

THE FALSE TRICHOTOMY

Rediscovering a Sacred Synergy

By Terran Williams

This book is part of the Missional Potency series.

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This particular book does not necessarily reflect the view of all leaders in Common Ground. It has been written by Terran Williams, who has served as a pastor, congregational leader, teaching team leader, and missional potency champion during his 20 years in the church.

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Introduction: A False Trichotomy

One of my sons is a natural-born competitor. Through his eyes, every normal activity is a race to the finish. He's the first to get dressed every morning, the first to finish his breakfast and the very last to let go of the invisible "score card" we all tend to keep in our heads at times. Although we've told him winning isn't everything about a thousand times, I'm still not sure he buys it. A few years ago, I remember him crawling onto my lap and asking me if I loved him.

"Of course!" I replied.

"But do you love me the most?"

I held him tightly. This small boy, whom I love with all of my heart, and yet no more than any of his precious siblings. Each one, so different to the others, and yet all of them, equally and fiercely loved. Still holding him to my chest, I did my best to explain how some things were never meant to be pitted against one another, that not everything in life is a race and not everyone is a competitor.

"Your brothers and sister are not your rivals, my boy. They are your greatest allies. Here to sharpen you, love you, be loved back by you and help you to become all you are meant to become."

This is not only true of siblings is it? There are many things in life, and indeed in church life, that we can mistakenly see as being opposed to one another but in actual fact, were always meant to work together for the greater good.

Men vs Women.
The Spirit vs the Word.
Love vs Truth.
Equality vs Ability.
Salvation vs Works.

I don't know about you, but after more than two decades in church leadership, I have been privy to countless debates and conversations on how to do church right. In our genuine desire to honour God and love and serve people well, we circle round the same questions again and again...

- In our Sunday meetings, are we meant to primarily disciple believers or reach new people for Christ?
- Should we try to reach more people for Christ by getting them to come to church services or by sending our people out to them during the week? 'What's more important – 'come and see' or 'go and tell'?
- Are we making true disciples through all our church activities? What does genuine discipleship really look like in our context today?

- How can we best serve and send our people out on daily mission and how can we collectively better reach people for Christ and help them cross the line of faith?

In the worst forms of these conversations, we pick one of these aspects and pit it against the others. Choosing what we see to be the most important aspect in our way of doing church, we contend for why it is superior or more biblical.

As I have reflected on hundreds of these conversations and debates, I have come to believe that we can tend toward a false trichotomy in our ministry philosophy.

A dichotomy is “a division or contrast between two things that are opposed or entirely different.”

While there are very real dichotomies, there are also loads of false dichotomies too –when we wrongly see two things as being in opposition or contradiction to one another, instead of compatible and complementary.

In this same line of thought, a false trichotomy (by my own definition) is when three things are wrongly pitted against each other.

In my experience, there are three aspects of ministry that can at times appear to be in opposition to one another, but were in fact always meant to complement and strengthen one another:

Discipleship. Mission. Magnetism.

My heartfelt prayer as you read further is that your current focus and ministry passion would in no way be diminished or diluted, but that you would see that when these aspects are seen as allies rather than rivals, everybody wins.

To echo what I said to my competitive son,

“Discipleship, mission and magnetism are not rival church focuses. They are each other’s greatest allies. They are meant to sharpen one another and help the church become all she was meant to become.”

A theological and philosophical book.

This is one of the least practical books I have written. I will not show you how to be a church that holds the sacred synergy.

I want to persuade church leaders that this sacred synergy is something we must aim towards, even as each leadership team finds their own way of doing this. I have also written this to help church leadership teams agree on the importance of being a church that does all three. By laying down the biblical and philosophical arguments for the synergy, church leaders can read this

book together and decide whether they can agree with it as the unmovable starting point for the way they do church.

As a church leader I know how hard it is to build something when one is unsure about the foundations, or when various leaders on a team have differing ideas about the foundational thinking behind what we're trying to do.

This book is my humble effort to (hopefully) help churches agree at the most foundational level of building a church.

PART 1:

A Biblical Basis for the Triple Priorities of the Church

Chapter 1: The Triple Threat

We may differ on thousands of smaller doctrines, but on the whole, all church leaders tend to be unified around our common mandate. Issued by the resurrected Lord himself, we've been charged to go and make disciples. To baptize them in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and to teach them to obey everything he has commanded. An impossible task, if it weren't for the bookend promises on either side of this instruction – that all authority on heaven and earth has been given to Christ, and relief upon relief, that it is this very Christ that will be with us as we fulfill this command, always, even to the very end. (Matthew 28:18-20)

Inherent in this, the greatest of all commissions, I see all three of the often contested aspects of church ministry focus:

Discipleship. Mission. Magnetism.

