolish, but understand what the Lord's will is*" (Ephesians 5:16-17). We have a responsibility to make the most of our days because they are short and fleeting.

As we near the end of this study, we want to move our attention to practical issues related to missionary living that will help our belief and practice become more congruent. We may have alluded to several of these up to this point, but let's spend some time teasing out the basic life rhythms of a person who is intent on living on mission.

It's important to realize from the outset that nobody is a natural missionary. Even Paul himself needed to pray for boldness. Before we start, you need to give yourself permission to not like missionary living at first. A firefighter doesn't enjoy rescuing someone from a burning building, doing CPR, or using the Jaws of Life to cut somebody out of the flaming wreckage of an automobile, but it needs to be done to save a life. You might not enjoy some of these actions at the outset, and it will most certainly take a good bit of work to adjust your regular rhythms to be in line with God's missionary plan. That's ok.

Rate your willingness to live as a missionary in each area listed below on a scale from 1 (poor) to 10 (excellent). Following each answer, list a few reasons for the score you selected.

I am confident in my ability to share the gospel.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Why?

I am confident in my understanding of the gospel message.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Why?

I have plenty of relationships with nonbelievers with opportunities to share.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Why?

I am passionate about sharing the gospel with non-Christians.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Why?

God alone can save a soul, but Paul clearly states that somebody has to be willing to bring the gospel to those who are far from Jesus (Romans 10:14-15). Even if you are intimidated, you should be encouraged by the fact that you are not alone. In fact, the Holy Spirit is known as the Helper (John 16:4-15). He is there to help you when you feel weak, inept, or downright ignorant. He's there to bring courage when you doubt and hope when you wonder if anything good is actually happening.

The apostle Paul discovered that through his weakness, the Lord was strong, and that His grace was sufficient for him (2 Corinthians 12:9). You'll discover the same as you trust God's word to you that He'll be with you as you step out in obedience to His command to "go." As you go, here is a four-fold process you should follow in order to make missionary living a regular part of your daily rhythms.

Build Relationships

Reading the book of Acts, or even the Gospels, it becomes obvious that most of the successful evangelism modeled by Jesus, and the apostles was done through strategic relationships and outside of buildings. There is an art involved in reaching people outside of the church, as much as there is a skill in fishing, golfing, or photography. Building relationships takes work. Here are a few ways to begin:

- 1. Have Fun**—Find ways to embed yourself in a few, strategic recreational activities in your community and participate in those consistently. There are fantasy sports, cross-fit groups and dinner clubs. This is where individuals are provided with opportunity to enter into the rhythms of society and be a part of the conversation people are already having. There are more activities than just sports. People who take their kids to dance, gymnastics and soccer games form a type of community. There are play groups for stay-at-home-moms. There are craft groups, cooking classes and yoga classes. The possibilities are endless. Relationship building is work, but it can be fun. Leverage something you already enjoy doing to be around people who are far from God.
- 2. Learn**—Art classes. Reading groups. Cooking classes. Night school. People are always trying to learn more, feed their minds and stimulate deeper thinking. Public libraries provide opportunities to teach writing workshops, or to speak on an area of expertise. Going to art exhibits with your neighbors and engaging in discussions about an artist's work can provide amazing gospel conversations. Since God's truth is seen throughout every facet of life, these arenas provide easy inroads to gospel conversations.
- 3. Serve**—Unbelievers today are socially aware to the conditions in their world, and socially awakened to do something about it. Nothing speaks so powerfully about grace than a group of people sacrificially serving others. Often, when non-believers witness the love of God in action, they are moved to join in and help. For Christians, this provides a huge opportunity to "pick a fight" with an area of darkness in your city and engage in meaningful mission. There is a saying

that you earn the right to speak to a culture when you serve a culture. Gospel conversations abound and flourish when we serve the less fortunate ones in a community. It could be kids aging out of foster care, making them vulnerable to sexual predators or the sex trade. It could be homelessness. Sex trafficking. Often, people in your community who are disinterested in the gospel initially, come along because they share the desire to see injustices eradicated from their city. Seeing you in action causes them to want to listen to what you believe.

4. **Show Hospitality**—Everybody has to eat. For that reason, inviting somebody over to eat seems like a big ask, but it doesn't necessarily take a huge investment of time if you'd already planned on eating anyways. Instead of half an hour around the table with your family, you might spend two hours in conversation with your neighbors. You could host a block party on Memorial Day, grill hotdogs and rent a bounce house. You can provide coffee for the commuters standing at the bus stop in an urban setting. Mark a day of the week, pick a bus stop bench, and own it. Serve coffee out of a Starbucks traveler until everybody has caught their bus. The more creative you get, the more fun you'll have. And remember, that's part of the power of it.

1. **Be a Regular**—Finally, certain places in your neighborhood are hubs for community. Being a regular in a particular place of business can foster a sense of community. In Britain, it's the local pub. In America, it can be the coffee shop, or a local restaurant. These places are where the people congregate and establish an unspoken relationship and fostered sense of community. It could be a skate park, a secret surfing spot, known only to locals, or a park in an urban setting. Whenever you see these places, consider doing business there. Especially if it's a hub in the community you're trying to reach.

Use these five suggestions to map out a plan for building relationships over the coming month. You may already do some of these things. If so, feel free to include them. Either way, seek to come up with at least one clear action step in each of these areas that would enhance your missionary living.

1. Have fun

2. Learn

3. Serve

4. Show hospitality

5. Be a regular

Bridge to Gospel Conversations

Building relationships should provide a natural context to bridge to gospel conversations. This doesn't have to be a bait-and-switch technique where people feel used so that you can feel good about yourself for having shared your faith. If the person feels this way, then your missionary efforts will often have the opposite effect—people will feel jaded and skeptical of the truth you proclaim. You should genuinely seek to build relationships in an effort to love people well. Then, if people truly feel loved, God will provide the opportunities for you to turn natural conversations into gospel conversations.

