



## The Mission Sequence

### Doing Mission The Way Jesus Did?

#### A Story

In Gordon MacDonald's book, Going Deep, the pastor, GMAC's, neighbours, Hank and Cynthia Soriano, had no interest in the church but they were good friends and Hank showed an interest in GMAC's work. It was Hank who challenged GMAC to clarify what it was the church actually did. That set GMAC on a course of discovery culminating in a commitment to meet regularly with a group of hand-picked church members, to intentionally "cultivate deep people" (CDP).

As part of the exploration phase though, GMAC and his wife, invited a number of people to their house for a discussion about their most profound learning experiences. How do people learn? They included the Sorianos who became intrigued with the depth of that conversation and with this idea of a church focusing on growing people – intrigued to the point of offering to help set up for the subsequent meetings and to serve the meal for the group members. They were invited to stay for the first evening when GMAC talked about biblical discipleship and put the proposal of regular meetings to those who had been invited. The Sorianos would not have the opportunity to be part of that group but they were beginning to meet the people and to hear something of the concept.

They were intrigued enough to want to know a bit more about "how this religious thing works" and to ask about the possibility of meeting with someone from the church to explore it.

That was arranged and the Sorianos offered to help set up and clear up each week that the CDP group met. That way they mixed with and observed the group members during the meal but were not part of the programme. They even turned up in church occasionally.

Sometime later they came over to say that they had been studying the Bible with their mentors and had decided to become Jesus-followers. They became prime candidates for the next CDP group!

That is fictitious and possibly sounds a little too easy. However, I think it illustrates something.

I know that every person and every situation is different. Jesus never demonstrated a formulaic approach to mission. Each different situation required its own response. Nevertheless, I wonder if there is not a mission sequence evident in the ministry of Jesus (and the story of the Sorianos) that would be enormously valuable to us. I am also naive enough to think that this sequence is applicable to personal mission, parish mission and global mission.

In the book, GMAC says, "I think that's the way a lot of evangelism is going to be done in the future. A loving community radiates the love of Christ. Others are drawn to it."

By "mission" I simply mean doing what we have been sent to do. There is considerable discussion about

what the mission of the church is and it is a question that must be answered. I do not attempt to do that here. In what follows, there is an implicit understanding of our mission. I am sure you will be able to identify it.

## **An Integrated Mission Sequence**

The sequence I am suggesting goes like this:

- 1) Filled and led by the Holy Spirit
- 2) Pray and seek God
- 3) Go where people are
- 4) Build relationships
- 5) Demonstrate the Kingdom of God
- 6) Talk about Jesus
- 7) Identify those who are open and seek a response of faith and repentance
- 8) Incorporate into community
- 9) Mentor to maturity in the context of mission
- 10) Commission to repeat the process

### **1) Filled And Led By The Holy Spirit**

We surely don't think that we can be effective in the mission of God by ourselves!

Jesus specifically told the Twelve not to embark on the mission He was giving them until they had received the Holy Spirit (Luke 24:49 and Acts 1:4). Christian mission is inextricably linked to the Holy Spirit. Jesus' promise "And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age" is linked to the Great Commission (Matthew 28:29-20). The promise of the Holy Spirit in Acts 1:8 is to enable disciples to be Jesus' witnesses in all the world. Indeed, John's version of the Great Commission includes "And He breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit."" (John 20:21)

#### **Was this true of Jesus?**

Before His ministry began, Jesus was baptised and the Holy Spirit came on Him in the form of a dove (Matt 3:16). He was then immediately "led by the Spirit" into the wilderness to be tempted (Matt 4:1).

Likewise, near the beginning of His ministry, Jesus quoted, and applied to Himself, words from Isaiah 61: 'The Spirit of the Lord is upon me because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me...' (see Luke 4:18). Just prior to that, we read that Jesus returned to Nazareth "in the power of the Spirit" (4:14).

Peter summarised Jesus' mission by saying, "you know what has happened throughout the province of Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John preached – how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power, and how He went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil, because God was with Him" (Acts 10:37-38).

The resurrected Jesus' words to the disciples about not leaving Jerusalem and about being empowered for witness were themselves spoken "through the Holy Spirit" (Acts 1:2).

#### **What about Paul?**

Paul's life as a Christian began with a prayer that he be filled with the Holy Spirit. God had announced Paul's mission to Ananias: "This man is my chosen instrument to proclaim my name to the Gentiles and their kings and to the people of Israel" (Acts 9:15). When Ananias then met Paul, he said, "Brother Saul, the Lord – Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you were coming here – has sent me so that you may see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit." (Acts 9:17).