The instruction to “make disciples” and to “teach them to obey everything I have commanded” (v19) points to a non-negotiable church focus on discipleship.

That instruction is preceded by the command to “Go.” This two-letter nuclear missile of a word makes it clear how outward-focused mission is essential to this commission.

And perhaps least obvious of the three, I see magnetism (the attractional drawing power of the church) in the fact that the community gathers around the Magnetic Lord to whom all authority has been give, the one to whom all nations will stream.

To further clarify and define these three aspects of church focus:

Discipleship refers to our efforts to deepen our people in their walk with Christ.

Mission implies the daily priority every follower of Jesus, as the church scattered, has to spiritually engage people outside of the spiritual community and in the time gaps between its meetings.

Magnetic attraction (or magnetism) concerns making our weekly meetings great places to bring our unchurched friends to.

Let's get scientific

To borrow from scientific terms to better illustrate these three aspects of our mandate, I'd like to suggest that our discipleship should be catalytic; our mission, centrifugal; and our magnetism, centripetal.

Catalytic Discipleship: A catalyst is an event or thing that causes change. Similarly, the church should continually spark and aid in the spiritual transformation, or change, of its members, toward ever-deepening Christlikeness.

Centrifugal Mission: This kind of force pushes something outwards from a centre, such as the rays of the sun, or a twirling child whose feet lift from the ground as her parent holds her arms and spins around. Like rays emanating from the sun, so our churches should be places that radiate Christ-followers out of our gathered moments, charged and equipped to live outward-focused lives of daily mission.

Centripetal Magnetism: This describes the gravitational force that pulls something inwards toward a centre. Like the inextricable and undeniable pull of gravity, with Christ's assurance that he is with us and rules over all, surely our churches should expect non-believers to be drawn to our communities that gather in his name? In anticipation and love for these seekers, surely we should strive to create magnetic, evangelistically potent environments to which church members can bring their unbelieving friends and in which, unbelievers can encounter him and be saved.

Even the winner loses

In the last decade, I have not only been in hours and hours of conversation around these three aspects of church ministry, I've also read lots of books written by innovative church leaders on the subjects. By and large, I've found they tend to emphasize one over the others.

There are churches that are mainly about discipleship. "As long as we're forming our people into ever-increasing levels of Christlikeness, we're succeeding."

There are churches that are mainly about mission. "As long as our people are living servant-hearted, faith-sharing, culture-engaging lives, we're succeeding."

There are churches that are mainly about magnetic attraction. "As long as unchurched people love to attend our Sunday meetings, and we can point to the numerical growth and many baptisms that have resulted from this approach, we're succeeding."

Very often, these authors will actually pit one value against the other. Most often, the discipleship churches or the mission churches will have a go at the so-called 'attractional church'.

It's subtle, but in essence many say, "If we try to attract unchurched people, we will not be able to really disciple our people. All we'll be doing is creating

attenders not disciples. And besides,” they will rightly argue, “The purpose of evangelism is not merely to make a convert but a person on the path to fully devoted discipleship.”

Others say, “We shouldn’t try to attract unchurched people or do evangelism in our church programs and meetings, rather, we should equip our people to live missionally out there.”

The problem with all of these arguments is that when we pit values against one another and make them compete, there is always going to be a loser. In fact everybody loses, because, as I will elaborate on later in this book, the best examples of these values in action only happen in the presence of the other equally important counterpart values.

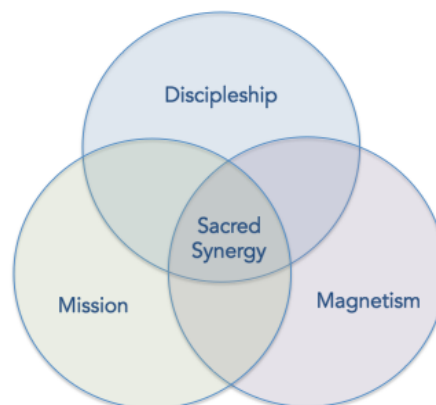
In this book I want to persuade you that when you put one above the rest, and call the others (however subtly) less biblical or important, and your church and city will be poorer for it.

We can (we must) have our cake and eat it too

I believe you can and should aim for deep discipleship and missional sharpness and ever-more magnetic meetings. You really can have the cake and eat it too. This book is not only my articulation of all three of these essential priorities, it’s also my journey toward discovering why we must fight for all three’s presence in our churches.