There you are. You've invited a family over for a meal. The food is the picture of excellence. The atmosphere is superb. The company splendid. Then, a perfect night becomes ruined by the forced conversation about Jesus. The obligatory gospel conversation is pulled out and dusted off to justify the existence of a good night out.

Have you ever had that experience?

Have you ever scratched your head about how it all went wrong? Did you wish that the person talking had learned to pick a better moment?

Perhaps you've been on the other side of the fence. You've been meeting with a couple or individual for months. Perhaps you've been playing basketball with a team for six months and nobody knows you're a Christian. You don't know how to ever bring it up. You wait. And wait. And wait. After enough time, it's actually embarrassing to share about Jesus because it seems so out of the blue now that so much time has passed.

Here's the reality. Timing is everything. In both situations, a little more faith was required. At the dinner table, faith was needed to allow God to open up the right opportunity. And even though it seemed to be taking a while on the basketball courts, guys sometimes take a lot longer to talk about deep things. Nonetheless, God is always working behind the scenes in our lives. God has perfect timing and as we get to know people, they open up and share things that invite us into their lives on a deeper level.

It could be that after practice, one of the guys tells you about his wife and how she's going to leave him. He'll ask your advice, and that's your time to listen, talk and offer to pray for him. Often, asking somebody if you can pray for them is the easiest way to break the ice. People will often say yes, or tell you politely that they don't believe in God. If they say yes, pray on the spot.

The importance of building relationships naturally is so that you can share the gospel in a natural way when the time comes. Often, we've been taught to share the gospel like a slick salesman, quickly laying out our pitch, then closing the deal on the spot. The problem is that this isn't modeled anywhere in Scripture. When Paul preached at Mars Hill in Athens, the response of the crowd was mixed. There were three responses. Some thought he was a babbler of nonsense and mocked him. Others believed. Others needed to hear more. Read this story in Acts 17. What do you observe there? What does this tell us about the importance of sharing the gospel in a natural way?

Read Paul’s description of gospel work in 1 Corinthians 3:5–9. How should this change the way you view the timing of gospel conversations?

How does understanding evangelism as being a process change the way you depend upon the Holy Spirit to partner with you?

For an excellent gospel conversation tool, visit namb.net/3Circles. Download the free training and mobile app.

Connect to the Church

The third stage—connect them to a local church—is one we often neglect or put in the wrong order. Of course, there’s nothing wrong with inviting a total stranger to your church’s Easter service and there’s also no issues with handing your neighbor an invite card to an upcoming event. More often than not, however, people are going to be drawn to take you up on your invitation if there is a relationship already established. If you’ve hung out with your neighbor and shared a number of meals together, they may be willing to come to a church cookout. If they’ve gone with you to a few ballgames, they might be willing to come over for a small group at your house. Also, if you’ve already shared the gospel with them, then they might be intrigued to hear more about the truth of the gospel when your church gathers.

What’s important, is that you try to find ways to involve non-believers into the rhythms of your church’s life. Why? Because once they are saved, the local church will be the context for growth and community, so why not go ahead and connect them? And, not only that, but the teaching of the church, the stories of other relationships built on love, will often have a compelling affect in drawing your friends to Christ.

This doesn’t mean that your first invitation has to be to your church’s Sunday morning gathering. It could be that you invite them to an outing with some guys from the church, a women’s Bible study, a mission project, or other activities in the life of the church. These smaller settings, in fact, will often allow your friends to feel more comfortable and form better relationships with believers.

Think about your church. What are some ways you could involve non-believers in the life of your church?

Commit to the Process

Missionary practices are not hard, but they do take intentionality. You may grow discouraged. You may not see immediate fruit from your missionary efforts. Some people will reject you. Others will be skeptical but distant. Still others may be genuinely interested, but just not let you know. What's important is that you persevere and continue to live a life on mission.

The purpose of each of these sessions is to create patterns of behavior that will last a lifetime. Yet, we are all forgetful people, and in a few months, or years, we will be prone to drift from the practices we've been reminded of this week.

In order to arrest these tendencies, finish this week by committing to not allowing any aspect of your life to neglect the needs of those around you who are far from God. If you are changed, your community will start to change around you. As we continue to pray the Lord of the harvest to send out workers, we will soon learn that with Jesus, the harvest is plentiful.

As we conclude, it's important to realize that nobody is an expert in evangelism. The Holy Spirit is willing to work with each one of us in a unique way as we boldly step out on the journey to become His instruments of bringing hope and salvation into people's lives. You will grow in your knowledge, boldness and confidence as you continually see God working in new and surprising ways. Each time God meets you on the other side of obedient faith-filled evangelism, your faith will grow and increase. Remember, when it comes to actually saving a soul, God does all the work. He is just looking for a faithful messenger who will deliver the good news of Jesus to all who need it.

Discuss:

1. What hinders you from living on mission? What challenges do you face when you attempt to live as a sent individual each week?
2. Describe a time when you built a new friendship. What did you do? How can the pointers from this week's session help you build relationships with people who are far from God?
3. Brainstorm some ordinary ways you can bridge everyday conversations to gospel conversations. What are some common themes you find in your conversations? How can you take each of these themes and bridge to gospel conversations? For example, you may say it is common for people to discuss hurt or pain their life. If so, it should simple for a Christian to take these stories of suffering and point to the One who is our only hope in times of pain.
4. How could you connect non-believers to your church community, even before they come to trust in Jesus? What challenges might you face? What are some ways that your group can make it more natural for outsiders to enter your group and feel loved and accepted?