

The Rhythms of the Missional Life

A Way of Life

The life of a missionary does not consist of a few scattered events throughout a week or month, but rather an ongoing flow of movement within the everyday rhythms of a culture. The most effective missionaries are not the ones who move into a new culture and stay distant or disconnected from the culture, only engaging in it when the people come to them. The most effective ones are those who join in the flow of life with everyone else, engaging in the activities of the culture they are sent into with gospel integrity, not falling to the left of syncretism or to the right of separatism.

Dear friends, I urge you, as aliens and strangers in the world, to abstain from sinful desires, which war against your souls. Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us.

1 Peter 2:11-12

This entering in to the everyday rhythms of life is necessary to the effective gospel mission of every Christian who believes they are the missionary people of God. It doesn't matter the age, the demographic or the region. If we are going to effectively lead and equip students to engage as missionaries to their culture, we must help them identify the rhythms of life and the unique ways in which to both live within them and preach the gospel through them.

Although, there are many unique rhythms that could be identified within every culture, we have discovered some that seem to exist in every culture since before the Fall. Certainly, they take on many different forms, but the underlying rhythms seem to be the same. As we look at these rhythms, they can provide for us a framework through which we can lead students into the active work of gospel mission.

Keep in mind, we lead students to hold to the Gospel Message, live out of Gospel Motivation (our New Identity in Christ) while we move into Gospel Methods (Missional Rhythms).

Everyday Rhythms

Story-Formed...

(Genesis 1:1-2; Psalm 1; 2 Timothy 3:16-17)

Everyone is living within the context of some story. The story they believe shapes the kind of lives they live. Although we live in a time when many would prefer denying that they live within the context of a meta-narrative, because the meta-narratives of the western world have seemingly shown themselves to be fairy tales not rendering the happy ending they promised. It is still true that everyone finds their meaning within a context larger than their own life - it is what gives any sense of context to our lives

The Biblical/Gospel story reminds us that we all move toward seeking meaning outside of God's Story (Adam and Eve are the first humans to show this tendency). The same story shows us how God rescues us from our alternative stories that lead to destruction and death. As we become familiar with His Story we realize that we are part of God's rescue plan as well. If students are going to be effective missionaries who enter into the rhythmic movement of their culture with the gospel they will have to be story-formed in a variety of ways:

THE STORY...

We are a story-formed people who are living our lives based upon and within a story. Our students must know God's Story because all of our beliefs, identity and actions are all connected to the dominant story. This is why we are to talk about it when we sit, stand, walk along the way, eat, lie down, etc.... (Deuteronomy 6:6-9)

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THEIR STORY...

Our students need to continue to grow in the gospel of grace and truth. Therefore they need to be self-aware and let the Spirit show them where their lives, past and present, are not in line with the gospel

OUR STORIES...

Not only should we regularly reacquaint our students with the Gospel Story, but they must also know each other's stories if they are going to be a Family who is equipping each other effectively. They need to hear each others stories and bring the gospel story to bear on each other (Consider Paul to Peter in Galatians 2:11-14).

THE CULTURE OR COMMUNITY'S STORY...

In order to be an effective missionary, our students need to know the story of our culture - what has shaped it, what is the dominant story line, what are the idols, where are the open doors for the gospel - both demonstrated and declared - and learn how to enter into the gospel crossroad.

Listen...

(Mark 1:35-37; John 16:7-15; Hebrews 1:1-3; Romans 1:20)

There are thousands of voices and messages competing for our attention and we are listening. We ebb and flow all day long from one voice to the other. The question is which voice informs how to listen to all the others?

In The Story, we see in the very beginning what happened when God's voice was no longer the dominant voice - Adam and Eve listened to the serpent and to themselves - and God's original mission for humanity moved into rebellion.

In order to faithfully walk in the gospel, we must walk dependently on God through the ongoing rhythm of listening...

