

The
Five
HABITS
of Highly
Missional
PEOPLE

Taking the BELLS Challenge
to Fulfill the Mission of God

By
Michael Frost

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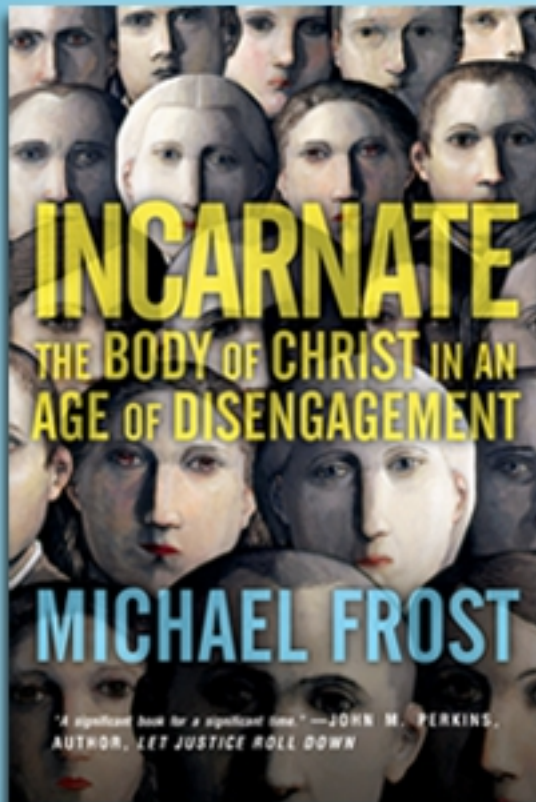
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Introduction

I really didn't set out to create an international movement. When I came up with the BELLS model, I thought it was just a simple idea our church could adopt to foster missional habits in our lives. I had no idea that churches right across the world—the United States, Canada, the UK, New Zealand and goodness knows where else—would embrace it. But now, it seems everywhere I go I meet folks who tell me they are living out these five simple habits in an attempt to better fulfill the mission of God.

I partly blame my good friend, Alan Hirsch. He regularly mentions BELLS in his lectures and seminars as an example of one of the ways churches can encourage missional living within their members. Although I have outlined the model in a couple of my earlier books, I have tended to be more coy about BELLS, preferring to encourage churches to create their own homegrown approach to missional living rather than expecting them to simply adopt our model.

But when the guys at Exponential asked me to write a manual on how to do BELLS, I figured it was time to abandon my diffidence and go ahead and fly the flag. I guess people have embraced it so quickly because it's such a simple, easy-to-adopt set of habits that does unleash essential missional values like engagement with neighbors, connection with each other, a deeper experience of God's leading, a stronger understanding of the Gospel, and a framework for identifying ourselves as missionaries.

I'm not suggesting that BELLS is a magic bullet or anything like that. But it is a really handy tool for mobilizing Christians up, in and out into mission. That is, *up* into deeper connection with the Triune God; *in* to a stronger sense of community with other believers; and *out* into the neighborhood.

The fact is we all recognize the need to live generous, hospitable, Spirit-led, Christlike lives as missionaries to our own neighborhoods. We want to live our faith out in the open for all to see.

Unfortunately, some of us grew up in churches that expected something less from us. For a

start, we were often told we are all evangelists and we were expected to memorize prefabricated Gospel presentations and to go forth and share that presentation with anyone who would listen. For a lot of us, this was a mortifying prospect. For a variety of reasons (temperament, lack of knowledge, lack of relationship), we felt inadequate and ended up feeling guilty about our lack of evangelistic zeal. Often, those who were confident enough to do it were so obnoxious in their approach they turned unbelievers away in droves.

Even when we felt released from the burden of having to be gung-ho evangelists, we still got the impression all we had to do was to befriend our neighbors and colleagues and invite them to church to hear the preaching of the Word.

I have no doubt that some people have become Christians by being buttonholed by a wild-eyed evangelist with a tract, or by being invited to church by a Christian neighbor. But I think both approaches are unfair to us. The former places too high a set of expectations on us—after all, not everyone is a gifted evangelist. But the latter reduces us to church marketers whose primary role is to advertise the church’s benefits.

Surely, there is a way we can see the church as “an army of ordinary people”¹ sent out to announce and demonstrate the reign of God through Christ without expecting us to be something we’re not, or something less than we should be.

That’s where BELLS comes in. I believe the key is to equip believers to see themselves as “sent ones” and to foster a series of missional habits that shape our lives and values and propel us into the world confidently and filled with hope. These are the five habits of highly missional people.

I must also acknowledge the efforts of Lynne Stringer and Judson Taylor in proofreading the text of this book. Their quick and efficient work saved me from great embarrassment.

Michael Frost,

Sydney, Australia

¹

Living “Questionable” Lives

Before we get to the five habits themselves, allow me to sketch the background. Evangelistic mission works effectively when we are living generous, hospitable, Spirit-led, Christlike lives as missionaries to our own neighborhoods. It also works when the gifted evangelists in our midst join us in sharing Christ with our neighbors. That’s not just good evangelism strategy. That’s the biblical model.

A Two-Fold Approach to Evangelism

Contrary to the myth that every believer is an evangelist, Paul assumes a two-fold approach when it comes to the ministry of evangelism. First, he affirms the gifting of the evangelist (interestingly, not the gift of evangelism, but that the evangelist herself is the gift). And second, he writes as though all believers are to be evangelistic in their general orientation.

He clearly places himself in the first category, seeing his ministry not only as apostolic, but also as an evangelist. But it doesn’t appear that he believes all Christians bear the responsibility for the kind of bold proclamation to which he is called. Note his description of this two-fold approach in his letter to the Colossians:

Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful. And pray for us, too, that God may open a door for our message, so that we may proclaim the mystery of Christ, for which I am in chains. Pray that I may proclaim it clearly, as I should. Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity. Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone (Col. 4:2-6).

For evangelists, Paul asks for opportunities to share Christ and for the courage to proclaim the Gospel clearly (verses 3-4). But he doesn’t suggest the Colossians pray as much for themselves. Rather, the evangelistic believer is to pray for the evangelists’ ministry, to be wise in their conduct toward outsiders and to look for opportunities to answer outsiders’ questions when they arise (verses 2, 5-6). When it comes to the spoken aspect of their ministries, evangelists are to proclaim and believers are to give answers. This two-fold approach can be summarized this way:

Type of Minister	Priorities	Type of Spoken Ministry
Gifted Evangelists	Clarity in the Gospel; looking for opportunities	Bold proclamation
Evangelistic Believers	Prayer; watchfulness; wise socializing;	Gracious answers

I think Paul assumed that the number of gifted evangelists wouldn't be great. It seems clear that he thinks the gifted evangelists can be local (like Timothy – see 2 Tim. 4:5) or trans-local (like himself). He seems also to assume that some gifted evangelists would occupy a leadership function in local churches (see Eph. 4:11), building up the church to be increasingly evangelistic. While it is an essential gifting for all churches, it isn't a gifting given to every believer. Rather, the believers' function, as noted, was to pray like crazy and to conduct themselves, in word and deed, in such a way as to provoke unbelievers to question their beliefs and enter into an evangelistic dialogue. Peter is in agreement with Paul when he writes:

Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect, keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander (1 Pet. 3:15-16).

In other words, the biblical model is for leaders to (1) identify, equip and mobilize gifted evangelists (with gifted evangelistic leaders taking the primary responsibility), and (2) inspire all believers to live *questionable lives*. If all believers are leading the kind of lives that evoke questions from their friends, then opportunities for faith sharing abound and chances for the gifted evangelists to boldly proclaim are increased.