As illustrated in the diagram below, I want to suggest that we should aim for the middle area where all three priorities overlap.

In this book, I’ll start by laying out a strong biblical case for each of these three to be top priorities in your church. Then, I’ll go on to show you how over-emphasizing any one of these aspects at the expense of the others will weaken your church, distort your focus and frustrate your overall effectiveness. And finally, we’ll look at the exponential power of church life lived in the intersection – where sacred synergy is found.



Chapter 2: The Biblical Priority of Centripetal Magnetism

Let me begin by restating my definition of Centripetal Magnetism:

Centripetal force pulls something inwards toward a centre, like gravity. Centripetal Magnetism refers to the value of creating attractional, evangelistically potent environments to which Christ-followers can invite their unbelieving friends and in which, unbelievers can find themselves drawn closer to Christ.

This is often decried as an outdated value – this idea that church events and environments should in any way be focused on attracting unbelievers. Rather, critics will argue, we are to leave the “centrifugal drawing” to the Holy Spirit alone, and trust that any unbelievers in our midst will be sufficiently convicted without our added efforts. I agree whole-heartedly that there are excesses in the seeker-sensitive movement, but I also believe that many are in danger of an over-correction... throwing the magnetic baby out with the seeker-sensitive water as it were.

In this section, I won't explore the priority of evangelism in general. I'll assume we're all more or less agreed that sharing the gospel and trusting for more people to come to know Christ is an imperative we all hold dear. I have written a short book on the subject, called 'Motivated for Mission' in which I explore 12 Scriptural reasons to join Jesus in seeking and saving the lost:

1. The wonder of salvation.
2. The compassion of Jesus.
3. The mission of Jesus.
4. The worthiness of Jesus.
5. The call to discipleship.
6. The overflowing love in the Trinity.
7. The opportunity of the harvest.
8. The possibility of the catch.
9. The sheer joy of it.
10. The kingdom of God
11. The promise of the Spirit.
12. The command of Christ.

In this book however, I will not go over that same material. Instead, I will specifically look closer at evangelism that is attractional in nature. These are events and/or environments where one of the intended purposes is to attract and evangelize non-Christians.

Centripetal magnetism (aka attractional church) is a bit like marmite in the church world, isn't it? You either love it or hate it. A lot of people don't only hate it – they'd liken it to a false gospel - an abhorrent modernday heresy if you were. But if you're particularly averse to any mention of attractional

thinking in your church, might it be possible you're in danger of over-correcting the excesses of a former era?

After all, a cursory look at the early church's gatherings suggest that it was a major method of evangelism. In every instance, the early church's regular gatherings were intended to be places and spaces where unbelieving seekers were not only to be expected, but welcomed and accommodated too.

This implies that there must have been a level of magnetism to these gatherings to get unbelievers there in the first place. As we'll explore below, Paul goes further to even implore church leaders to give careful thought to the non-believers in their midst. He suggests that they should give some pre-thought to what these people will experience when they do come, and to adjust the way they do their meetings accordingly.

Surely, this injunction still holds for us in the 21st century?

Here are more biblical reasons we should assume and plan for the presence of not-yet-followers of Jesus in our meetings:

1. The Old Testament: Outsiders are welcomed into the people of God.

Tim Keller wrote an excellent article on "Evangelistic Worship" ¹ in which he draws on sample Old Testament texts to make the argument that worship should be done in front of people who don't yet know God:

"God commanded Israel to invite the nations to join in declaring his glory. Zion is to be the center of world-winning worship (Isa 2:2-4; 56:6-8). "The name of the Lord will be declared in Zion, and his praise in Jerusalem when the peoples and the kingdoms assemble to worship the Lord" (Ps 102:18). Psalm 105 is a direct command to believers to engage in evangelistic worship. The psalmist challenges them to "make known among the nations what [God] has done" (v1). How? "Sing to him, sing praise to him; tell of all his wonderful acts" (v2). Thus believers are continually told to sing and praise God before the unbelieving nations. (See also Psalm 47:1; 100:1-5.) God is to be praised before all the nations, and as he is praised by his people, the nations are summoned and called to join in song."

Tim Keller then connects these Old Testament insights to the church of Jesus...

Peter tells a Gentile church, "But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light" (1 Peter 2:9). This shows us that the church is challenged to the same witness that Israel was called to—evangelistic worship.