...TO GOD

The gospel informs us that we are fully dependent upon God's Spirit to teach us the truth, convict of sin, show us the way to go and empower us to do everything God wants. So, we must teach our students to walk in submission to the Spirit if we are going to live as God intends. Listening itself is an act of submission and dependency on God.

...TO OURSELVES

Teach students to pay attention to what they say to themselves. C.J. Mahaney states in his book, *Living the Cross Centered Life*, that we should not just listen to ourselves, but begin speaking the gospel to ourselves. In order to regularly realign ourselves to the truth of the gospel, we need to listen closely to what we say to ourselves and compare that to the gospel and our gospel identity. Where what we are hearing doesn't match up to the gospel, we should preach the gospel again to ourselves.

...TO EACH OTHER

If students are to *gospel* each other, they not only need to know each others stories, but they need to listen carefully to hear where they are not yet gripped by the gospel and where the story is about them or dependent on them. In order to do most of the *ONE ANOTHERS*, we must listen to each other.

...TO THE CULTURE OR COMMUNITY

The students in our community are telling each other what they believe and why. We need to teach students to ask questions and listen. If they are to be prepared to give an answer for the hope they have, they will have to must spend less time just preparing answers and as much time listening for the questions. Listening to others first is prerequisite for gospel engagement. They should be listening constantly to know whose story they believe in and where that story has proven weak and ineffective to save.

Celebrate...

(Leviticus 23; Acts 2:42-47; Hebrews 10:24-25)

Everybody loves a good party. In fact, most people are regularly on the lookout for the party – especially students. Why? Because God made us to be worshippers – to be rejoicing and satisfied in someone other than ourselves – namely Him. This hunger to celebrate – to worship – is in every person.

The student who engages the missionary activity of God must regularly enter into celebrating...

...GOD GRACE

If they truly understand and believe the gospel, Christian students should be the most celebratory people on the planet. God regularly called his people to celebrate through feasts and parties because he did not want them to forget His grace and abundant provision. The very celebration wasn't just a response – it was also a demonstration of what God is like and has done. Students must enter into a regular rhythm of celebrating God's extravagant blessings in ways their peers can understand.

...IN THEIR LIFE

Part of our student's ability to live out the gospel is dependent upon their regular reflection on the gospel. We need to teach them to regularly set their affections on things above – the work of God in Jesus Christ and what is now true of me because of Him. Celebration should be a regular rhythm in all I do.

...WITH EACH OTHER

We also must call students to not give up meeting together so that we might spur each other on to love and good deeds. Jesus himself demonstrates this through his first recorded miracle – at a wedding feast where he affirms the celebration of life together because celebrating life together demonstrates the working out of and one of the purposes for the gospel.

...WITH THE CULTURE OR COMMUNITY

The people God has sent our students to are also celebrating – they happen to be celebrating a different god and a different story. We need to teach students to enter into their celebrations and do it unto God and fully aware that even this celebration is within His Story. Then, within the celebrate teach students to look for ways to serve, redeem, bring gospel light, etc...

Bless...

(Genesis 12:1-3; Ephesians 1:22-23; 2:8-10; 1 Peter 2:12)

Everyone has received blessings and chooses to do something with what they have received. Some people give in order to gain acceptance; to appease their guilty conscience or because they simply like the feeling. Others hoard what they have or use it only for themselves. Followers of Jesus believe they have been blessed by God to be a blessing. They are not motivated to gain something through giving, but because they have been given something they don't deserve in order to share with others in need.

...BLESSED BY GOD

Just like Abraham we have been blessed – we have received unmerited favor and provision. This is not because of anything we have done, but because of all that God has done for us in Jesus Christ. We must remind students that they are co-heirs with Christ and blessed with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly realms.

...TO BE A BLESSING

We are not blessed just for our own good. We have been given what we have so that others might also receive. We must help students regularly take account of what has been given to them and realize that it is not theirs, but God's to steward. Then, in light of the gospel that reminds us that He become poor so that in his poverty we might become rich, we are freed up to pour out our lives and things so that others might be blessed and taste and see that the Lord is good.