Taking Over the Empire

This two-fold approach was so effective it literally transformed the Roman Empire. With evangelists and apologists such as Peter and Paul proclaiming the Gospel and defending its integrity in an era of polytheism and pagan superstition, literally hundreds of thousands of ordinary believers were infiltrating every aspect of society and living the kind of questionable lives that evoked curiosity in the Christian message.

They devoted themselves to sacrificial acts of kindness. They loved their enemies and forgave their persecutors. They cared for the poor and fed the hungry. In the brutality of life

under Roman rule, they were the most stunningly different people anyone had ever seen. Indeed, their influence was so surprising that even the fourth-century Emperor Julian (AD 331-363) feared that they might take over the empire. Referring to Christians as “atheists” because they denied the existence of pagan gods, and believing their religion to be a sickness, he penned this directive to his officials:

We must pay special attention to this point, and by this means affect a cure [for the “sickness” of Christianity]. For when it came about that the poor were neglected and overlooked by the [pagan] priests, then I think the impious Galileans [Christians] observed this fact and devoted themselves to philanthropy. And they have gained ascendancy in the worst of the deeds through the credit they win for such practices. For just as those who entice children with a cake, and by throwing it to them two or three times induce them to follow them, and then, when they are far away from their friends cast them on board a ship and sell them as slaves ... by the same method, I say, the Galileans also begin with their so-called love-feast, or hospitality, or service of tables—for they have many ways of carrying it out and hence call it by many names—and the result is that they have led very many into atheism [i.e. Christianity].²

Julian was concerned that the Christians’ acts of hospitality and philanthropy were winning too many of his subjects. He decided to launch an offensive against them by mobilizing his officials and the pagan priesthood to *out-love* the Christians. He decreed that a system of food distribution be started and that hostels be built for poor travelers. He wrote:

“Why do we not observe that it is their benevolence to strangers, their care for the graves of the dead and the pretended holiness of their lives that have done most to increase atheism? I believe that we ought really and truly to practice every one of those virtues ... For it is disgraceful that when the impious Galileans support not only their own poor but ours as well, all men see that our people lack aid from us.”³

Perhaps not surprisingly, Julian’s new social program utterly failed. He couldn’t motivate pagan priests or Roman officials to care that much for the poor. He failed to realize that the Christians were filled with the Holy Spirit of love and motivated by his grace. The message they shared—that God loved the world—was patently absurd to the average Roman. The pagan gods cared nothing for humankind. And yet in the miserable world of the Roman

²

³

Empire, the Christians not only proclaimed the mercy of God, they demonstrated it. They not only fed the poor, they welcomed all comers regardless of their ethnicity. They promoted liberating social relations between the sexes and within families. The nobleman embraced the slave. They were literally the most surprising alternative society, and their conduct raised an insatiable curiosity among the average Roman. You can see how the proclamation of the gifted evangelists would have been far more effective among a society of people living such questionable lives.

I think this is what Paul referred to as “adorning” the Gospel, or in more contemporary language, making the Gospel attractive. He uses this phrase in Titus 2, when exhorting Titus to teach sound doctrine:

You, however, must teach what is appropriate to sound doctrine. Teach the older men to be temperate, worthy of respect, self-controlled, and sound in faith, in love and in endurance. Likewise, teach the older women to be reverent in the way they live, not to be slanderers or addicted too much wine, but to teach what is good. Then they can urge the younger women to love their husbands and children, to be self-controlled and pure, to be busy at home, to be kind, and to be subject to their husbands, so that no one will malign the Word of God.

Similarly, encourage the young men to be self-controlled. In everything set them an example by doing what is good. In your teaching show integrity, seriousness and soundness of speech that cannot be condemned, so that those who oppose you may be ashamed because they have nothing bad to say about us.

Teach slaves to be subject to their masters in everything, to try to please them, not to talk back to them, and not to steal from them, but to show that they can be fully trusted, so that in every way they will make the teaching about God our Savior attractive.

Note the way he concludes that list of rules (verse 10). He tells Titus to teach his congregation of slaves and free, young and old, to conduct themselves in this manner not to win God’s mercy—that mercy is offered freely in God our Savior. Instead, Paul insists that Christians live this way to “make the teaching of the church attractive.”

Nothing would be more questionable in the first century than a slave who loved his master, or a self-controlled young man, or an old woman who didn’t engage in slander. In other words, this was Paul’s recipe for a questionable life in his time. Our challenge is to find what similarly questionable lives look like in the 21st century.

What Kind of Life Will Evoke Questions?

There's an old communication theory that goes: When predictability is high, impact is low. In other words, when the audience thinks they know what you're going to say, and you go ahead and say it, your words makes very little impact. On the other hand, when an audience is surprised or intrigued, they will think long and hard about what they've heard.

The same goes for Christian outreach. Remember that one of the primary acts of the evangelistic believer is the arousal of curiosity among unbelievers leading to questions and faith sharing. Acts of philanthropy and hospitality by Christians today are not unheard of, but neither are they unexpected. If we hear a Christian businessman donated money to a cause, or that a church has opened a feeding program or a hospice, we aren't intrigued. It is expected. I'm not suggesting Christian philanthropy shouldn't continue as an expression of the grace offered to us in Christ, but it doesn't evoke questions the way it might have in the fourth century.

Neither does living a fine upstanding middle-class lifestyle in the suburbs. Again, I'm not saying we shouldn't live our lives this way, but if we're trying to live questionable lives, then cutting the lawn, saying hi to the neighbors, washing our car, walking the dog and driving to the office every day is hardly an intriguing lifestyle. We need the impetus to propel us *outward*, into the lives of our neighbors, but also *upward*, into deeper intimacy with Jesus. We need to become a godly, intriguing, socially adventurous, joyous presence in the lives of others. I think the five habits will do exactly that for you.

A New Set of Habits

Missional is a habit! And the five habits I'm about to unpack will help to reinforce your missional lifestyle, a lifestyle that will evoke questions from unbelievers. The links between our spirituality and our action are far greater than many believe. In fact, Jesus and the New Testament writers saw a much more powerful integration of faith and action, so much so they found it impossible to separate them. In fact, to separate the person from their actions can be very dangerous. The Apostle James says, "Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by my deeds" (James 2:18).

It is far more biblical to see action as a powerful expression of the person who makes that action. Indeed, Swiss psychiatrist Carl Jung once said, "You are what you do, not what you say you'll do."

Whereas we often see our faith being exhibited in action, there's also a strong case to be made for suggesting it can flow in the other direction, too. That is, our actions can shape our faith.

As Aristotle said, "We are what we repeatedly do. Excellence, then, is not an act, but a habit."

Transfer that idea to faith. Faith, then, is not an act, a single choice, or even just a belief system; it is a habit.

French philosopher Pierre Bourdieu referred to this as *habitus*. In his view, society at large develops a complex series of socialized norms or tendencies that guide the behavior and thinking of its members. In other words, the practices and actions that a society endorses in turn shape the way members of that society think. Habitus is the way society helps people to think, feel and act in determinant ways, which then guide them.

For example, the majority of Americans would have the view that getting married, building a career, buying a house, and raising a family are important and desirable milestones. These are examples of an American habitus. They are desirable practices (or habits, if you will), which in turn reinforce a belief system that values monogamy, home ownership, professionalism,

consumerism and reproduction. Of course, not every single American values these things or desires these practices. And plenty of those who do value these things don't necessarily live them out perfectly. But they are expected societal practices that in turn shape core American values. In this sense, habitus is created and reproduced unconsciously, without any deliberate pursuit of coherence.

