



EQUIPPER

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Dear Christian on mission with Jesus:

These days it's common to hear people say that, "The church needs to be more missional." Though I agree in large part, the term *missional* is often used in ways that obscure its essential meaning. Ed Stetzer of LifeWay makes this point in a post on *The Exchange* blog (www.christianitytoday.com/edstetzer/2014/july/why-defining-missional-matters.html). His post includes this quote from Michael Goheen:

[Missiologist Leslie] Newbigin made an important distinction between mission and missions.... Mission is an all-embracing term that refers to "the entire task for which the Church is sent into the world." Missions or foreign missions are intentional activities designed to create a Christian presence in places where there is no such presence, or at least no effective presence. As such the foreign missionary task is an essential part of the church's broader mission.

It's common to confuse *missions* (as in foreign or domestic missions) with *mission*. But as Goheen and Stetzer point out, mission is a far broader term. Ed goes on to note in his post that mission is about "joining Jesus on mission, from everywhere and to everywhere." He also notes that mission is our faithful response to Jesus' powerful and directive statement to his disciples: "As the Father has sent me, I am sending you" (John 20:21).

These definitions of mission from Goheen and Stetzer align well with our incarnational, Trinitarian theology. For us, *mission*, and the related term *missional*, refer to the wide sweep of the work that our triune God is doing in the world. As Randy Bloom notes in his article on page two, God's "doing" flows from his "being." God does mission because God, in the outflow of his loving, tri-personal being, is missional. The Spirit then forms, equips and sends each follower of Jesus to share in God's missional activity in the world. By God's design, the church is *a missional people*—on mission not merely for God, but with God.

Some of us on the Church Administration and Development (CAD) team met recently with church planting consultant Tom Nebel who told us that if we as a fellowship will focus on mission (missional thinking and living), our various ministries will follow. Note how mission precedes, then shapes ministry. The sequence here is vital to understand, because often a focus on specific ministries makes churches program-driven in ways where they cease to be missional—missing out on what God is doing, on mission, around them.

Being missional means being responsive to the calling that we have to participate in what Jesus is doing, in the power of the Spirit, to fulfill the Father's mission to the world. That participation, with its many and varied ministry forms, is motivated (Paul says *compelled*) by Christ's own love at work within and through us. With Christ we live and share the gospel; with Christ we multiply disciples, leaders, ministries and churches.

On mission with Jesus and with you,
Greg Williams, associate director, Church Administration and Development



"Come on mission with me!"

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Outfitting GCI churches and ministries for a mission-focused journey with Jesus.

Implications of Trinitarian Theology for Church and Mission by Randy Bloom

We believe that the doctrine of the Trinity is the most comprehensive framework for understanding what Christians refer to as *mission*. Though mission often is viewed as the activity of the church, it is not the domain of the church. Mission originates with, flows from, and is empowered by God. Mission is the loving and free activity of the triune God in the world on behalf of all humanity.

What the Father, Son and Spirit are doing *on mission* in our world is revealed in Scripture. John 3:16 affirms that God's being as Father, Son and Spirit is love. From all eternity, love has been flowing out from the Father to the Son in the Spirit, and from the Son to the Father in the Spirit. God's love is outgoing first in the internal and eternal relations between the Triune Persons. Creation is the product of the overflow of that love for the sake of a loving relationship with creation.

Out of his love, the Father sent the Son of God to save the world, drawing all people to the Father through himself. Jesus is the incarnation of the Father's love and the Father's mission to a fallen world. The Holy Spirit is sent out as the agent through which the Father accomplishes his mission in Christ—transforming hearts and minds, giving gifts, guiding and empowering people to participate in the mission of God.



Scripture tells us that God is a missionary God. His loving and gracious activity in the world, evident throughout history, is rooted in his love. His *doing* is thus grounded in and inseparable from his *being*. God cannot be God and not be actively engaged in the world that he created and loves, drawing people into communion with himself.

As Christians, we know that our life is in Christ. Through the Incarnation, Jesus has drawn us into the life and love of the Trinity, sharing with us all that he is, as he shares in all that we are. Our identity—collectively and individually—is thus grounded in who Jesus is. Because God's being cannot be separated from his doing (his missional activity), the being of the church cannot be separated from its doing. Just as Jesus was sent by the Father to enter into humanity and share God's life and love in practical, realistic ways, so Jesus sends his church to actively and realistically participate with him in what he continues to do (John 20:21). Thomas Torrance put it this way:

The being and nature of the church are equally inseparable from its mission, that is, its sending by Christ on the mission of the love of God, just as the sending of Christ by the Father is inseparable from his being and nature as the incarnate Son.... We can never speak of the being and nature of the church statically, but always in terms of the divine act, the divine movement of love from God to man, and from man to God and man to fellow man.... (*Atonement*, p. 373).

Included and grounded in God's triune being, every member, realizing it or not, is a participant in God's doing—in his saving and redeeming activity (mission) in the world. Our joyful challenge is to recognize and embrace the manner in which the Holy Spirit calls, gifts, empowers and sends us to participate. Each of us is privileged to take advantage of the opportunities the Spirit gives us to be faithful, regardless of circumstances, in sharing in what Jesus is doing in the lives of family, friends, neighbors, co-workers and others. As we come together in church families to partner in that missional activity, various ministries will emerge. Those ministries will be missional to the extent that they are defined by God's mission and not by something else.

As we live individually and collectively on mission with God, we will be living out of our true identity, which is in Christ. As we participate with Jesus, through the Spirit, in the Father's mission, we become more fully who we truly are—we experience life more and more not in ourselves, but in Christ who is our life.

Editor's note: For a related post on The Surprising God blog from Randy Bloom, see <http://tinyurl.com/ph3qh9j>