Paul realistically described his preaching of the gospel, drawing attention away from any suggestion that its power lay in his eloquence but simply in the work of the Holy Spirit. “My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words but with a demonstration of the Spirit’s power, so that your faith might not rest on human wisdom, but on God’s power” (1 Cor 2:4-5). “Our gospel came to you not simply with words but also with power, with the Holy Spirit and deep conviction (1 Thess 1:5).

Speaking about his mission, Paul said, “I will not venture to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me in leading the Gentiles to obey God by what I have said and done—<sup>19</sup> by the power of signs and wonders, through the power of the Spirit of God” (Romans 15:18-19a). The power of signs and wonders was a standard part of mission for Paul.

Paul was also literally led by the Spirit. In Acts 16:6-7, the Holy Spirit twice would not allow him to go to certain places and we can assume that the vision beckoning him to Macedonia was also a work of the Holy Spirit.

### **What about us?**

Do we balk at the suggestion that the first requirement for mission is to be filled and led by the Holy Spirit? Do we assume that church members can be involved in mission even when they may not be Christians, let alone led by the Holy Spirit?

Some of what we refer to as mission can be carried out without the help of the Holy Spirit. People can deliver meals to neighbours without being led by the Spirit. We can protest about environmental damage without being empowered by the Holy Spirit. Many non-Christians do these things effectively. But we will never make disciples of Jesus Christ without the help of the Holy Spirit. We will never advance the Kingdom of God without the Holy Spirit.

Jesus said, ‘Without me you can do nothing.’ (John 15:5) The first of the Beatitudes describes the blessedness of those who know they are spiritually poor and need God’s help (Matt 5:3).

It may be that God can use anybody to advance His mission in some way but those occasions are the exceptions rather than the rule. In general, if people are going to be effective in mission, they must first be Christians and be filled with the Holy Spirit. We would certainly not want to encourage people to engage in mission without themselves being filled by the Spirit of God, when Jesus emphatically said, “Do not leave Jerusalem but wait for the gift my Father promised.”

In the words of Andrew Marshall<sup>1</sup>, we must be in Christ before we are in the community. Otherwise, it is futile; we are powerless. Churches are focusing a lot on opening opportunity shops and many other ministries, but without ensuring that the people involved are Holy Spirit-empowered Christians.

## **2) Pray and seek God**

You would hope that it would go without saying that we must pray but we probably do actually need to say it.

### **Was this true of Jesus?**

Clearly Jesus gave high priority to prayer but was that prayer specifically linked to His mission?

His claim that He did only what He saw His Father doing indicates a level of discernment that allowed Jesus to be alert to the activity of God – a level of discernment birthed in prayer.

His ministry began with His proclamation of His mission manifesto in the synagogue on Nazareth (Luke 4:16-20). But this followed the forty days in the wilderness. While prayer is not mentioned explicitly, only

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<sup>1</sup> Pastor of Blockhouse Bay Community Church and National Director of the Alliance Churches of New Zealand

that he was tempted by the devil, it is impossible to think that that period was not a time of intense prayer accompanying the fasting. Jesus' whole mission began with a time of concerted prayer and seeking God.

In Mark 1, when the disciples lost Jesus and eventually found Him in prayer in a solitary place, Jesus' response to their appeals to return to Capernaum was to say, "Let us go somewhere else – to the nearby villages – so I can preach there also. That is why I have come."

His time of prayer gave birth to a new phase in His mission, clearly linked to His sense of purpose in coming.

Likewise, His selection of the Twelve, a crucial part of his mission to make disciples who could carry on His ministry, was preceded by a whole night of prayer (Luke 6:12).

Jesus' readiness to complete His mission by facing His arrest and death, emerged out of yet more prayer – tortured, ardent prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane.

### **What about Paul?**

In his letters Paul frequently comments on his prayer for his readers. His mission is undergirded with prayer and is fruitful only because of prayer.

Similarly, we can recall Paul's mission being supernaturally guided as the Holy Spirit led him to certain places and situations or did not allow him to pursue some others. That sort of guidance comes out of intimacy with God.

### **What about us?**

We display a distressing confidence in our own ability if we do not follow suit and ground our mission in deep prayer. Prayer is the means of guidance whereby we discern what God is asking of us at any moment, and the source of power without which any mission will be fruitless.

Let us start nowhere other than in prayer.

## **3) Go where people are**

Where do people gather? Where can we meet them? Where can we rub shoulders and serve together? Where can we have fun together? The first word of the Great Commission is "Go". Christians need to move out of their churches and their comfort zones to be where people are. That may be challenging. It might be uncomfortable but it is part of mission. The word "mission" is derived from the Latin word meaning "to send". We are a sent people.