My point is that just as desired societal habits shape that society's values, so can an individual's personal habits shape their values. In fact, I think this is a much overlooked aspect of discipleship. We need to be fostering a set of habits among Christians that will in turn shape their values and beliefs. That's what BELLS is.

There was once a time when Christians saw a daily "quiet time" as an essential habit for nurturing their faith. Today, it seems to have gone by the wayside, but at its best it was a daily rhythm that fostered a love for the Bible and prayer. Try to imagine how the "quiet time" came to be so essential to our parents and grandparents. No doubt, Bible study and prayer have always been an important value to Christians, but over time this became shaped into a daily routine that included the reading of short sections of Scripture, a brief reflection on its meaning, followed by prayers for needs and concerns. Soon, Christian agencies produced booklets aimed at facilitating this endeavor. Over time, church leaders didn't so much need to promote Bible reading and prayer per se. Instead they promoted the importance of having a daily "quiet time," and they distributed the booklets and tools to facilitate it. The habit took effect. And the habit deepened the value it was created to foster.

This leads me back to my earlier question about what we could do that would so surprise our friends that they would question our motivations and provide us opportunities to talk about Jesus with them. I think the answer has something to do with the kind of missional habits we inculcate within our churches.

Missional Habits

Sometimes called missional rhythms or missional practices, missional habits are those habits we foster in our lives that in turn shape our missional outlook. By *missional*, I mean all that we do and say that alerts others to the reign of God.

The South African missiologist David Bosch wrote, "Mission is more and different from recruitment to our brand of religion; it is the alerting of people to the universal reign of God

through Christ.” In other words, mission derives from the reign of God. In that respect, the ideas of mission and Kingdom are irrevocably linked. Mission is both the announcement and the demonstration of the reign of God through Christ. Mission is not primarily concerned with church growth. It is primarily concerned with the reign and rule of the Triune God. If the church grows as a result, so be it.

Those of us who are not gifted evangelists need to foster habits in our lives that draw us out into the lives of unbelievers and invite the kinds of questions that lead to evangelistic sharing. If our only habits are going to church and attending meetings, it’s not going to connect us with unbelievers nor invite their curiosity about our faith.

The trick is to develop habits that unite us together as believers, while also propelling us into the lives of others. We also need habitual practices that don’t just deplete our energy and burn us out, but which re-energize us, replenishing our reserves and connecting us more deeply to Jesus. I have seen the following habits do just that. The five habits of highly missional people are:

<i>BLESS</i>	I will bless three people this week, at least one of whom is not a member of our church.
<i>EAT</i>	I will eat with three people this week, at least one of whom is not a member of our church.
<i>LISTEN</i>	I will spend at least one period of the week listening for the Spirit’s voice.
<i>LEARN</i>	I will spend at least one period of the week learning Christ.
<i>SENT</i>	I will journal throughout the week all the ways I alerted others to the universal reign of God through Christ.

I will explain more fully what is involved in each of these BELLS habits in the following chapters, but let me make the point that each habit is designed to release a certain value in the life of the person who practices them. If you bless three people every week, you’re going to become a very generous person. If you eat with others, you’ll develop a greater capacity for hospitality. If you foster the habit of listening to the Holy Spirit, you’ll become an increasingly Spirit-led person. If you’re learning Christ, it’s fair to assume you’ll become more and more Christlike. And if you’re journaling the myriad ways you’ve been sent into your world, you’ll increasingly see yourself as a sent one, or a missionary in your own neighborhood. In other words, each habit shapes us around a particular missional value:

Bless	Generosity
Eat	Hospitality
Listen	Spirit-led
Learn	Christlike
Sent	Missionary

My point is this: If you want to be a generous, hospitable, Spirit-led, Christlike missionary, don't just try to learn those values. Foster these habits! Indeed, I'm pretty certain most churches have a mission or vision statement that says they are committed to something similar to this. I also suspect most members of churches read these and agree with them in theory but have very little idea of what exactly it means for them to live these out under the noses of those who have not yet been set free in Christ. To pastors and preachers I say, you don't have to preach these values if you're fostering the habits. The habits will in turn unleash the values naturally.

The First Habit: BLESS

I will bless three people this week—at least one of whom is not a member of our church.

The first habit I want you to consider embracing is that of blessing others. In fact, I'd like you to bless three people each week—at least one of whom is *not* a member of your church; at least one whom *is* a member of your church; and the third can be from either category.

The term *to bless* can have various meanings. Technically, it describes the act of consecrating something or someone by religious rite or word. From the Old English *bletsian*, which was in turn from the Proto-Germanic *blodison*, it originally meant “to hallow by the sprinkling of blood on pagan altars.”

When the Bible was being translated into Old English, the term was chosen to translate the Latin *benedicere* and Greek *eulogein*, both of which have the meaning “to speak well of, to praise.” Later, the meaning shifted toward “pronounce or make happy.”

Today, Christians use the word “bless” in a variety of ways. In most respects, it means to confer prosperity or happiness upon another. Even blessing someone who has just sneezed is an expression of such goodwill and a desire for continued health.

I've heard that part of etymology of the term is “to add strength to another's arm.” Therefore, to bless another is to build them up, to fill them with the encouragement for them to increase in strength and prosperity.

(Incidentally, I know Christians often talk about “blessing God” and since it's impossible for us to add strength to God's arm, it seems an odd use of the term. The reason for it, though, is that the Old English *bletsian* was also chosen to translate the Hebrew *brk*, which meant “to bend the knee, worship, praise, invoke blessings.” An entirely appropriate reference to our relationship to God.)

So, what does it mean to add strength to another's arm? Anything that relieves their burden in life. Anything that helps them breathe more easily. Anything that lifts their spirit or alleviates their distress. It can be a small thing or large. From my experience, blessing another generally

takes three different forms.

1. Words of Affirmation

This is the simplest way to bless someone. Send them a note, write them an email, text them. Send them some words of affirmation and encouragement. Let them know you've noticed something worthwhile about them. Mark Twain once said, "I can live for two months on a good compliment." I've heard it said that a word of encouragement is like oxygen to the soul. Beautiful. A word of affirmation helps our souls to breathe more easily.

Gary Chapman included words of affirmation as one of his five love languages and he describes them as verbal support to communicate love. But he goes further. He identifies the importance of empathy in blessing others with words of affirmation:

"Encouragement requires empathy and seeing the world from [another's] perspective. We must first learn what is important to [the other]. Only then can we give encouragement. With verbal encouragement, we are trying to communicate, 'I know. I care. I am with you. How can I help?' We are trying to show that we believe in him and in his abilities. We are giving credit and praise."⁴

2. Acts of Kindness

Who doesn't feel blessed when someone does them a favor or provides some kind of practical support? Cutting an old lady's lawn. Babysitting an exhausted couple's kids. Helping a neighbor move. These acts of kindness literally add strength to their arm. They lighten the recipient's load. Look for ways to perform an act of kindness in someone's life.

I have an old Alcoholics Anonymous "Just For Today" card which contains nine daily promises a recovering alcoholic is required to make as part of the program. The fifth promise is, "I will do somebody a good turn and will not get found out. If anybody knows of it, it will not count." That's nice, isn't it? I'm not suggesting you have to perform secret acts of kindness like the AA program, but it's the same principle. Exercise your soul and bless another person by doing them a good turn this week. It will not only bless your soul, but will also provide practical assistance to another and hopefully, over time, deepen your bonds with each other.