A key difference: in the Old Testament, the center of world-winning worship was Mt. Zion; but now, wherever we worship Jesus in spirit and in truth (John 4:21–26), we have come to the heavenly Zion (Heb 12:18–24). In other words, the risen Lord now sends his people out singing his praises in mission, calling the nations to join both saints and angels in heavenly doxology. Jesus himself stands in the midst of the re-deemed and leads us in the singing of God's praises (Heb 2:12), even as God stands over his redeemed and sings over us in joy (Zeph 2:17).

The Old Testament also details some outsiders who are 'gathered' into the people of God and, so doing, come to know God too. For example, Isaiah 56:6-8 speaks of God's plan to gather and graciously include people who previously have been excluded from God's people:

"Let no foreigner who is bound to the Lord say, 'The Lord will surely exclude me from his people.' ... Those foreigners who bind themselves to the Lord... these I will bring to my holy mountain and give them joy in my house of prayer... my house will be called a house of prayer for all nations. The Sovereign Lord declares— he who gathers the exiles of Israel: I will gather still others to them besides those already gathered."

Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, a Midianite priest, is an example of a foreigner who was gathered by God into those who had already been gathered. He comes to faith by being invited into the people of God, where he hears the redemptive story that created that people.

In Exodus 18:8-12, Moses welcomes Jethro...

Moses told his father-in-law about everything the Lord had done to Pharaoh and the Egyptians for Israel's sake and about all the hardships they had met along the way and how the Lord had saved them. Jethro was delighted to hear about all the good things the Lord had done. "Praise be to the Lord," he said, "Now I know that the Lord is greater than all other gods, for he did this to those who had treated Israel arrogantly."

As a token of his conversion:

"He brought a burnt offering and other sacrifices to God, and Aaron came with all the elders of Israel to eat a meal with Moses' father-in-law in the presence of God."

Here we have someone who is welcomed into the midst of God's people by a relative. Upon hearing about God's goodness to them, and seeing for himself the evidence of God's grace at work for and in a community, he believes and is welcomed into the faith community through a symbolic meal of fellowship. That's salvation through magnetism.

2. The Gospels: Jesus draws and ministers to crowds.

A major part of Jesus' ministry was to gather crowds around him, to whom he would minister in word and power. This serves a precursor churches where people of all stages of life and faith would gather around the preaching and presence of Jesus in the gathered church.

In some literature that attacks the so-called 'attractional church' there is a broad condemnation on ministry to large crowds of uncommitted people. Rightly pointing to Jesus' investment in the disciples, they wrongly conclude that church meetings are only for disciples. Jesus' major emphasis on ministry to crowds is enough to put a question mark on that conclusion.

In Mark's Gospel, for example, wonder-filled, curious and pressing crowds gather around Jesus. They gather around his healing touch, his amazing teaching, his liberating power. They are farmers and fishermen, tax collectors and prostitutes, centurions and children, men and women, mainly Jews but also a growing number of Gentiles. Not once or twice but chapter after chapter. Some of them become his disciples, but many don't. Certainly Jesus has times when he hones in on his disciples in isolation from the crowds. But even this separation from the crowd is his attempt to raise up leaders who will be able to minister to the crowds (Mark 3:13-14). Nonetheless his ministry to crowds is a central part of his ministry:

- 'The whole town gathered at the door, and Jesus healed many who had various diseases. He also drove out many demons' (Mark 1:33-34)
- 'Since they could not get him to Jesus because of the crowd' (Mark 2:4)
- 'Once again Jesus went out beside the lake. A large crowd came to him, and he began to teach them' (Mark 2:13)
- 'Jesus withdrew with his disciples to the lake, and a large crowd from Galilee followed.' (Mark 3:7)
- 'Then Jesus entered a house, and again a crowd gathered' (Mark 3:20)
- 'A crowd was sitting around Jesus, and they told him, "Your mother and brothers are outside looking for you." (Mark 3:32)
- 'Again Jesus began to teach by the lake. The crowd that gathered around him was so large that he got into a boat and sat in it out on the lake, while all the people were along the shore at the water's edge.' (Mark 4:1)
- 'Leaving the crowd behind, they took him along, just as he was, in the boat' (Mark 4:36).
- 'When Jesus had again crossed over by boat to the other side of the lake, a large crowd gathered around him while he was by the lake' (Mark 5:21).
- 'When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them' (Mark 6:34).
- 'Immediately Jesus made his disciples get into the boat and go on ahead of him to Bethsaida, while he dismissed the crowd' (Mark 6:45).

