

Being Missional: The gospel as a way of life

4 For we know, brothers loved by God, that he has chosen you, 5 because our gospel came to you not only in word, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction. You know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake. 6 And you became imitators of us and of the Lord, for you received the word in much affliction, with the joy of the Holy Spirit, 7 so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia. 8 For not only has the word of the Lord sounded forth from you in Macedonia and Achaia, but your faith in God has gone forth everywhere, so that we need not say anything. 9 For they themselves report concerning us the kind of reception we had among you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, 10 and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come. (1 Thessalonians 1:4-10)

For many of us, healthy is a way of life; everything we do turns around that core- the way we structure our time, our activities, and our diet. Many of us consciously consume super foods, anti-oxidants, vitamin supplements, and plenty of water for hydration. Here's a word to describe that lifestyle: missional. Missional is being purposeful, intentional, thoughtful, staying on a focused track or mission about a way to live.

Paul is describing folks in this text who also were missional. They had the gospel as a way of life. As a result, this young church thrived, even in a hostile environment. I want some of what they had. Let's look at three questions.

What is it?

Living missionally is not quite the same as being a missionary. It's living with the gospel as a core principle and motivation of your life, wherever your mail is delivered to you. Paul shows here that the Thessalonian believers became missional through the gospel itself.

*Paul set an example →
The Thessalonians received the gospel →
They imitated Paul, becoming an example →
The Macedonians received the gospel.*

Jesus by his Spirit put something in their DNA that fostered spiritual health and vigor, expressing itself in outward concern for others. This is exactly what God himself is like. He sends, he comes to us, he seeks us out. Jesus is his sent son. Jesus came with a core value in the center of his soul: in joyful obedience to his father, he came *to seek and to save what was lost*. Jesus is missional; if you know him you are too. Jesus said,

As the father sent me, so I send you. (John 20:21)

There is a pattern: in the same way you were attracted to Christ and those he sent, finding them worthy of imitation, you likewise live so others are as well. You're not living for you, but for Jesus' sake. He is worth everyone being attracted to; he is worthy of the worship of all creatures. You can't *not* speak about something so magnificent:

...the word of the Lord sounded forth from you. (8)

The Thessalonians had a missional mindset; they sought Christ's glory, what he is doing on earth, where God is working, how Christ is extending grace, knowing that he uses us to do it! Thus Paul's spontaneous prayer in 2 Thessalonians 1:

11 To this end we always pray for you, that our God may make you worthy of his calling and may fulfill every resolve for good and every work of faith by his power, 12 so that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you, and you in him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ.

What are its benefits?

There are at least two benefits of living missionally. First, being missional frees you to live for something larger than yourself. Living for maximum health is fine; I want to extend my days and make those I am given most effective, with health and vigor. But eventually health ends. And your health is always subject to forces beyond your control.

Healthy can't be your ultimate mission. Why? Because if health is the most compelling cause you know, you'd only be living for your own welfare, for your glory. You weren't created for that. That's not God's purpose for your life. Human hearts function properly only when they live for something greater than themselves, namely, God's glory. Think about your experience:

Who has helped you most in life, people who lived for their glory, or for others' welfare? When are you faithful to the two great commandments, love God and love neighbor, when you live for your glory, or God's?

Paul saw his life as belonging to another, for his good and God's glory. So he laments in Philippians 2 not being with the Lord in heaven, yet values life on earth as bringing benefit to those he can serve. Nowhere does the bible commend or command living for yourself! So think of your life as being either like a tether ball or a soccer ball.

If you're a ball tethered to Jesus and his grace, that's where you'll stay wound. If you live for the gospel, though things buffet you from without, you will ever be tethered to an unshakeable core, Jesus, who uses difficulty to wrap us closer to himself. He identifies, comforts, helps us in our every need.

But if a soccer ball, if you live for yourself, all the things you live for ultimately end up kicking you around. Things like money, approval, control, success- you never have enough of them and ultimately fear losing them. A good indicator you live for these things is your strongest emotions, or how you feel when you don't get what you want, or when what you expect is threatened.

For Paul, what was larger than himself? Actually, something that is healthy, alive, and indestructible: the eternal word of God. Hence his prayer in 2 Thessalonians 3:

I Finally, brothers, pray for us, that the word of the Lord may speed ahead and be honored, as happened among you,

Paul describes a life where your relationship to the word of God is like the wind and a leaf. It carries you.