3. Gifts

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The recipient of a gift thrives on the love, thoughtfulness and effort behind the gift. A gift can show the recipient that they are known, cared for and valued. And I'm not just talking about birthday or Christmas gifts. I mean totally random gift giving. Almost everything ever written on the subject of love indicates that at the heart of love is the spirit of giving. A gift is a symbol of that thought. Gifts come in all sizes, colors and shapes. Some are expensive, and others are free. Some gifts are given for obvious reasons. A struggling single mother would appreciate a food basket, or the victim of some misfortune would value being cheered up. But some gifts are nothing more than expression that the recipient has been thought of.

And remember, as I mentioned earlier, I want you to bless at least one member of your church and one person who is not a Christian. This means the blessing ricochets around your church, as members are affirming, gifting and performing acts of kindness for each other. It also means church members are propelled outwards to bless unbelievers in these ways. Just watch how unleashing a culture of blessing—words of affirmation, acts of kindness, gift giving—binds people to each other. It has the effect of strengthening the Christian community while launching its members more deeply into the lives of outsiders.

And even more than that, the simple act of blessing can have huge evangelistic impact as well. In his book, *Discover Your Mission Now!*, Dave Ferguson recounts reading a doctoral thesis entitled “Blessers versus Converters.” The researcher had looked at two teams of short-term missionaries that visited Thailand with distinctly different missional strategies.

The team referred to as the “blessers” went with the intention of simply blessing people. They saw their mission as being to bless whoever came their way in whatever practical ways they could. On the other hand, the “converters” went with the sole intention of converting people and evangelizing everyone they encountered. Ferguson summarized the researcher's findings:

“First of all, they discovered that that the ‘blessers’ had a greater social impact than the ‘converters.’ This proved that the ‘blessers’ intention of blessing the people and the community around them resulted in tremendous amounts of ‘social betterment and social good.’ Secondly, and here is what was so surprising, they discovered that the ‘blessers’ also had almost 50 times as many conversions than the ‘converters!’ The ‘blessers’ were 50 times more successful at helping people find their way back to God!”⁵

This would surely be because of the point made earlier. When we live unexpected lives

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(which clearly includes the blessing of strangers), we find ourselves being questioned by others. Then we have the best opportunity for sharing the hope of Christ within us.

The Second Habit: EAT

I will eat with three people this week—at least one of whom is not a member of our church.

Earlier, I quoted that cranky old Emperor Julian who was peeved with the Christians in fourth-century Rome for practicing such an amazing form of hospitality that they were taking over the empire. He complained to his officials that one of the Christians' methods for "perverting" the empire was their so-called love-feast or service of tables. He appears to be uncertain of the name of their gathering because he says "... they have many ways of carrying it out and hence call it by many names."

So what was he referring to exactly? And how many different ways were there of carrying it out? Well, to begin with, it is doubtful that he was referring exclusively to the Eucharist or the practice of the Lord's Supper, although this was probably part of the original Christian love feasts. It seems that the early Christians must have focused so much of their lifestyle and ministry around the table that outside observers like Julian were confused as to the exact nature of any given meal.

Of course, we know the Corinthians were practicing a communal meal as part of their weekly habit, because Paul rebukes them for conducting it so poorly in 1 Cor. 11:17-34. He is outraged that their so-called love feast doesn't express love at all, with certain people being left out and others appearing to eat in cliques rather than as a whole body of believers. He then goes on to offer them a form of words they should use when eating the Eucharist, which indicates that the Corinthian love feast included the Lord's Supper at its heart.

Then around AD 112 Pliny the Younger, the Roman governor of Bithynia-Pontus (now in modern Turkey), wrote a letter to Emperor Trajan to ask counsel on dealing with the church. He reported that the Christians would meet "on a stated day" in the early morning to "address a form of prayer to Christ, as to a divinity." Then, later in the same day they would "reassemble, to eat in common a harmless meal."

In other documents of the time, there appear various references to the separation of the Eucharist from the love feast, as though they were seen as two very distinct gatherings. This

might be why Emperor Julian had trouble keeping track. In any case, a rhythm eventually developed where it was standard practice for the early Christians to celebrate the Eucharist in the morning and the love feast in the evening.

My point is that eating has been a central Christian practice since the beginning of our movement. And not only eating sacramentally, as in the Eucharist, but eating missionally as a way to express love to all.

The invitation to share a table is a profoundly meaningful one in every culture. I'm calling you to foster the habit of eating with three people each week. You won't need to add a great deal into your often already busy schedule. You already eat three times a day. That's 21 meals a week. I'm simply asking that you bring another person to your table for three of those. Or if you want to cut corners, you could bring three people to your table for one of them.

The meal could be an elaborate dinner party, or it could be breakfast or even just coffee and a donut. Just sit across a table from three people this week, and ... talk. The table is the great equalizer in relationships. When we eat together, we discover the inherent humanity of all people. We share stories. And hopes. And fears. And disappointments. People open up to each other. And we can open up to them to share the same things, including our faith in Jesus. As Alan Hirsch and Lance Ford say in their book, *Right Here Right Now*:

“Sharing meals together on a regular basis is one of the most sacred practices we can engage in as believers. Missional hospitality is a tremendous opportunity to extend the Kingdom of God. We can literally eat our way into the kingdom of God! If every Christian household regularly invited a stranger or a poor person into their home for a meal once a week, we would literally change the world by eating!”⁶

I agree. Of course, inviting well-mannered Christian folks into your home is easy. But what about inviting unbelievers or the poor to our table? What's more, what if they reciprocate our hospitality and invite us to their home? Would our presence at their table imply that we affirm all their values? Ben Meyer addresses this in the example of Jesus himself. After explaining that in Jesus' time a person wouldn't eat with someone of different social standing, and certainly never with someone of a different religion (i.e. Jews eating at the table of Gentiles), he tells us that Jesus turned this on its head:

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“... the act of Jesus was to reverse this structure: communion first, conversion second. His table fellowship with sinners implied no acquiescence in their sins, for the gratuity of the reign of God cancelled none of its demands. But in a world in which sinners stood ineluctably condemned, Jesus’ openness to them was irresistible. Contact triggered repentance; conversion flowered from communion. In the tense little world of ancient Palestine, where religious meanings were the warp and woof of the social order, this was a potent phenomenon.”⁷

Conversion flowered from communion. What a beautiful expression. We see it in Jesus’ attendance at a meal at the home of the tax collector Zacchaeus (Luke 19:1-10). His communion with the sinful tax collector led to repentance and conversion. Likewise, we should be as prepared to eat with sinners as a habitual missional practice.

I remember meeting a Southern Baptist minister in Portland who told me his neighbor claimed to make the best margaritas in all of Oregon and who regularly hosted margarita-and-poker nights in his garage. All the men from the neighborhood attended, but the Baptist pastor never accepted an invitation to join them, believing this to be a strong witness to his faith. When I heard this, I asked him how many times his neighbor had asked him any questions about his faith in Christ. “Never,” was the reply. I asked how often he’d ever shared *anything* of his faith with his margarita-making neighbor and again the answer was “never.” You see, it’s not “questionable” when a Baptist refuses to attend a margarita-and-poker night. It’s expected. I challenged him to accept the next invitation he received and he took me up on it. The neighbor nearly fell over in shock. The Baptist minister joined the gathering in the garage, and true to his convictions he just drank soda. No one minded. He ended up having more conversations about faith than he’d had in ages. The Baptist pastor at the margarita night was a surprise. It evoked questions.