- ‘Again Jesus called the crowd to him and said, "Listen to me, everyone, and understand this’ (Mark 7:14).
- ‘During those days another large crowd gathered. Since they had nothing to eat, Jesus called his disciples to him and said, "I have compassion for these people.” (Mark 8:1-2)
- ‘Then he called the crowd to him along with his disciples and said: "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.” (Mark 8:34)
- ‘When they came to the other disciples, they saw a large crowd around them’ (Mark 9:14).
- ‘Jesus then left that place and went into the region of Judea and across the Jordan. Again crowds of people came to him, and as was his custom, he taught them’ (Mark 10:1).
- ‘The whole crowd was amazed at his teaching’ (Mark 11:18)
- ‘The large crowd listened to him with delight’ (Mark 12:37).

Jesus loved the crowds who gathered around him, precisely because he saw the people in the crowd. Jesus does not minister to a faceless crowds. In Mark’s Gospel, time and again, we’re told of how Jesus hones in on one individual in the crowd: a paralyzed man who takes up his mat in front of a crowd, after dropping in on Jesus from a rent ceiling (Mark 2:1-12), the woman with the issue of blood who sneaks up to him in the crowd, (Mark 5:21-30), a deaf man whom Jesus takes away from the crowd to minister to (Mark 7:31-35), and a blind man whose first sight is of Jesus (Mark 10:46-52). Jesus loved the crowd because he loved individuals. He loved a crowd of 350 people 350 times more than he loved just one person.

Can you see it? Jesus drew crowds around him. They were not all his disciples. Many of them became his disciples. This is a precursor to the magnetic dimension of churches who would later gather around Jesus’ invisible presence ready to receive his Word and touch, where ‘crowds’ joined in the throng – in fact we see this happening in the very first church meeting on the day of Pentecost...

3. The book of Acts: unbelievers are included in Christian gatherings.

Continuing the gathering work of Jesus, the first revival in the Christian church happens on the Day of Pentecost in Acts 2. Jesus is not present not in body but in Spirit. Yet the continuity from his ministry to the crowds in Mark’s Gospel to what happens on this day is very evident.

A group of 120 praying disciples are squeezed into an upper room, but when the Spirit came upon them in power, their gathering spilled outdoors, into a far more accessible arena, where ‘Jews from every nation under heaven’ (v5) heard the commotion and joined in the meeting. They are ‘a crowd who came together in bewilderment, because each one heard their own language being spoken (v6). They all hear the nascent church ‘declaring the wonders of God in (their) own tongues’ (v11). Just then, Peter stood up and preached the

Gospel and 1000s responded, crossing the line of faith and causing 120 people to blossom into 3,120 overnight.

We've heard this story so many times before, but consider it afresh through the lens of a centripetal, centrifugal and catalytic church focus... Which one was this? This is magnetism at its best. The 3,000 people that were added that day were drawn in to something that they found compelling and comprehensible. The church did not go out to them – they gathered to the church. Once there, the Holy Spirit convicted their hearts. The message of the gospel cut straight through their objections, doubts and fears and got right to their hearts.

Not only occurring on Pentecost, centripetal evangelism continues into the early months and years of the Jerusalem church as they met in larger meetings as well as homes. 'And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved' (v47).

It's an often-overlooked factor of the early church, but for unbelievers to be added daily, they must have been invited to belong before they believed. How else would they have found themselves in the very places their conversions could take place? It's as they were invited into Christian gatherings (before they themselves became Christians) that they moved toward faith.

4. Paul: It was expected that non-Christians would be present in meetings.

There are very few chapters in the New Testament which give us an inside view of the early church's worship gatherings. 1 Corinthians 14 is one of them. Here we see Paul's pressing concern that believers be edified, strengthened and comforted. But also we see his concern for the unbeliever in their midst.

Paul expects unbelievers to be in their midst, and is concerned that the meeting might miss the opportunity to intelligibly, effectively and evangelistically engage them (v23). He pushes the church to even revise the use of their spiritual gifts in the hope that an unbeliever "will be convinced by all that he is a sinner" (v 24). He hopes that they experience the convicting, converting power of the Spirit (in the meeting itself) so that they will end up in worship to God, exclaiming, "God is really among you"(v25).

This attempt to remove needless obstacles to outsiders believing the gospel is not Paul's idea. He gets it from James.

Responding to the many non-Jewish outsiders who were coming into church gatherings, early church leaders held their first Council (Acts 15). James quotes an Old Testament prophecy to show that God had always planned to add to the people of God "the rest of mankind" who will then be able "to seek the Lord" (v17).

