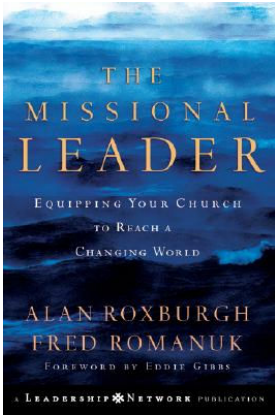


MISSIONAL

An idea that changes everything

GCI pastoral intern discussion starter
by Charles Fleming



Recommended Reading:

The Missional Leader: Equipping Your Church to Reach a Changing World by Alan Roxburgh and Fred Romanuk, pages 15-35.

“Missional” is a popular buzzword in many Christian circles. In a world where ideas come and go, is being “missional” another passing fad? Perhaps, but maybe not. Maybe being *missional* will be a “splinter in the mind”—like Neo was for Orpheus in the movie, *The Matrix*. Such “splinters” transform lives; and churches.



The book, *The Missional Leader*, has been a “splinter” in my mind in two ways. First it has given me a radically new paradigm or worldview—one that, though new, has felt strangely familiar (like Saito’s “half-remembered dream” in the movie *Inception*). Secondly, it has given me a new skill-set useful for living “on mission.” In these two ways, *The Missional Leader* has built into my life what is sometimes called a “Hope Account.”

A Hope Account

Roxburgh and Romanuk argue convincingly that we are living in a time of “discontinuous change” that brings entire cultures to tipping points, yielding something entirely new. They observe that these changes frequently leave church leaders with a sense of hopelessness, no longer able to believe “that God could or would do anything new among their people or under their leadership.”

According to the authors, the solution to this hopelessness is to cultivate a “new imagination” that is able to see the new ways that God is working in the world. With this new imagination at work, church leaders and whole congregations begin to make deposits in their Hope Account.

According to Roxburgh and Romanuk, hope is “the most important currency a congregation has to spend.” For them, hope is a combination of *belief* in a God who is present and active and *expectation* that this God will actually do something for, with and through them.

In order to build up this Hope Account in a congregation, the authors suggest using interactive Bible Studies and sermons focused on God’s involvement in the ordinary lives of ordinary people—giving people opportunity to “share their own stories...so as to connect their stories with the Biblical narrative.” With this approach, a biblical and theological narrative begins to shape the congregation’s understanding of how God is at work in the world and is drawing the members of the congregation to join with God in his mission.

As I read *The Missional Leader*, I realized that over the past 14 years I have been given my own Hope Account and thus, like Saito, I have received a new, empowered reality.

Splinter in my mind

“You are excellent managers, but your churches probably will not long exist if you do not develop apostolic eyes.” That comment became lodged like a

splinter in my mind. My supervisor made this comment to a roomful of Regional Directors about 14 years ago. As I heard these words, I knew I was being challenged to “re-make” myself. Here is the context: In 2000 I had already been in ministry for more than 20 years. I had experienced one of the most radical transformations a denomination can make. GCI had moved from cult-like legalism to orthodox Christian doctrine and practice. All this meant that I was already in the process of being “re-made.”

His comment about us being “excellent managers” resonated with me. Recently, I had completed a Master’s degree in management. This was the fulfillment of a promise I had made to God back in 1986. In the 1980’s I served in Jamaica and was frustrated by the over-centralization of the denomination. I told God that I thought our worst problem was bad management (not bad theology!) and told him that if he ever wanted to assemble a team of competent middle managers I was willing to do whatever it takes to be equipped to serve on such a team.

Looking back, I see where God took me seriously because a few years later, I was moved into middle management and given a chance to go back to school. So, here I was in 2000, being told I needed “apostolic eyes.” When I asked what that meant, I was told I needed to be able to see mission opportunities and be the kind of leader who could motivate others to get involved. At the time this was not very satisfying. But the splinter was implanted and began to work.

So I went back to school to find out what “mission” is and how to recognize it. By the time I read *The Missional Leader* in 2010, I realized that it describes what God had done to and for me since I began responding to the implanted splinter. He used a rhythm of *doing and reflecting* – work and study – to create a context wherein I could connect my experience with Scriptural narratives to see how he is at work in my world. Not only has this given me new skills, it has fundamentally changed my worldview. By God’s grace, I have become a missional person. My identity now is *to be* a witness (Acts 1:8). For me, mission is not just something I do—but the heart of who I am.

Half-remembered dreams

In this, I am not alone. GCI has been turned around by a series of “splinters” embedded in many receptive minds. Many have turned from an internal mindset focused on serving an organization to a mindset that is also

concerned for the plight of people outside the organization, including the poor in the regions we serve.

Of course, we had justified our internal focus with scriptures—ones like Matthew 26: 11 where Jesus proclaims, “The poor you will always have with you.” We took this to mean that we can (and therefore should) do nothing about the poor. But we came to realize that this conclusion was a misuse of this verse. We noted Mark’s addition: “You can help them [the poor] any time you want. But you will not always have me” (Mark 14:7). Aiding helpless people is what Jesus did while on earth and what he continues to do through his church.

Our transformation has led to an amazing outpouring of support for practical mission. The Holy Spirit is helping us become missional with Jesus, by turning our half-dreams and vague inner stirrings into something quite tangible.

As our Hope Accounts have grown, missional creativity, initiative and energy have begun to flow.

Discussion starter questions:

1. What is the state of your personal Hope Account? Can you think of ways in which God may be offering to help you increase it?
2. Have you ever experienced an activity, church service or other gathering in your congregation where you felt members were recognizing God’s Vision for their missional engagement as a result of listening to each other, member-to-member? If so, what was that like? If not, why do you think that is not happening? How could you help?
3. Has a person or experience ever implanted a “splinter” in your mind? What was that idea? What did you do about it? How do you distinguish between a kingdom-enriching splinter and a negative splinter? How long are you willing to wait and work for a “splinter” to be resolved (.e. to bear fruit)?
4. Do you agree that we are living in a time of “discontinuous change” where our culture may “tip over into something new”? What do you see as the biggest changes that are occurring? Are they all good? All bad? How do they challenge/help us? Pick one and discuss how you might overcome or use it in your context.