Jesus prayed that His followers would be in the world but not of it (John 17:14-16). Too many Christians have retreated from the world. Being in the world means mixing with the people of the world.

Going where people are is not simply geographical. It also means entering their culture: speaking their language, behaving in ways that don't cause offence, understanding their philosophies and views, identifying with their hopes and their struggles.

The gospel must be contextualised i.e. conveyed in a way appropriate for the context.

### **Was this true for Jesus?**

History's greatest act of "going where people are" was the incarnation itself.

But even besides that, Jesus kept moving around. He went to every village in Galilee as well as travelling to other regions. Why? Because He wanted to reach out to as many people as possible. With His reputation, he could have stayed in one place. Many would have willingly travelled to Him. But He could reach even more by going to them.

How many people do you imagine Jesus met in the three years of His ministry? What does that say?

He came to seek and to save the lost. Seeking meant going looking for them.

He spoke their language. He told stories from their context that they readily identified with. He mixed with all strata of society and ministered relevantly in each situation.

### **What about Paul?**

Paul, likewise, travelled around an awful lot. He had a passion for taking the gospel where it had not already been heard. When he arrived in a city, he would often go first to the synagogue. He went where he knew he could find an audience. If rejected there, he might then speak in the marketplace or a lecture hall or somewhere else that he could find people.

Perhaps the classic expression of contextualisation is Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 9:19-23. They are worth repeating for the clarity of Paul's denial of his personal preferences – his own freedom – so as to relate to various groups, and for his clear missional motivation.

*1 Cor 9:19-23      <sup>19</sup> Though I am free and belong to no one, I have made myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible. <sup>20</sup> To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law), so as to win those under the law. <sup>21</sup> To those not having the law I became like one not having the law (though I am not free from God's law but am under Christ's law), so as to win those not having the law. <sup>22</sup> To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all people so that by all possible means I might save some. <sup>23</sup> I do all this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings.*

A classic example of contextualisation is Paul's speech in the Areopagus (Acts 17:22-34) in which he referred to their many idols including one he had spotted that was inscribed "To the unknown god". He quoted from their poets. He spoke to them as Greeks and his sermons to Gentiles are markedly different from his sermons to Jews.

### **What about us?**

The people we want to reach are not in our churches. We have to go to them. Indeed, seeking to lure them to our churches with ever improved attractions is becoming less successful as the cultural gap between society and the church widens. It is us, not them, who must be willing to make the sacrifices to cross that gap.

## **4) Build relationships**

Relationships are the basis of mission. Mission happens as people interact. Mission is essentially relational.

### **Was this true for Jesus?**

Jesus was both famous and infamous for relating. He was criticised for being a friend of sinners. He attended parties and meals and weddings. He mixed with tax collectors and prostitutes. He cared for those who were otherwise rejected or overlooked. He touched lepers. He loved.

That does not mean that all relationships were built up over a long period. Some were very brief. Jesus presumably had only part of a day with Nicodemus but the whole encounter was intensely relational. It was having time for a social outcast and the expressed desire to share a meal together that made the encounter so stunning.

Even brief encounters were relational. Jesus was present. He took an interest in the person involved. He didn't heal whole crowds with a single wave of His hand. At worst, healing required people to actually

touch Jesus' clothes.

### **What about Paul?**

Paul travelled with a team. He had extended relationships with his apprentices. But he also expressed deep love for those in the various towns he visited and later wrote to. We frequently hear of his love and concern for them and his prayer for them. See for example, the very tender expressions Paul uses in his first letter to the Thessalonians.

These examples refer to Paul's relationships with his fellow Christians more than his building of relationships with non-Christians. However, in 1 Thessalonians Paul refers back to his attitude to them when he had come to their town. Again, he was very tender and caring.

We often think of Paul as being hard-nosed and driven however the Thessalonians would have known if his claims were patently untrue!

### **What about us?**

We live in an age in which we are persuaded that we do not have time for relationships. We are also part of a culture that values privacy. Community has, in many respects, broken down.

We prefer to put people through programmes than build relationships with them. Programmes are quicker and tidier. Relationships are messy and inconvenient, time consuming and sometimes deeply disappointing.

Yet Jesus modelled relating. Maybe the call of God on us is to have a lot more time for people and to open our lives up much more, allowing people into them and allowing people to see who we really are.

Being relational means many things including taking a genuine interest in the other person. Impersonal approaches to evangelism use a formulaic approach not tailored to the individual because no time has been taken to know the individual.

