

The Missional Manifesto

Preamble

God is a sending God, a missionary God, who has called His people, the church, to be missionary agents of His love and glory. The concept missional epitomizes this idea. This manifesto seeks to serve the church by clarifying its calling and helping it theologically understand and practically live out God's mission in the world today. Although it is frequently stated "God's church has a mission," according to missional theology, a more accurate expression is "God's mission has a church" (Ephesians 3:7-13).

One of the goals of theology is to safeguard the meaning of words in order to uphold truth and articulate a biblical worldview within the community of faith. Redeeming the integrity of the word missional is especially critical. It is not our intent (or within our ability) to define words for others, but we thought it helpful to describe and define how we are using the term—and to invite others to do the same. A biblically faithful, missional understanding of God and the church is essential to the advancement of our role in His mission, and thus to the dynamism of Christianity in the world.

It is first necessary to be clear about what missional does not mean. Missional is not synonymous with movements attempting to culturally contextualize Christianity, implement church growth, or engage in social action. The word missional can encompass all of the above, but it is not limited to any one of these.

Properly understanding the meaning of missional begins with recognizing God's missionary nature. The Father is the source of mission, the Son is the embodiment of that mission, and mission is done in the power of the Spirit. By nature, God is the "sending one" who initiates the redemption of His whole creation. Jesus consistently spoke of Himself as being "sent" in John's gospel and subsequently commissioned His disciples for this same purpose (John 17:3, 8, 18, 21, 23, 25). As the "sent" people of God, the church is the instrument of His mission (John 20:21).

A strong foundation in the gospel, obedience to Christ and posture to the world are critical components to both individuals and churches living missionally. A missional community is one that regards mission as both its originating impulse and organizing principle (Acts 1:8). It makes decisions accordingly, believing that Christ sends His followers into the world, just as the Father sent Him into the world.

The Church, therefore, properly encourages all believers to live out their primary calling as Christ's ambassadors (2 Corinthians 5:20) to those who do not know Jesus. The ministry of reconciliation is applicable to both its native culture and in cross-cultural ministry throughout the world. In this sense, every believer is a missionary sent by the Spirit into a non-Christian culture activating the whole of his or her life in seeking to participate more fully in God's mission.

Missional represents a significant shift in the way we understand the church. As the people of a missionary God, we are entrusted to participate in the world the same way He does—by committing to be His ambassadors. Missional is the perspective to see people as God does and to engage in the activity of reaching them. The church on mission is the church as God intended.

Affirmations

With this in mind we affirm the following:

1. Authority: As a revelation about the nature of God, we can only truly understand the mission of God by what is revealed through the Scriptures. Therefore, our understanding of the *missio Dei* and

the missional church must always be directed and shaped by, and cannot be contrary to, God's revealed Word in scripture.

2. Gospel: We affirm that God, who is more holy than we can imagine, looked with compassion upon humanity made up of people who are more sinful than we will admit and sent Jesus into history to establish His kingdom and reconcile people and the world to Himself. Jesus, whose love is more extravagant than we can measure, gave His life as a substitutionary death on the cross and was physically resurrected thereby propitiating the wrath of God. Through the grace of God, when a person repents of their sin, confesses the Messiah as Lord, and believes in His resurrection, they gain what the Bible defines as new and eternal life. All believers are then joined together into the church, a covenant community working as "agents of reconciliation" to proclaim and live out the gospel.

3. Kingdom: We affirm that the gospel is the good news of God's Kingdom. The Kingdom is the active and comprehensive rule of God over His whole creation. The sovereign reign of God brings righteousness (right relationships with God, others, and creation), restores justice, and brings healing to a broken world. The Kingdom of God has been inaugurated but is still "not yet." It will not be fully revealed until Jesus returns. The church, birthed in the wake of the kingdom, serves as an agent of the King in the "already and not yet" of the Kingdom by proclaiming and spreading the gospel and living out its implications.

4. Mission: We affirm that the *missio Dei* is the mission of the triune God to glorify Himself. God does so in this world by redeeming sinful humans and, in the future, restoring corrupted creation. The Father sent the Son to accomplish this redemption and sends the Spirit to apply this redemption to the hearts of men and women. Included in God's mission is the *missio ecclesia* whereby He empowers the church for witness and service that leads to witness. Believers are called to share the gospel with people so they can come to know Christ. Moving from God, through the church, to the world, God's redemptive work results in people of every tribe, tongue and nation responding in lifelong worship of the God. Ultimately the *missio Dei* will encompass all of creation when God creates a new heaven and new earth.

5. Church: The church is a sign and instrument of the Kingdom of God, birthed by the gospel of the Kingdom and tasked with the mission of the Kingdom. The church is a covenant community of imperfect but redeemed believers living in our world. Followers of Christ do not live out their mission in isolation, but rather the Spirit of God enfolds believers into local Christian communities, i.e. churches. It is in and through such community their mission in the world is enhanced.

6. Christocentric: We believe that Jesus is the center of God's plan. By extension, the church as the body of Christ is the primary medium of God's mission to His world. We affirm that while God's work and presence is not limited to the church, nonetheless the proclamation of the gospel of Christ comes through the church and believers everywhere. Members of the church, living by the power of the Spirit, are being conformed into the likeness of Christ in their attitudes and actions.

7. Disciple-making: We believe that discipling of the nations is the essential aspect of the mission of God (Matthew 28:18-20). The gospel calls people to respond in faith and repentance to the good news of the Kingdom in and by the gospel's power. The maturing of believers is inherent to the work of the church ushering those who place faith in Jesus from spiritual infancy to spiritual maturity (Colossians 1:28). This means the church trains its members to be leaders in deeds of justice and ministry to the poor, as well as live out the implications of their faith in business, the arts, in politics, the academy, the home, and in all of life. As the church makes disciples, it equips them to bring their faith to bear on every area of their lives, private and public.

8. Duality: We believe the mission and responsibility of the church includes both the proclamation of the Gospel and its demonstration. From Jesus, we learn the truth is to be proclaimed with authority and lived with grace. The church must constantly evangelize, respond lovingly to human needs, as

well as "seek the welfare of the city" (Jeremiah 29:7). By living out the implications of the gospel, the missional church offers a verbal defense and a living example of its power.

9. Universality: We believe God's mission, and thus the mission of His people, extends to every people, nation, tribe and tongue; to persons of every gender, age, education, social standing, and religious persuasion (or lack thereof). Thus a missional church will intentionally embrace diversity locally and will cross social, cultural and geographic barriers as agents of the missio Dei. God's mission furthermore universally encompasses every aspect of life: personal, familial, social, cultural, and economic. This is grounded upon the universal authority and lordship of Jesus Christ.

10. Application: We believe the mission of the church continues in multiplying and maturing the followers of Christ (discipleship), increasing the number of congregations (church planting) dedicated to God's kingdom (living under His lordship), extending God's fame throughout the earth (worship), and doing good in the name of Christ (works of mercy).

Epilogue

Because we believe these things, we are compelled to action. We urge God's people to align around the lordship of Jesus, the missional nature of His church, and the reality of His kingdom. We invite the body of Christ everywhere to see people and the world through the lens of God's kingdom, to live holy lives as Jesus' disciples, and to intentionally represent Him together as the church. We affirm that Jesus was sent to fulfill God's purposes in the world through His perfect life, substitutionary death, and physical resurrection so that redemption could be made available to us. With Christ as our focal point, His kingdom as our destiny, and His Spirit as our empowerment, we accept the privilege and joy of His mission.