Since God is clearly drawing outsiders to the gospel (v17), it is the responsibility of churches to “not make it difficult for the Gentiles who are turning to God.” Here we have a sample of people who are trying to join the church of Jesus. James is urging churches to open their doors wide.

I believe with all of my heart that from that day to this day, and until the day that Jesus returns, churches are bound to follow this counsel: to remove all cultural and practical barriers they can to help people join in the people of God, first as those who attend and explore, then as those who believe and commit.

Does this mean regularly re-evaluating our context and own church culture to see what unhelpful and ultimately unnecessary extra-biblical peanut butter we may be making unbelieving seekers swim through before they can get to Christ? Absolutely. Does this mean re-evaluating our convictions and the biblical truths we hold to? Absolutely not. These two are blessedly two very different things.

Chapter 3: The Biblical Priority of Centrifugal Mission

If centripetal magnetism focuses on reaching unchurched people who come to our Christian gatherings, centrifugal mission emphasizes how we (as Christ followers) go to our worlds: taking the life, love and message of Christ to people who do not yet know him and do not attend our meetings.

Why is centrifugal mission so important?

1. The Old Testament: God sends his people out on mission.

On the whole, the Old Testament presents a more centripetal (inwards pulling) vision of the nations being gathered as the people of God in Zion.

But even in the Old Testament, there are samples of God's missional heart for people to go out with the message:

There's Abraham. Abraham is the father of the faith. Every subsequent believer walks in the footsteps of his faith (Romans 4:12). His life of faith in God sets the direction of our life of faith. It has profound implications for us then that the very first word God speaks to him (and us) is the word "Go" (Gen12:1). He is commanded to leave his country, his people, his father's household and go to the land God will show him. Wherever he goes, he will "be a blessing" (v2). In fact, correlating with this readiness to go to where God leads, he (and we) can expect that "all peoples on earth will be blessed" (v3). Though the Israelites failed to fully rise to this vocation, ultimately the sentness and blessing-potency of Abraham converges and culminates in Christ and in those who are in him (Gal 3:9,14).

There's Daniel and those in exile. During the exile, Daniel and many Israelies are forcefully removed from their homeland and planted in the midst of a pagan empire. His remarkable integrity, tenacious courage, diligent stewardship of God-given gifts and his declarations of the goodness and sovereignty of God enable him to faithfully serve and powerfully witness to several Emperors across two empires – both Babylonian and Persian. Elsewhere in the world at a similar time, the prophet Jeremiah prophesies to the exiles that they should live missionally toward their pagan neighbours – sending down their roots into the neighbourhood, even while they maintain their distinctness of faith and godliness. They are to prayerfully and practically seek the well-being and prosperity of the godless city they live in (Jer 29:5-7).

There's Jonah. This is a story of a man who would rather do anything than love and preach to the wicked people that God sends him to (Jonah 1). God refuses to take no for an answer (Jonah 2), and uses the reluctant prophet to bring a revival to the nation of Ninevah (Jonah 3). Not happy to merely accept Jonah's outward missional obedience, God goes the distance to reveal and implant his missional heart into Jonah (Jonah 4).

2. The Gospels: Jesus does not wait for people to come, he goes to them in a lifestyle of mission.

We know what God is like primarily by looking at Jesus who is ‘the exact representation of God’ (Hebrews 1:3). A close look at the Son who is the Window into the character and intention of the Father reveals a stunning truth – God is missional. This is one reason that theologians speak of the *Missio Dei* (God’s own mission). God has mission not only as an activity but as an attribute. Mission is not just what he does. It is who he is. Let’s see the missional heart of God pulsating through his Son in the Gospels:

Jesus embodied a servant-approach to outreach. He served people wherever he was. Few places reveal this more than Jesus’ commentary on his own life, as well as the pathway of mission he calls his followers to, in Mark 10. There he reveals that he as the Son of Man “came not to be served, but to serve others” (v45). We learn that our entire approach to influence and leadership should be pervaded by a heart to serve, in contrast with our culture’s tendency to dominate, control or manipulate others (v42-43). After all, true greatness is measured by service (v43), God rewards us for the price we pay in service (v38), and we have his example as our inspiration – an example of him laying down everything, even his life for the good of the world (v45). In short, Christ left his sceptre in heaven, and chose instead to carry a yoke around his neck. He calls us to share in that same yoke (Matt 11:28-29).