Taking an interest means paying attention to the person, asking "What is going on?" It will mean asking questions to discern the person's world view and needs. It means being interested in what makes them tick so as to then respond appropriately.

Recognising that the sequence is about adding aspects without stopping the previous ones, we still want to be led by the Holy Spirit – open to what He is saying about this person, discerning whether the person is open or not and whether the conversation should go any further, etc.

## **5) Demonstrate the Kingdom of God**

This is a huge topic. There are so many aspects of the Kingdom and so many ways of demonstrating them. Nevertheless, let's explore it.

My suggestion is that we let people see the Kingdom of God before we ask them to respond in faith.

The Kingdom of God exists wherever God is King. Where God is King, the values of the King are exhibited by His subjects and the power of the King is visible.

We could list many characteristics of the Kingdom: community, compassion, justice, power, freedom, mercy, fellowship, worship, righteousness... Each characteristic of the kingdom is the reflection of an aspect of the character of the King. So, when people see the Kingdom of God they begin to see the King.

Disciples, as individuals and as a community are called to manifest the Kingdom – to be an outpost of the Kingdom of God, reflecting the character and values of the King and providing a graphic alternative to the world. That might be done through a vast array of behaviours: personal integrity, gentleness,

thoughtfulness, praying for someone who is sick and seeing God answer that prayer, casting out demons, befriending, being a servant and so much more.

The point is that we manifest a different way of life and a different set of values and that we invite people to see these manifestations of God Himself – His love, His power, His righteousness and His truth.

The characteristics of the Kingdom might be classified broadly under the following headings:

- Worship – putting God above everything else and whole-heartedly relating to Him, praising Him,, serving Him...
- Character – Christ-likeness – love, integrity, grace, mercy, humility, focus, passion, patience...
- Demeanour – peace, joy, serenity,...
- Compassion – heartfelt concern and action for the poor, the disadvantaged, the suffering
- Community – loving one another, sharing, caring, loyalty, nurturing growth, worshipping, rejoicing, having fun...
- Service – selflessly meeting other people’s needs
- Power – miraculous demonstrations of God’s power, healing, answered prayer, spiritual gifts, authority...
- Obedience

### **Was this true of Jesus?**

Jesus’ early mission strategy was “Come and see” (see John 1:39. Note also John 1:41-42; 46; 50).

Jesus told the disciples that the Kingdom was present among them, and He repeatedly demonstrated the Kingdom. He healed the sick, cast out demons, forgave sin, befriended, was merciful, performed miracles, extended hospitality...

When John the Baptist’s disciple came asking Jesus if He was the Messiah or should they expect someone else, Jesus’ response was “What do you see? The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised and the good news is proclaimed to the poor.”

The presence of the power and the love of God were evidence of the Kingdom. Jesus invited people to see the evidence then make their decision about Him.

In His own person and character and way of life as well as in His ministry, Jesus unceasingly demonstrated the Kingdom of God.

### **What about the early church?**

Clearly the very early church was a dramatic demonstration of a different type of society. The descriptions of its life in Acts 2:42-47 and Acts 4:32-37 are bursting with Kingdom-ness: truth (the apostle’s teaching), fellowship, sharing of possessions, prayer, signs and wonders, devotion, joy, worship together, meals together, growth, unity, and more.

The Kingdom was present in the church and it was attractive to many (although, of course, not all.) People were saved and added to their number daily.

The account of Ananias and Sapphira in Acts 5 illustrates the manifestation of the love of God (through the communal sharing of possessions and the selflessness of the better off) but also the righteousness of God (in judging deceit) and the power of God. Again, it had missional impact in inducing the fear of God in the believers (i.e. it was part of their maturing) (v.11) and more and more people believed in the Lord (v.14).

### **What about Paul?**

In Paul’s lifestyle and ministry we see a similar pattern. Indeed, he could refer back to his lifestyle amongst, for example, the Thessalonians (in 1 Thessalonians 2), identifying the power of God working through him,

his non-use of flattery and willingness to forego their financial support, his care for them, his sharing of his life with them, and his hard work. He had already reminded them that the gospel had come among them not just with words but with power, with the Holy Spirit and with deep conviction. He goes on to say, “You are witnesses and so is God, of how holy, righteous and blameless we were among you who believed. For you know that we dealt with each of you as a father deals with his children, encouraging, comforting and urging you to live lives worthy of God, who calls you into His kingdom and glory.” (1 Thess 2:10-12).

All of these things were a visible demonstration of the Kingdom of God about which Paul could say, “You saw these things.”