Initially, all I’m asking is that you invite three people to share your table, at least one of whom isn’t a churchgoer. But what you’ll find happening is that people will reciprocate your hospitality. You’ll start getting return invitations. And when that happens you’ve got serious missional traction. Don’t judge the lifestyles or eating (or drinking) habits of your host. See the opportunity as a goldmine for missional relationship building. Let communion precede conversion.

7

The Third Habit: LISTEN

I will spend at least one period of the week listening for the Spirit's voice.

The third habit I want you to foster is that of listening for the Spirit's voice. I suggest you find at least one chunk of time, preferably at the beginning of each week, to stop and create space to commune with God.

For many people, listening to the Holy Spirit is like trying to hear the radio in a busy coffee shop. You can make out the announcer's voice, but you have to strain to make out what she's saying over the hubbub of the other patrons. This is the same situation that exists when you try to listen to the Holy Spirit with too many people or things offering interference. Everything and everyone else must be "turned off."

We know the Holy Spirit is our companion and the source of our strength, and for missionaries the Spirit is an indispensable source of wisdom. How are we to know how to negotiate our way through the world, eating with and blessing unbelievers, without the Spirit's voice to guide us unless we fall into sin?

My experience when engaging with my neighbors is that I must open my heart to the Holy Spirit to separate the truth from the untruth, the fiction from the knowledge, the honorable from the dishonorable. If I'm going to encourage you to bless others and eat with them, it would be irresponsible of me not to also encourage you to listen to the Spirit.

In lifting or opening the heart to God the Holy Spirit, most people tend to do all of the talking and do not allow time for a reply. You must learn how to listen. You must learn how to let the Holy Spirit do the prompting (talking). What we need to learn as missionaries is not just found in books, but in the Holy Spirit who gives us the gift of knowledge to answer others' questions and deal with the challenges they pose. Here is some advice in fostering an openness to the Spirit's promptings:

1. Set aside a designated time

Don't try to connect to God the Holy Spirit on the run. Set aside a designated time each week.

I'm only asking for one (although, if you want to do it more than once a week, be my guest). See it as a precious time alone, just between you and God.

2. Eliminate distractions

For the person untrained in listening to the Holy Spirit, you should find ways to avoid any intrusion on the senses of touch, sight, smell, taste or sound. Music, noise in the distance, the tick of a clock, voices of people, the gentle breeze of the wind, even the written words of others in inspirational books—each will cause a distraction and prompt us to listen to what our ear or other senses are picking up. The quieter the room or surroundings, the more conducive to listening to the Holy Spirit. After all, Jesus taught us, “Whenever you pray, go to your room, close the door, and pray ... in private” (Matt. 6:6).

Find a comfortable position in a chair and adopt a posture most helpful to you for spiritual concentration. Lacing your fingers together, placing the palms together or sitting on your hands can help you become unaware of them. Closing your eyes in a dark or semi-dark room can help to eliminate any visual distractions.

After eliminating all of these distractions, you will be ready to listen.

3. Let God in

Don't start your meditation by asking questions or telling the Holy Spirit what you want. He already knows. Start by simply enjoying God's presence. Sit quietly and let the Holy Spirit possess you. The devil most likely will remind you of your sins and unworthiness and try to discourage you. You must always remember God loves you because He created you. While you may be well aware of your unworthiness, the Holy Spirit is most anxious to dwell in your heart, the temple He created for himself. In times like this, I am conscious of the words of St. Therese of Avilla: “If you are willing to bear serenely the trial of being displeasing to yourself, then you will be for Jesus a pleasant place of shelter.”

If you're an outcomes-oriented person, you'll be desperate to get to the point of it and ask the Spirit to grant you knowledge or wisdom or courage or righteousness, or whatever you need in your current circumstance. But before you get to that, simply abide in His presence. Let His love wash over you. Listening to the Holy Spirit can become for you, just as it has for me, a source of comfort, a source of great peace and a source of answers to present problems. Listening to God can be one of the highest forms of prayer.

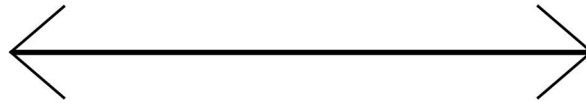
4. Follow God's promptings

The Spirit might bring to your mind the name or the face of a person you are to bless or eat with (which is why you might want to begin your week with this exercise). The Spirit might convict you of sin, or encourage you in your faithfulness. The Spirit might prompt you to re-engage with someone you blessed last week, or He might bring to mind something you ought to have said to someone but didn't. You will sense His presence in your heart, and that presence will add strength to your arm and oxygen to your soul, and you will be filled with His rewards: love, joy, peace, or any of the other fruit of the Holy Spirit.

In Romans 8, Paul presents the stark difference between those who live “according to what the flesh desires” and those who have “their minds set on what the Spirit desires” (verse 5). While some people have mistakenly interpreted this in an overly dualistic way (flesh is bad; spirit is good), I understand Paul to be talking about the worldview that the believer adopts. If we are governed entirely by our appetites, we will be driven in very unhelpful directions. If however, we allow the Spirit to guide us, we will be free to enjoy our appetites in a redeemed, godly fashion.

All that to say, missionaries *really* need to know how to rein in their appetites by setting their minds on what the Spirit desires. If I go back to what I said earlier about eating and drinking with unbelievers (an essential missionary practice), we need to be governed by the Spirit's promptings to ensure we are a godly example, one that arouses curiosity and interest in our faith. Carousing and gossiping like anyone else isn't all that interesting to anyone. Eating and drinking and blessing others in the way of the Spirit will be surprising to others.

The difficulty for many people seeking to live missional lives is negotiating the spectrum between being withdrawn and judgmental on the one hand and entering fully into a social setting that might be considered ungodly on the other. That spectrum could be illustrated this way:



Drunkenness

Judgmentalism

Gossip

Pharisaism

Gluttony

Pietism

Missional Christians aren't happy to be at either end of the spectrum. But trying to figure out how to sit somewhere in the middle—a godly, intriguing, socially adventurous, joyous presence in the lives of others—is tough. I don't think we're clever enough on our own to find that balance. That's where the missional voice of the Spirit comes in. His promptings help us adjust our stance. The Spirit's promptings rebuke us when we drift too far to either end of the spectrum, choreographing our social life in a way that promotes connection with unbelievers while also rousing their curiosity about our faith. That's why listening to the Spirit is one of the five habits of highly missional people.

The Fourth Habit: LEARN

I will spend at least one period of the week learning Christ.

The expression *to learn Christ* was a common one among the earliest Christians, but not one we use much these days. In the earliest centuries of the Christian movement, conversion involved denying the pagan gods and “learning Christ.” This meant entering a period of catechism, committing oneself to an intensive study of the person and work of Jesus. We would do well to institute a habitual study of the Gospels ourselves today.

It was fashionable some years ago to ask, “What would Jesus do?” when confronted with a life choice or major decision. I think that if we’re being sent into the world to live questionable lives, to arouse curiosity, to answer people’s enquiries about the hope we have within, we need more than ever to know what Jesus would do or say in any circumstance. And we can’t know that without a deep and ongoing study of the biographies of Jesus written by those who knew Him best—the Gospels.