Jesus defined our discipleship in his kingdom with missional metaphors. Jesus said we the church are salt and light (5:13-16). This requires that we infiltrate the tasteless, unsavoury culture we live in (5:13-14) as well as go to where the darkness is (5:15-16). Like yeast, we are to get into our culture so that we can influence it – pervading it with grace, blessing, the kingdom (Matt 13:33). As kingdom subjects and conduits we are ‘like a net that’s let down into the lake and has caught all kinds of fish (13:47).

Jesus modelled a lifestyle of mission. Immediately after taking the time to form a missional friendship with Zacheus (to whom he brings salvation) and on his way to Jerusalem (where he knows he will die to usher in salvation life for multitudes) Jesus says of himself, “The Son of Man came to seek and to save that which was lost” (Luke 19:10). Commenting on the vision-restoring work he had just done for a man blind from birth (John 9:6-7) as well as the saving work he did for the same man a while later (John 9:35-38), Jesus says of himself, “I have come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly” (Jn 10:10).

Jesus personally engaged people in spiritual conversations. Not all of us followers of Jesus can and should preach in public gatherings. But we all can do the more informal, conversational kind of mission that Jesus so often did. In John’s Gospel alone, think of his many conversations: with semi-intoxicated people at a wedding (2:1-11), with a prominent religious leader (3:1-15), with a

hurting woman at a well (4:4-29), with a desperate dad (4:46-50), with a paralytic man (5:1-9), with two broken-hearted sisters (11:17-28), and with a cowardly ruler and skeptic (18:28-38). Jesus was the master at engaging individuals, where he would draw them into a spiritual conversations!

Jesus crossed all kinds of social barriers. He modeled a radical approach of accessibility and inclusivity. The religious leaders of his day hated him for it – this friend of sinners and tax collectors could surely not be as holy as he seemed, they whispered amongst themselves. Yet, though Jesus never sinned, sinners *loved* to be with him. Though he never shied away from sharing hard, inconvenient truths, it was borne out of such genuine love, that all kinds of unlikely converts felt their usual defenses slip away in his presence. Young and old, men and women, rich and poor, those ethnically like him and those who were not, religious and irreligious, the pious and the promiscuous, the radical zealots and the conservatives – our Redeemer walked alongside all of them. In many instances not because they came to him, but because he went to them. He was ready to cross over social, ethnic, cultural and religious boundaries, all in the name of love.

Jesus flexed his relational range. Read the Gospels, and you'll see Jesus was always mixing it up, more comfortable with diversity than homogeneity. Let's start with just his selection of his inner circle. There's blue collar fishermen (Mark 1:16-20), a sophisticated tax collector (2:13-14), a Zealot who supported violence against the occupying Rome (Luke 6:15), and some women who had lived such a checkered past that they'd picked up some demons for the ride (Luke 8:1-3).

Or think of who Jesus ate with: he socially gravitated to all kinds of people, hanging out with them, asking them lots of questions, enjoying their company and eating with them. Luke records Jesus socializing with tax collectors who were among the most hated people in Israel (5:27-32), a self-righteous religious leader as well as a promiscuous woman who (scandalously) was his favoured person on this occasion (7:36-5), his best friends Lazarus, Martha and Mary whom he praised for joining in the conversation instead of slaving in the kitchen (10:38-42). There were lots of other meals too, the consummate one being the last supper where he included a traitor in his circle of communion (22:14-38).

Or think of John chapter 3 and 4. There we see perhaps the widest range of his relational flex. Consider his back to back interactions with Nicodemus (John 3) and the Samaritan woman (John 4). Nicodemus was a Jew, a man, rich, socially respected, politically elite and morally upright. In radical contrast, the Samaritan was not a Jew, a female, poor, socially rejected, politically powerless and morally degraded. Yet Jesus relates to both by flexing his relational range, by seeing each person as an individual deserving of his attention.

My point is that anyone who follows Jesus must prioritise a widening of their relational range, actively looking to love and engage with people who are very

different to them. This is as much for our own hearts and personal growth as it is for the people we engage with.

Jesus is the Sent One who sends us. In John's Gospel, Jesus uses the Greek verb 'pempain' to refer to 'the Father who sent me' twenty-four times. It's a word that focuses on the one doing the sending, namely the Father. In another 17 passages, the verb 'apostellein' is used to speak of Jesus as the 'Sent one' – a word that focuses on the one being sent. Jesus lives his life with a laser focused sense of being sent, of being on mission. This mission includes his incarnation, his daily life of mission while on earth, as well as the zenith of his life's work on the cross and in the resurrection.

And here, the cross and resurrection are sandwiched on either side by a startling insight that comes from the mouth of Jesus. The night before he is crucified, before his wide-eyed disciples, he says in prayer to the Father.