...EACH OTHER

We must help our students see that when we believe the gospel and know that what we have we did not earn and since we have been bought with a price nothing is our own anymore, then we also realize that our Father in heaven provides for his children through sharing what we have with each other. When I come to see this I realize that I don't really own anything and yet at the same time I have more than I ever dreamed (brothers, sisters, fathers, mothers, houses, cars, clothes, food, etc... Luke 18:29-30). All that we have is His and that is His is ours.

...OUR CULTURE OR COMMUNITY

God's intent in blessing His people has always been so that those who don't know Him and his grace might see Him at work in and through us, taste of His grace and come to Him. We must direct our student's eyes outward and begin to lead them to believe the gospel has given us everything for *life* and *godliness*. He has resourced us with what we have to do the gospel work of blessing others who don't know Him yet.

Eat...

(Leviticus 23; Matthew 6:11; 26:17-30; Acts 2:46-47; Romans 12:13)

No one would deny that everyone eats regularly – some of us too much and some too little. It is interesting that the means God gave to Adam and Eve to show their faith in him was eating. They choose to eat unto themselves instead of in faith to God. This became a prime means for expressing faith and thanksgiving to God throughout The Story and it is still true for us today.

...UNTO GOD

Whatever we do, whether we eat or drink, we do it unto God. Every meal really is a demonstration of the gospel. We come hungry (a real need) and our need is graciously met (Whatever we have is from God). Since we eat three times a day, we get a gospel reminder over and over again IF we eat unto God. It's interesting that throughout the Story, food continues to be the prime example of God's provision meeting their need. And in every case, they ate unto God or unto themselves.

...WITH EACH OTHER

When we eat together we commune over our common need and God's provision. In doing this we proclaim the gospel to each other over and over again. That is why it is so important to lead students to eat together regularly – a loving community of believers communing around the work of Christ is the best apologetic of the gospel AND eating together is one of the ways we are commanded to do this.

...WITH UNBELIEVERS

The table for the Jews, as also in our day, is very symbolic AND communicative – who we eat with makes a statement. This is why Jesus was called a friend of sinners – he ate with people who were dirty, unreligious, and visibly or sociably unacceptable. The table becomes one of the most powerful displays of God's love and acceptance of sinners. We need to lead our students to use the table to exercise radical inclusivity.

Recreate...

(Genesis 1-2:3; Deuteronomy 5:12; Mark 2:23-28; Hebrews)

Recreation is not a new thing in our culture, but we often forget that God is the one who put it in place. After his work of creating was finished he was satisfied with it and he rested. He then set up a rhythm of life that starts with us resting in his creative work then working creatively. Some have a hard time really resting in God's finished work and therefore find it hard to work, create, play and take it easy and rest in all or any of those.

...WE REST IN GOD'S WORK

Because God has accomplished everything necessary for our justification and is the one who will finish the work He started in us, we can rest. Whether working, playing, sleeping or creating – we rest in His work and His abilities and His power. Our rest then is not only a result of the Gospel, but a demonstration to the world not at rest of the gospel. Students need to know this rest.

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...WE WORK , REST, CREATE AND PLAY

We should then show students that they can now approach school, sports, clubs and work not needing validation or security - they can truly do all of it unto the Lord and be free to do it as worship (not worshipping the grade, the position, the trophy or award, or the status they obtain). We need to teach students that they can truly rest because the world is held together and run by Him and it will be restored by His work through them, not their work apart from Him. They should also know that they can create freely, not dependent on the quality of the creation or the validation of others to say it is good, but rather because they are already called good in Jesus Christ. Finally, they should be the most playful and joy-filled students because they know the Father is in control and loves them deeply.

...WITH EACH OTHER

Students should recreate together as a way of preaching the gospel to one another. By doing this they become a display together of the truth of the gospel to a watching world. Their resting, creating, working and playing all proclaim that God is Creator, Sustainer, Provider and Redeemer.