Where do get loyalty to that? From the one who word it is, Jesus. That explains why Paul offers this prayer in 2 Thessalonians 3:5:

May the Lord direct your hearts to the love of God and to the steadfastness of Christ.

Think of your heart as unbaked bread. Ask God to bake it in the oven of Christ's commitment to you, the warmth of his undying affection, his steadfastness whereby he endured the cross and now ever lives to pray for you, and gets you every resource you need:

For he who did not spare his own son, but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him freely give us all things. (Romans 8:32)

With that unshakeable promise Paul prays this:

Now may our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God our Father, who loved us and gave us eternal comfort and good hope through grace, 17 comfort your hearts and establish them in every good work and word. (2 Thessalonians 2: 16)

Do you detect the core of missional in his prayer?

...our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God our Father, who loved us and gave us eternal comfort and good hope through grace...

The second benefit of living missionally is such an outlook saves you from false way of understanding church. Some see church as a spiritual restaurant; you come in regularly for spiritual nourishment and leave. If church is just another block of time in your otherwise full calendar, Jesus won't change the world. He purposes to use corporate worship- time spent with the world changer himself- to renew his people in our relationship and to reveal his beauty again so that we can't help but live for and speak for him.

Additionally, being missional saves believers from seeing their faith as a private, personal thing, where God is true for me but isn't necessarily for others. It also saves the church from trying to be like the world, stressing what we have in common while downplaying the distinctives that make the church a counter cultural movement. Nor should the church maintain an "us versus them" mentality, withdrawing to a place where outsiders don't feel invited into the discussion.

What is the evidence you are living missionally?

Is it hard to tell a stale pond from bubbling brook? No, the movement of the water is a dead give away. You can easily see, hear, and smell the effects of the moving water. Likewise, in the heart, and therefore the life, of a missional person, you see movement. The gospel becomes a bubbling brook in them, an idea hinted at in Proverbs 10:11:

The mouth of the righteous is a fountain of life.

The teaching of the wise is a fountain of life. Proverbs 13:4

God starts the waters flowing in us and through us:

7 How precious is your steadfast love, O God! The children of mankind take refuge in the shadow of your wings. 8 They feast on the abundance of your house, and you give them drink from the river of your delights. 9 For with you is the fountain of life; in your light do we see light. (Psalm 36:7-9)

What movement do you see in the life of a missional person? First, there is always movement toward God:

...and how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, 10 and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come. (1 Thessalonians 1:9-10)

Yes, this verse describes their conversion, but because of the tendency of our hearts to turn inward on ourselves, we need to constantly turn to gaze upon Christ. Then what do we discover? The more I look myself, the less impressed I am with me and the more impressed I am with God. Serving idols destroyed me; serving God made me. His glory became my heart's chief delight.

Second, there is movement toward others. Movement toward God will always produce concern for others. Why? That's what God specializes doing in his Son, who came to earth to reclaim it as his own. He heals, restores, redeems, renews. God sees human brokenness and is moved to pity. Look how many people Jesus healed. He couldn't stand the status quo, so he used his power to change it. That's being missional. Missional folks are discontent with the status quo. Jesus isn't receiving the glory he deserves from all his creatures,

Missional folks can't stand to see the church as irrelevant or marginalized in society. The majestic cathedrals in Europe became museums because at some point what they offered people became irrelevant. We must ever see the world as needing redemption and loved by God, worth saving, the sphere of his loving restoration. That's why missional people discover where God is at work already. If it looks like he isn't, move on. No one can open hard hearts; only God can. We just hang around and offer ourselves as servants, asking God: How are you at work here? What is my role here?

Missional folks, third, move toward their resources. Our money tends to grip us and speaks to us: "save me, keep me, don't part with me, spend me, use me for your self, you deserve what I can buy you." The missional heart, though, is free to move toward his resources to part with them, to scatter them.

24 *One gives freely, yet grows all the richer; another withholds what he should give, and only suffers want. 25* *Whoever brings blessing will be enriched, and one who waters will himself be watered.* (Proverbs 10)

Being missional sees needs and moves to help meet needs because this is a tangible way to joyfully be rich toward God. Since your money isn't just for you, you have developed the grace to want what you have, versus want what you lack.