Some years ago, Alan Hirsch and I wrote a book about this called *ReJesus*. It was our contention that the church needs to “re-Jesus” itself. That is to say, we need to be immersed in the Gospels, totally marinated in the work and words of Jesus. We were taking our lead from C.S. Lewis, who wrote:

“In the same way the Church exists for nothing else but to draw men (sic) into Christ, to make them little Christs. If they are not doing that, all the cathedrals, clergy, missions, sermons, even the Bible itself, are simply a waste of time. God became man for no other purpose. It is even doubtful, you know, whether the whole universe was created for any other purpose. It says in the Bible that the whole universe was made for Christ and that everything is to be gathered together in Him.”⁸

Some readers will be disturbed by Lewis’ reference to us becoming “little Christs” but he isn’t proposing anything blasphemous here. Rather, he is promoting a preoccupation with the example and teaching of Jesus for the purposes of emulation by His followers. Of course, we

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can't emulate Christ in his salvific death and resurrection, the miracles, and His judgment of the unrighteous. But we can embrace a study and examination of the person and work of Jesus for the very purpose of determining in what ways the various elements of His character and activity can be emulated by sinful human beings. For example, no, we can't die for others like Jesus did, but we can offer ourselves sacrificially in service of others. "Learning Christ" helps us understand Jesus better and provides the tools for appropriating His example into our lives.

Spending just one chunk of time in learning Christ is no great sacrifice. I hasten to point out that I encourage you to continue whatever other regular Bible reading habit you currently have, but to add this intensive study time to your schedule. Let me suggest three things you might do with your time:

1. Study the Gospels

Read, reread and reread again the four canonical Gospels. I know you think you've done that before, but I'm asking you to develop a habit of really marinating your mind and your soul in the four Gospels.

You might want to mix up the manner of your reading. Consider taking the time to read one or another through in one sitting. Mark will take about 90 minutes, John about two hours, and you can get through Matthew and Luke in around two-and-a-half hours each. Reading them in one sitting helps you to connect to their broad themes and the rhythms of their themes and language.

Of course, you can read them in sections. And you can read them with the use of commentaries or daily devotional material. All I'm asking is that you inculcate a habit of constantly reconnecting with Jesus through the words of Scripture.

2. Read about Jesus

There are so many scholarly and popular works written about Jesus that it might be hard to choose. Allow me to suggest a couple I have written. *Jesus the Fool* (Baker, 2010) looks at the way Jesus reframes our conventional wisdom. And I mentioned earlier, my book with Alan Hirsch about the need for the church to rediscover Jesus and His message—*ReJesus* (Baker, 2009)—is useful for church leaders.

I would also strongly recommend scholarly works like *The Challenge of Jesus*:

Rediscovering Who Jesus Was and Is (IVP, 1999) by N.T. Wright, and *Jesus According to Scripture: Restoring the Portrait from the Gospels* by Darrell Bock (Baker, 2002) and *Jesus and the Gospels* (B&H Academic, 1997) by Craig Blomberg. Look out for anything about Jesus by Ben Witherington as well. At a more popular level, check out Tim Keller's *King's Cross: The Story of the World in the Life of Jesus* (Dutton, 2011). I've included below a list of 10 more great books you could use.

<i>The Life: A Portrait of Jesus</i> – J. John (Authentic Media, 2003)	An excellent introduction to the living, breathing human being at the center of the Christian Good News: Jesus of Nazareth. Easy to read, with helpful answers to some of the common questions we all have about Jesus' life. Read it, and then give it to your non-Christian friends.
<i>Following Jesus: A Non-Religious Guidebook for the Spiritually Hungry</i> – Dave Roberts (Relevantbooks, 2004)	This will revolutionize your walk with God, revealing a perspective on Jesus you've never seen before. Explores what a real, dynamic relationship with Jesus looks like. Excellent, particularly if your faith life is getting a little stale.
<i>The Jesus of Suburbia: Have We Tamed the Son of God to Fit Our Lifestyle?</i> – Mike Erre (W Publishing Group, 2006)	Have we settled for a watered-down, safe, comfort Christianity? Mike paints an exciting, inspiring and powerful picture of the real Jesus. He challenges us to embrace the message of Jesus Christ as a revolutionary, life-transforming, culture-impacting movement of God. Brilliant! Good for firing you up for a radical life of sacrificial Jesus-following!
<i>Paradox: Coming to Grips with the Contradictions of Jesus</i> – Tom Taylor (Baker, 2006)	This unfolds some of the core mysteries of Jesus' upside-down teachings (e.g. die to live; serve to reign; walk by faith not by sight, etc.). This book helped me understand the lifestyle Jesus wants His followers to live more than any other. Really explains why doing life Jesus' way is better than any other.
<i>Velvet Elvis: Repainting the Christian Faith</i> – Rob Bell (Zondervan, 2005)	Rob looks at how Jesus wants to be reflected in church communities today. Well-researched Jewish background of Jesus is fascinating. Simple but profound.
<i>Mealtime Habits of the Messiah</i> – Conrad Gempf (Zondervan, 2005)	A funny, quirky and informative book that looks at 40 of Jesus' encounters with others, with questions for reflection. Jesus: alive, fun, engaging, warm and occasionally dangerous. This will give you an extra shot for the day.
<i>God in the Flesh</i> – Don Everts (IVP, 2005)	Don looks at Jesus via the reactions of those who met Him. The real Jesus jumps off the page and comes to life as a compelling person and very, very cool. Short studies included. Good for a personal devotion or maybe a Home Group.
<i>A Spectator's Guide to Jesus</i> – John Dickson (Blue bottle books, 2005)	The back cover sums it up: "If you have ever wondered how a crucified Palestinian peasant could end up winning the allegiance of 2 billion confessed Christians

	today, this book will provide some of the answers.” Really useful historical teaching to correct some of the rubbish out there!
<i>The Jesus I Never Knew</i> – Philip Yancey (Zondervan, 1995)	Now a classic. Yancey uncovers a Jesus who is brilliant, creative, challenging, fearless, compassionate, unpredictable and ultimately satisfying. A great read.
<i>Jesus Through Middle Eastern Eyes</i> – Kenneth Bailey (SPCK, 2008)	More than 400 pages, a very weighty exploration that puts Jesus in His socio-political and religio-cultural context. Challenging, but essential reading for those wanting to understand Jesus.

Pastors might also want to develop a collection of reading material—including chapters from preferred books, articles and blogs—that help reinforce the learning of Christ among their congregations.

3. Further viewing

Why not develop a library of filmed versions of the Gospels? Since no one single depiction of Jesus’ life on film can adequately do Him justice, I find it helpful to explore a range of films to get a better sense of what the Gospels teach. A couple of them—*Godspell* and *Jesus of Montreal*—aren’t technically films about Jesus Himself, but they beautifully capture different aspects of His character and action. And if you don’t like some of the grittier films in my list below, there are plenty more available, all freely searchable online. And don’t forget the charming animated film, *The Miracle Maker* (2000), in which the day-to-day experiences of Jesus are depicted with stop-motion puppets, while the parables, flashbacks, memories and spiritual encounters are depicted the traditional, hand-drawn way. Very clever. Anyway, here are some of my other favorites:

<i>The Gospel According to St. Matthew</i> (1964)	Directed by controversial Italian filmmaker Pier Paolo Pasolini, every single line of dialogue comes directly from Matthew’s Gospel. Jesus wears a black hooded cloak and seems dangerous and radical. The film is gritty and down to earth and underscores the revolutionary nature of Christ’s message. After viewing this, you can understand why the authorities would want to crucify this guy.
<i>Godspell</i> (1973)	Sure, it’s a musical set in New York City (one sequence even takes place on the roofs of the then-brand-new World Trade Center), but it’s a joyous meditation on the teachings of Jesus, especially the parables and the Sermon on the Mount, and how they resonated with the countercultural mood of that time. Controversial at the time, it helps us see the joy of Jesus and His

	vision for the world.
<i>Jesus of Nazareth</i> (1977)	Not really a film, but a six-hour miniseries, directed by Franco Zeffirelli, this really fleshes out the supporting characters in ways that convey the breadth and depth of the impact Jesus had on His contemporaries.
<i>Jesus of Montreal</i> (1989)	A Canadian film about a troupe of actors who put on an unorthodox, but acclaimed Passion Play which incites the opposition of the Catholic Church. Daniel, the actor playing Christ, finds his life beginning to mirror that of the real Jesus. This is a clever retelling that highlights Jesus' opposition to organized religion.
<i>The Passion of The Christ</i> (2004)	Mel Gibson's deeply personal film about the death of Christ was inspired not only by the Gospels, but also the Stations of the Cross and the visions of Sister Anne Catherine Emmerich, a stigmatic German nun. But its stark, gruesome depiction of the suffering of Christ is unforgettable. More than any recent director, Gibson captures the grand supernatural conflict which gives the death of Christ its meaning.