We might note just a passing reference such as “So Paul and Barnabas spent considerable time there (in Iconium) speaking boldly for the Lord who confirmed the message of His grace by enabling them to perform signs and wonders” (Acts 14:3.)

### **What about us?**

All of the ethical imperatives in the gospels and the epistles are reflections of the Kingdom of God and they have missional force. Jesus said that it would be by our love for one another that people would know that we are His disciples.

We are urged to live such good lives among pagans that they may see our good deeds and glorify God on the day He visits us (1 Peter 2:12).

Peter, of course, reflects Jesus’ words that we are to let our light shine before people, that they may see our good deeds and glorify our Father in heaven (Matthew 5:16).

Paul talks about an unbeliever coming into worship, being convicted by prophecy and declaring “God is really among you!” (1 Cor 14:24-25).

That is the point – actions that demonstrate the presence of God.

Do we need to ponder this? Are we called to demonstrate the presence of God as part of our mission? If so, how are we currently doing that and how could we do it even more powerfully? It is not a question of inviting people to see our church but to see the Kingdom of God (and, therefore, God Himself.)

### **A wee qualification**

Building relationships and demonstrating the Kingdom can happen in the other order. It might be a demonstration of the Kingdom that initiates the relationship. Sometimes the Kingdom is demonstrated *by* befriending.

## **6) Talk about Jesus**

St Francis of Assisi is supposed to have said, “Preach the gospel at all times and if necessary use words.” Actually he probably never said it nor believed it.

The value of the quote is to remind us that we are to demonstrate our faith at all times via our lifestyle. That was the point of the previous section.

The danger of the quote is that it suggests we often don’t need to say anything. In fact, all of the gospel words in the New Testament suggest verbal proclamation.

Paul asks, “How can they believe unless they hear?” (Romans 10:14) and Peter urges us to always be ready to give an answer to the person who asks about the hope we have (1 Peter 3:15).

While our actions may demonstrate that we belong to a different kingdom, we still need to tell people

about the King and to tell them that the way into this Kingdom is through Jesus. If our lifestyle raises questions for people or creates a yearning in them, we need to then answer those questions or provide the satisfaction of that yearning. We simply have to talk about Jesus; about His earthly life, who He is and what He has done; about our experience of Him, and about how others can also know Him.

The Acts 1:8 version of the Great Commission says, “You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you and you will be my witnesses...” A crucial part of our mission is to bear witness to Jesus.

Our task is not so much to present a system, or a process, for finding salvation but to introduce people to the Saviour.

### **Was this true of Jesus?**

Jesus frequently invited people to follow Him. In other words, after they had seen His love, or His power, or heard His authority, they were asked to make a decision about their allegiance to Him.

Even when those words were not used, Jesus’ demonstration of the Kingdom inevitably led to questions such as: Who is this man? Why did He heal me? What should be my response to Him?

Jesus’ miracles (indeed, every aspect of His ministry) bore witness to Him. It was simply impossible to separate the demonstration of the Kingdom from the questions it raised about Him.

### **What about the early church and Paul?**

When the actions of the believers raise the question, “What is going on here?” they were quick to point immediately to Jesus. On the Day of Pentecost, Peter preached about Jesus (Acts 2). When the lame man was healed at the temple (Acts 3) and a crowd gathered, Peter and John were quick to state that the healing had not been achieved by their power and they immediately preached Jesus.

Paul said, “Jews demand signs and Greeks look for wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified... Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God” (1 Cor 1:22-24) and “We proclaim Him...” (Colossians 1:28)

### **What about us?**

We generally think of evangelism as the verbal proclamation of Jesus and many of us are terrified of it. We might try to avoid this step. My suggestion is that it is integral to the whole process – in fact, the lynch pin of the whole process.

### ***A major question for us***

A major question arises though: Why do we find it so hard to move from step 5 to step 6? Many churches and individuals are happy to demonstrate the Kingdom in some way but find it hard to talk about the King. We have all manner of community ministries and some do include a desire to share the gospel. Some, however, might even philosophically oppose any evangelism. Even those that believe in evangelism find it difficult taking the next step.

Why is that when, in Jesus’ ministry, it happened very naturally. His ministry gave rise to questions about His identity and people’s response to Him. There was virtually no gap between the demonstrations of the Kingdom and the identity of the King. But, for us, there is often a huge gap. Why the difference?

I suggest there is not enough King in our Kingdom. Therefore, there is not the same integral link between the two. We run opportunity shops and counselling services and street parties but there is often nothing of Jesus in them. They could be run just as well (or maybe, better) by any secular organisation.

People do not encounter Jesus. It is no surprise then if they do not immediately have questions about Jesus. When our events are indistinguishable from secular events, we might need to question if we can really call them demonstrations of the Kingdom. Are we fooling ourselves but no one else?

## 7) Identify those who are open and seek a response of faith and repentance

I have listed this step separately from the previous one simply to draw attention to it. While we might say that seeking a response is simply part of proclaiming Jesus, we actually need to do it. Bearing witness to Jesus without encouraging the other person to respond and enter a faith relationship with Him, is doing only half the job and leaving the person dangling – told about the food that will satisfy his hunger but not offered any.

The second greatest act of love is to offer salvation through Jesus Christ. (The first is identified in John 15:13)

Faith is, of course, the fundamental response required. We are saved by faith. As John 3:16 says, it is those who believe in Him who have eternal life. But faith must always be accompanied by repentance. Jesus' message is frequently summarised as including the call to repentance and faith (e.g. Mark 1:15). It is an insipid "Christianity" that offers people blessings without calling them to repent. It is an altogether different "gospel" than the biblical gospel.

Following Jesus requires a change of direction which means turning away from our old direction. That is repentance. We cannot say we are following Jesus if we simply keep going the way we were before. Mission is not about getting more people to church without them also coming to Christ. The objective at this point is conversion – being born again by the Spirit of God. That requires faith and repentance.

Why specify "identify those who are open"?

Jesus told the disciples to look for "people of peace". We will consider this more fully under the next heading.

### **Was this true of Jesus, the early church and Paul?**

We don't need to spend much time on this. Jesus' message is summarised as "Repent for the Kingdom of Heaven has come near." (Matthew 4:17). Repentance was, and is, the necessary response and Jesus urged that response.

He regularly called people to follow Him. Following requires faith. They would not have left everything else to follow Him if they had not trusted Him.

Similarly, on the Day of Pentecost and in Paul's later preaching. The apostles loved people enough to urge them to respond and to find life in Jesus.

Although conviction is a work of the Holy Spirit, there is a place for persuasion. It may be the evangelist's appeal that the Holy Spirit uses to bring the person to conviction. However, we also need to know that it is not the words themselves. Perfectly crafted words may fall flat, while God uses some stuttering, inept presentation powerfully. In Thessalonica, Paul's approach was to reason from the scriptures "explaining and proving". Some believed and Paul later wrote how the gospel had not come simply with words but with power, with the Holy Spirit and deep conviction. But others in Thessalonica were not persuaded.

### ***People of peace***

Recent missions thinking has given a lot of attention to the concept of the person of peace. We have accounts of Jesus instructing the apostles (Matthew 10) and the 72 (Luke 10) before sending them out on mission trips. These chapters are worthy of our study as we seek to understand our mission.

The Twelve were to preach this message: "The kingdom of heaven is near". They were also to heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those who had leprosy and drive out demons. Then they were to search for a worthy person and stay in his house. Where they were not welcomed, they were to shake the dust off their feet and move on.

A key piece of Jesus' advice to the 72 was also to discern the open person (in Luke 10 called "a man of peace"). Where they were welcomed, they were to stay. However, where they were not welcomed, they were to shake the dust off their feet and move on. This is mentioned after the instructions to heal the sick and proclaim that the Kingdom of God was near the people. Many times it might be the demonstration of the Kingdom and the proclamation of the presence of the Kingdom that prompts people to reveal whether or not they are open.

Christians often feel that they are asked to persuade resistant people. It is a relief to realise that we are called to be bold in proclaiming Jesus but we are to then look for those who respond positively and work with them. We are not required to invest our time into people who are not ready.

Paul routinely went to the synagogue when he first arrived in a new town. He would first give Jews an opportunity to hear about Jesus, and some responded positively. Quite often though, it was when he was rejected there that he turned to the Gentiles. Where the message was rejected, he moved on (despite his love for his own people.)

## 8) Incorporate into community

This may have happened already. Indeed the demonstration of the Kingdom might have included involving a person in Christian community. It is frequently said that people need to feel they belong before being asked to believe and behave.

If it hasn't already happened (or if the community life is not appropriate for now nurturing this person's faith) incorporating is crucial.

Those who come to faith and are baptised, are baptised into the church. But they are only spiritual babies. They need other Christians around them to care for them and cultivate their growth. God has designed us for community and community is the best environment for maturation.

The Bible knows nothing of individual, lone-ranger Christians. Believers in Jesus are part of a body, needing the other members of that body all of whom are honoured. (The "corp" in "incorporate" of course, means "body". It is about making people a part of the body.)