You might have picked up earlier on my reference to us needing to *marinate* our minds and souls in the story of Jesus. It's not just a cute expression. I meant it. Through biblical study, theological reading and even the viewing of films (no matter how limited each of them might be), we slowly but surely orient our lives toward the things of Christ, and we become deeply familiar with His story so we can share it whenever anyone asks us for the reason for the hope we have in Him.

The Fifth Habit: SENT

I will journal throughout the week all the ways I alerted others to the universal reign of God through Christ.

The final habit is to begin identifying yourself as a missionary—a sent one—by journaling the ways you’re alerting others to God’s reign. You can make daily journal entries or set aside some time at the end of each week to look back over the last seven days to recall how you’ve either announced or demonstrated God’s universal reign, even if it’s in the smallest of ways.

Our English term, mission, comes from the Latin *missio*, which means to send, to be ejected or pushed out. The word was almost exclusively used to describe a person who travels overseas attempting to spread Christianity. More recently, we’ve adopted the term to describe all Christians who attempt to glorify God in their daily lives. If, as we noted earlier, our mission is to alert others to the universal reign of God through Christ, then all believers should see themselves as missionaries.

As I explained earlier, this doesn’t mean every believer is a gifted evangelist, but it does mean that every believer needs to take seriously their calling to alert others to God’s reign and rule. In my book, *The Road to Missional*, I refer to our lives being like a trailer or a preview for an upcoming feature film:

“Trailers are tasters, short-film versions of the soon-to-released feature, and they usually include the best special effects or the funniest scenes or the most romantic moments, depending on the film, of the upcoming feature. Now, watch those around you in the theatre at the end of each trailer. If it has done its job, usually one person will turn to the other and say, ‘I want to see that movie.’ This is a great metaphor for the missional church. If it does its job well, people will see what it does and say, ‘I want to see the world they come from.’”⁹

The question that necessarily follows is, well then, what does the reign of God look like? If your life is meant to alert people to His reign, what exactly are you pointing them to? Let me suggest a few things. I have borrowed them from various writings by N.T. Wright and have

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explained them in greater detail in *The Road to Missional*.¹⁰

1. Reconciliation

Since reconciliation between God and humankind is at the heart of Christ's work on the cross, it makes sense that reconciliation should be a core expression of God's reign and rule. Reconciliation between God and humankind, between Jew and Gentile, slave and free, black and white and Asian and Hispanic, etc. We are to both announce reconciliation (champion it, describe, explain, advocate for), and demonstrate it (be reconciled to others, broker reconciliation among others). For this fifth missional habit, I want you to start journaling all the ways in any given week you've alerted others (by word or by deed) to the reconciling aspect of God's reign. You might have done this in your workplace, by mediating between warring colleagues. Or you might have reconciled with a friend or relative with whom you've been estranged. You might have shared the good news with someone that God reconciles us to himself through His son, Jesus. The more you journal this stuff the more you find yourself living it out.

2. Justice

It's not true to say, as many do, that evangelicals have only just begun to be interested in social justice. In fact, Christians have long recognized in Scripture a call to defend and uphold the dignity and wellbeing of all persons, especially the poor and powerless. They have seen this as a primary expression of the reign of God, a kingdom in which everyone has enough, and no one is marginalized or disadvantaged. Christian greats such as John Wesley, Lord Shaftesbury, Charles Spurgeon, and Charles Finney led campaigns for the betterment of society, whether it was prison reform, labor reform, abolitionism or the temperance movement. More recently, evangelical leaders like John Stott, Ron Sider and Jim Wallis have promoted Christian engagement in anti-poverty, anti-war, environmental and immigration causes. Today, there are all kinds of ways we can be sent to demonstrate this aspect of God's reign, whether it be eliminating sex trafficking, promoting fair trade products, and clean water campaigns. There are now new movements to encourage Christians to fight homelessness or to foster disadvantaged children. Whether you're simply donating to a cause, signing an online petition or opening your home to the poor, start journaling the ways you were sent to show justice in your world this week.

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3. *Beauty*

This one sometimes surprises people when I mention it. Reconciliation and justice make sense. The Bible is full of references to such things. But beauty as an expression of the reign of God? Really? But the more you think about it, the more sense it makes. Where do you often feel closest to God but on a mountaintop or a beach or in the presence of natural beauty? Doesn't a beautiful cathedral or a piece of music leverage you toward the creator of all true beauty? Some years ago I was moved to tears listening to some music (it was just music, not Christian), and I remember wondering to myself why music existed. The only conclusion I could come to was that it is a gift of God to His people, Christian and non-Christian alike, and that we could see Him in it even if it was written by a lascivious Mozart rather than a godly Wesley. C.S. Lewis suspected this when he wrote:

“For the beasts can't appreciate it [beauty] and the angels are, I suppose, pure intelligences. They understand colors and tastes better than our greatest scientists; but have they retinas or palates? I fancy the 'beauties of nature' are a secret God has shared with us alone. That may be one of the reasons why we were made.”¹¹

If beauty is an expression of God's reign, we need to think about ways to invite our friends to encounter it. Take them hiking. Climb mountains. Walk along beaches. Encounters with true beauty can't help but make us think of Psalm 8, “When I behold ... the work of your fingers ... what is man that you are mindful of him?” Rudolph Otto, a German theologian, listed a number of responses normally associated with an awe-encounter with God. They include a sense of majesty, its unapproachability, a feeling of fascination, including both fear and attraction. He also speaks of a feeling that can never be adequately described, only experienced, the feeling that we are important enough to be invited to encounter the Holy (as he called it) but in its presence we are overwhelmed and made aware of our smallness. Such experiences of the transcendent are not only frightening, they are strangely comforting. We need them.

But more than natural beauty, I think we should commit ourselves to creating beautiful music, art, craft and food, and inviting others to join us. Try to find ways to alert others to the universal reign of God through Christ by an observation of His creation and by personally fashioning expressions of beauty.

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4. Wholeness

In Luke 7, the imprisoned John the Baptist sends his followers to double check that Jesus really was the Messiah. Jesus' response to their questioning of His identity is really interesting: "Go back and report to John what you have seen and heard: 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" (Luke 7:22). In other words, the "credentials" He presents to prove He is the Messiah, ushering in the universal reign of God, are the restitution of broken people. He heals the blind, the lame, the lepers, the deaf and even the dead as an evidence of God's Kingdom coming in glory. Therefore, it should be reasonable to suggest that *wholeness*, the healing of broken people, is a primary evidence of that reign today. Of course, many Christians are committed to bringing healing to the lives of others—doctors, nurses, psychologists, counselors, etc. And I want to encourage these as important expressions of the reign of God. When Christians provide emergency relief to victims of natural disasters, we are showing them what the reign of God looks like. When we help to repair a broken marriage, we do the same. When a Christian medical practitioner treats a patient with dignity and grace, bringing healing to their body, we can clearly see it as mirroring the work of God. But I want to go further and say that, more than these practical expressions of healing, we should also be praying for *supernatural* healing in people's lives.