### Was it true of Jesus?

The most obvious "converts" were the Twelve. Jesus incorporated them into a tight community.

It would appear that there was a bigger circle as well – the 72. While we hear nothing of them other than that Jesus sent them out in mission, it would appear that they were, to some extent, a distinct, identifiable community.

Other people impacted by Jesus do not appear to have been incorporated into community. Legion wanted to travel with Jesus but was sent back to his own town. The Samaritan woman went back to her town and presumably stayed there although by this stage there were many believers in Sychar and so they would have formed community (John 4). Where there is no mention of what happened to others, we cannot say whether or not they became part of a believing community.

We can say that, with the disciples at least, Jesus modelled gathering them into community for their further training.

### Was it true of the early church?

The clearest single quality that rings through the summary description of the very early church after Pentecost (in Acts 2:42-47 and 4:32-35) is "togetherness" or "fellowship". They were devoted to the fellowship. They broke bread together; they were together and had everything in common; they shared

their possessions; they met together in the temple courts; they broke bread in their homes and ate together.

Throughout the book of Acts, communities are very apparent – the church in Jerusalem, the church in Antioch, the various churches established all over the region.

### **Was it true of Paul?**

In much the same way that Jesus had created a community of disciples, Paul also built a team who travelled with him and ministered with him.

Wherever there were converts, Paul established a church often with identified elders. He nurtured community through his letter writing and those letters were written, most often, to the church in a particular city mentioning the churches that met in people's homes.

### **What about us?**

It is probably assumed by many that Christians should become part of the church. The real question perhaps is how much our churches are communities where there is corporate worship, study, sharing of possessions etc to a level approaching that demonstrated in the New Testament. Equally, it must be asked if our churches are intentional about growing new members to maturity. More often the expectation is simply that people will attend reasonably regularly.

## **9) Mentor to maturity in the context of mission**

This again is a huge topic which requires much fuller explanation. Suffice to say that we have been commissioned not to make converts but to make disciples (Matthew 28:16-20). Disciples are defined in a number of places but, in Matthew's version of the Great Commission, Jesus describes disciples as those who obey everything He has commanded. Clearly, this speaks of a radically transformed life and of living in a way that is, by definition, Christ-like.

Why specify that this mentoring must happen in the context of mission? Simply because that is what we see modelled by Jesus and Paul and others in the New Testament. Small groups have huge potential but might be isolated from the realities of mission. It is in the mission context that Christians are faced with realities that make them conscious of their need for God. It is there that they can begin to exercise their own mission but under the caring tutelage of older believers who can model and instruct.

### **Was it true of Jesus?**

Jesus invested massive time into the Twelve in order to train them to the point where He could commission them to repeat the process. Growing these men was perhaps the highest priority in Jesus' ministry prior to going to the cross.

### **What about Paul?**

Paul said that he focused all of his (God-given) energy on one thing: proclaiming Jesus so as to present everyone "fully mature in Christ" (Colossians 1:28-29).

### **What about us?**

Do we have that same focused intention?

Do we take our training into the context of mission?

## **10) Commission to repeat the process**

Jesus made disciples then commissioned them to make disciples. If disciples obey everything Jesus commanded, then that includes this command to make disciples. Disciples are to become disciple-makers.

Again, this is a topic for another time. The point here is that the missionary sequence must not stop before

the next generation of missionaries is commissioned.

Jesus did it.

Paul famously told Timothy to entrust what he had heard from Paul to reliable people who would then teach yet another generation (2 Timothy 2:2). There are four generations in that verse, with the obvious intention that each generation passes these things on to the next. In that way the mission sequence repeats and the Kingdom expands.

We need to make disciples who make disciples and we need to intentionally commission them to do that. God's model is multiplication. It is only as each generation continues the mission that multiplication happens.

The effectiveness of our parenting is seen in our grandchildren. In other words, that is where we see whether or not we produced children who know how to raise children. Likewise, the effectiveness of our mission is seen in whether or not our disciples know how to make disciples.

## Fragmented mission

Many people and churches are willing to go as far as step five (i.e. demonstrating the Kingdom of God) but no further. They are willing to be involved in caring ministries demonstrating the love of God but may be very reluctant to bear witness to Jesus.

Whole mission organisations and denominations will talk in terms of compassion and justice and being prophetic but will be dismissive of evangelism. Churches will rejoice in having various community groups use their buildings feeling that they are thereby serving the community. But there is no witness to Jesus. Is that actually Christian mission?

Does that mean that caring for people is simply a step towards evangelising them? Doesn't that suggest manipulative ulterior motives and that the love is not genuine?