By fostering the habit of briefly journaling the various ways (large or small) that you alerted others to God's reign of reconciliation, justice, beauty and wholeness, you will find yourself increasingly identifying yourself as a sent one. And remember that you can alert others to these things both by talking about them (witness) and demonstrating them (action).

Discipleship, Nurture & Accountability

As should be obvious by now, I'm not merely promoting these five practices as a one-off program. I want you to make a habit of them. I want you to inculcate these habits as a central rhythm of your life. You see, doing a short-term project like *40 Days of Purpose* is great. But missional effectiveness grows exponentially the longer we embrace these habits and the deeper we go with them.

This begs the question, how long does it take for us to form a habit? In his book, *Making Habits, Breaking Habits: Why We Do Things, Why We Don't, and How to Make Any Change Stick*, Jeremy Dean suggests it takes much longer than we have assumed. Dean's research involved asking 100 participants to choose an everyday behavior that they wanted to turn into a habit. They all chose something they didn't already do that could be repeated every day; many were health-related: people chose things like "eating a piece of fruit with lunch" and "running for 15 minutes after dinner." Then, for 84 days, they logged into a website and reported whether or not they'd carried out the behavior, as well as how automatic the behavior had felt. Dean found the following:

The simple answer is that, on average, across the participants who provided enough data, it took 66 days until a habit was formed. As you might imagine, there was considerable variation in how long habits took to form depending on what people tried to do. People who resolved to drink a glass of water after breakfast were up to maximum automaticity after about 20 days, while those trying to eat a piece of fruit with lunch took at least twice as long to turn it into a habit. The exercise habit proved most tricky with "50 sit-ups after morning coffee," still not a habit after 84 days for one participant. "Walking for 10 minutes after breakfast," though, was turned into a habit after 50 days for another participant.¹²

Now, I'm asking you to do something considerably more challenging than eating a piece of fruit with lunch. From Dean's research, it seems that it might only take a few weeks to develop a basic habit like drinking a glass of water every day, but to change and develop new

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habits that are more complex can take months of intentional practice.

For that reason, I propose that a simple system of accountability needs to be put in place to ensure people remain committed to the habits over a long period of time. My suggestion is that church members be grouped into triads, micro-groups that meet weekly to hold each member accountable to the habits, as well as encouraging and nurturing each other and helping each other learn from their experience of living out the habits. I call these micro-groups DNAs (Discipleship, Nurture, Accountability).

Each group will meet weekly to ask and answer a series of accountability questions. You might be familiar with Neil Cole's Life Transformation Groups, which have a similar format.¹³ With DNA groups, I propose the questions be shaped around the five habits. At the end of this chapter, I have included a suggested accountability form that each member might complete each week in preparation for their DNA meeting. It includes such questions as, "Who have I blessed this week?" and "What did I hear from the Holy Spirit this week?" It also includes such questions as "What questions, issues, or learning arose from this habit this week?" My hope for DNA meetings is that each member might not only report on whether they completed the habits that week, but also begin to allow themselves to be shaped as missionaries by those habits. A DNA meeting should fulfill the following goals:

1. Discipleship

By asking each other about what questions, issues or learning were raised by the five habits, the members of your DNA can help you process your responses and hopefully move forward with greater insight and confidence. For example, if you ate with someone who confessed they have marriage problems, your fellow members might help you explore recommended strategies for them. If a neighbor stumped you by raising questions about same-sex marriage or told you they were exploring Buddhism, or asked questions about an area of the Bible you weren't familiar with, your DNA friends could help you think through ways you might have responded more appropriately. Together you could study the Scriptures to develop biblical responses to those issues raised. Further, by sharing with each other what you've learned about Jesus that week, you will be teaching each other from the Word of God. In other words, you'll be discipling each other based on your missional experiences through the five habits.

2. Nurture

¹³

If you've had an unusually busy week, or your kids are sick or won't sleep, or you're feeling depleted and unable to give any more, you can share this with your DNA group. The DNA process isn't designed to beat you up when you fall short and can't fulfill the five habits. It's there to encourage you and support you when things get overwhelming.

3. Accountability

Having said that, if due to laziness or fear you didn't fulfill the five habits this week, your DNA are there to provide some real accountability. They are to hold you to the commitments you made together. Knowing that your friends are checking in on you should provide some impetus to continue with the habits. Further, if the Spirit convicted you of the need for repentance in an area of your life, you might care to confess this with your DNA so that they can hold you accountable to whatever new choices the Spirit's voice has called you to. If the teachings of Jesus have prompted you to set different priorities, you can share this with your DNA and ask them to hold you accountable to it.

As we discovered earlier, to make these five commitments (blessing, eating, listening, learning, sentness) a set of habits, we need to stick with them for an extended period of time. The discipleship, nurture and accountability built into the DNA groups are essential to help you stay at it. But remember, I'm not asking you to do something distasteful or unpleasant. Blessing people is personally satisfying. Eating with others is fun. Listening to the Spirit and learning about Jesus is spiritually enriching. And journaling the various ways you alert others to the reign of God is encouraging.

End Notes

Felicity Dale, *An Army of Ordinary People*, (Carol Stream: Tyndale House, 2010).

² John Dickson, *The Best Kept Secret of Christian Mission*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010) p. 93.

³ Dickson, *ibid.* p. 94

⁴ Gary Chapman, *The 5 Love Languages* (Chicago: Northfield Publishing, 2010) p. 46.

⁵ Dave Ferguson, *Discover Your Mission Now*, Exponential eBook Series,
<https://www.exponential.org/ebooks/discovermission/>

⁶ Alan Hirsch & Lance Ford, *Right Here, Right Now* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2010) p. 203

⁷ Ben F. Meyer, *The Aims of Jesus*, (London: SCM, 1979) p. 161.

⁸ C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York, Simon & Schuster Touchstone, 1996), p. 171

⁹ Michael Frost, *The Road to Missional* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2011), p. 29

¹⁰ Frost, *ibid.* 104-112

¹¹ C. S. Lewis, quoted in Philip Yancey, “Neat! Way Cool! Awesome!”, *Christianity Today*, March 7, 1997.

¹² Jeremy Dean, *Making Habits, Breaking Habits: Why We Do Things, Why We Don't, and How to Make Any Change Stick* (Boston: De Capo Press, 2013) p. 6.

¹³ For more on Life Transformation Groups, see <http://www.cmaresources.org/article/ltg>

The **BELLS** CHALLENGE

DNA Accountability Form

WHO DID I BLESS THIS WEEK?

Name: _____

Name: _____

Name: _____

Word

☐
☐
☐

Act

☐
☐
☐

Gift

☐
☐
☐

WHAT QUESTIONS, ISSUES, OR LEARNING A ROSE FROM THIS HABIT THIS WEEK?

WITH WHOM DID I EAT THIS WEEK?

Name: _____

Name: _____

Name: _____

WHAT QUESTIONS, ISSUES, OR LEARNING A ROSE FROM THIS HABIT THIS WEEK?

WHAT DID I HEAR FROM THE HOLY SPIRIT THIS WEEK?

WHAT DID I LEARN (OR RELEARN) ABOUT CHRIST THIS WEEK?

SHARE TWO OR THREE ENTRIES FROM YOUR JOURNAL ABOUT THE WAYS YOU ALERTED OTHERS TO THE REIGN OF GOD.