Absolutely not! We care for people because we love them and because they are in need. It is what Jesus wants us to do. It simply means we don't stop there. We love people too much for that. Caring for people's physical and emotional needs without also offering eternal salvation is simply not enough and shows a very truncated love.

Does this not mean that caring is simply a means to an end?

In one way, yes. The demonstration of the Kingdom is designed to make it appealing to others so that they want to be part of it. Often the door to evangelism is opened by the fact that we have served selflessly and people see our genuineness; or because we prayed and people experienced God for themselves.

Demonstrating the Kingdom is a means to an end. John calls Jesus' miracles "signs". They are designed to show people something or to point them in a particular direction, so that they might take a further step of faith. The signs were not an end in themselves.

But in another way, no. Firstly, we will care for people even if they don't respond. We are called to love our neighbours. Love means we want them to know the eternal, abundant life in Jesus but we will love them even if they reject that.

Secondly, we do not stop caring when someone becomes a Christian. We continue to love because that is an aspect of the Kingdom of God. Furthermore, we continue to love because that helps Christians know how to live as citizens of the Kingdom.

The main point is that demonstrating the Kingdom is not an end in itself. We always want more for people than that they got a glimpse of God. We want them to become God's children. Mission involves the demonstration of the Kingdom *and* bearing witness to Jesus.

If some want to stop at step five, other people and churches want to jump in at step six and immediately talk about Jesus, without having taken the time to build a relationship and without having demonstrated the Kingdom in any way.

We can all be guilty of not birthing the whole process in prayer. Again, we might ask if it is Christian mission if it is not prayed through.

Even those who are enthusiastic about evangelism can fail to move on to step 8 (making mature disciples).

In other words, we tend to break mission up and choose to do only bits of it.

Fragmented mission is surely inadequate mission because it is not what God has in mind. My suggestion is that mission is a seamless integration of all of the steps rather than a splintering of them. I suggest that what is modelled for us in the scriptures is the integrated, holistic mission and that we can use that framework to re-think our own mission.



Indeed, I would suggest that each step is simply to be added to the previous one. We don't stop praying when we start building relationships. The prayer continues throughout. We don't stop developing relationships when we start demonstrating the Kingdom. We continue to relate but add in the demonstration of the Kingdom, and so on. As already mentioned, we continue to demonstrate the Kingdom through our lives after the other person has come to faith – simply because we are called to live as citizens of the Kingdom consistently. We don't stop doing that. But also because our modelling of Kingdom living is crucial to mentoring them to maturity. Likewise, we mentor people to maturity by a continuing to bear witness to Jesus – His teaching, His commands, His lifestyle.

## Another Story

The Motueka Baptist Church has a team of “Saturday Servants” – young people who on some Saturdays go out to serve in the community. The leadership has impressed on the team that their purpose in serving is simply to build relationships. It is not evangelistic. It is to build relationships.

On one occasion the team was asked to help tidy up a house and property in preparation for an open home later that same day. The property was not in good shape. Nevertheless, the team did what it could and certainly made a difference.

Later, as they ate lunch together, someone suggested they should pray for the sale of that house. It wasn't in good condition and the property market was weak. The chances of a sale were small. However, they prayed and, that day, the house sold.

Some time later, a similar situation presented itself. Again the chances of a sale were small. However, this time the team was able to ask the owner if he/she would like them to pray for a sale. They were able to say they had a pretty good track record in this area! The owner agreed and again the house sold.

I forget the exact details but one of those families started attending the church and in the week after I heard the story some family members were to be baptised.

## For reflection

- 1) What are the strengths and weakness of this suggested “mission sequence”?
- 2) To what extent does it reflect biblical mission?
- 3) Starting at Step 1, consider how present each step is in your mission or your church's mission and what could be done to strengthen it. Don't move on until the first steps are strong.
- 4) What are the characteristics of the Kingdom of God? Make a list.
  - a. If it helps, group the characteristics under the headings:
    - i. the love of God,
    - ii. the power of God,
    - iii. the righteousness of God and
    - iv. the truth of God
  - b. Or you might try using the headings:
    - i. Worship
    - ii. Character
    - iii. Community
    - iv. Compassion
    - v. Service
    - vi. Power
    - vii. Obedience
  - c. How is God asking you to manifest those characteristics in your life? In your small group? In your church?

I would value your reflections and comments. On the followers website there is a page describing the mission sequence ( <http://followers.org.nz/disciple-making/disciple-making/how-to-make-disciples/the-mission-sequence/>) Please make comments there or [email me](#).

[Peter Cheyne](#).

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