"As you sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world" (John 17:18).

Later, on the evening of the day he exits the grave, he again commissions these bewildered disciples with the same words: "As the Father has sent me, so I am sending you" (John 20:21). With these commissioning words, one before the cross and the other after the resurrection, he takes the sentness that had so gripped his heart and defined his entire approach to life, and injects it into the DNA of his followers. The Divine Domino of mission falls upon his disciples.

Jesus' final words are utterly clear. "Go and make disciples" (Matthew 28:19). "Go and preach the gospel to all creation" (Mark 16:15). "And this gospel will be preached in all nations" (Luke 24). "As the Father has sent me, so I am sending you" (John 20:21). "You will be my witnesses... to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8). Of interest, in the the KJV of the Bible, the word "go" is used 1542 times and the word "stay" is used 62 times. We serve a God on the go, moving toward the margins and the masses – and he commands us to do the same.

3. The book of Acts: the church exists for mission like fire exists for burning.

In the book of Acts we realize that it is not that the church has a mission as much as it is the mission having a church.

Acts 1:8 captures the centrifugal nature of mission. In this verse (the backbone verse of Acts in my opinion) Jesus defines the mission as an ever-expanding spread of the gospel, pushed and powered along by the Holy Spirit. It starts in the city of Jerusalem, but then extends outwards to the wider province of Judea, then the neighbouring province of Samaria, then it moves

unstoppably from there towards the ends of the earth. It is centrifugal force defined.

Almost all miracles happen outside of church meetings – which is itself instructive. Quoting at length JD Greear from his book, “Gaining by losing”:

“In the New Testament, the balance of ministry decidedly shifts away from specialized leaders to ordinary people. Paul, in fact, said that God’s primary purpose for church leaders is equipping of the saints for the work of ministry. The saints, he said, do the work of the ministry; pastors and leaders are only there to equip! I tell our church, tongue only slightly in cheek, that according to Paul, when I became a pastor I left the ministry. That means I should not be the first one from whom their neighbors hear the gospel; neither should I be the first one to visit one of our members during a time of suffering. The congregation’s job is not merely to invite unbelievers to hear me preach but also to be the primary means by which God testifies to their friends.”

“Get this. Of the forty miracles recorded in Acts, thirty-nine happened outside the church walls. That’s 97.5 percent! You can safely conclude from this that the main place God wants to manifest his power is outside the confines of the gathered church. Think about how foreign this is to most church members’ thinking though. Ask most church-going Christians to describe a time when they saw or felt the power of God, and they will point to a moment in the sermon or the crescendo during a special time of collective worship. But most of what God wants to do in our society happens outside our church meetings, facilitated by the hands of the church - ordinary people in all walks of life. In Acts, the one place you seem to be unable to find the apostles much is, well, in church! Like Jesus, his disciples went “outside the camp,” taking the power of the gospel into the lost wilderness of the world (Heb. 13:12–13).”²

The persecution that breaks out in Acts 8 is the point at which mission in the early church becomes more centrifugal (going out) than centripetal (drawing in). The first 7 chapters of Acts, and the first few years of the nascent church occur in Jerusalem. It seems they have forgotten the call to “go” to regions beyond Jerusalem, until God, in the wake of the first martyrdom, seems to drive them out of their comfort-zone of a base church in a dominant city. Despite Jesus’ great commission, the apostles seem to be making no plans to spread the gospel beyond the city. Perhaps the centripetal vision of the nations coming to Jerusalem dominate their evangelistic mindset... but all that changes when Stephen is martyred.

“On that day a great persecution broke out against the church in Jerusalem, and all except the apostles were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria” (v1).

No longer waiting for the world to come to them, the church begins to go to the world. The mother church in the mother city (Acts 1-7) finally has daughters in Judea, Samaria and the ends of the world (Acts 8-28).

Forced to run for it, they may have been stripped of security but they were clothed in the gospel.

“Those who had been scattered preached the word wherever they went” (v4).

Before this moment, evangelism seems to have been dominated by the Apostles, and also Steven who was among the Seven (Acts 6:1-7). But as ordinary Christians are scattered, they take the gospel with them wherever they go.

One particularly powerful example of this is Philip, also amongst the Seven, who:

“went down to a city in Samaria and proclaimed the Messiah there. When the crowds heard Philip and saw the signs he performed, they all paid close attention to what he said” (Acts 8:5-6).

A revival breaks out, which warrants Peter and John to come and assist (Acts 8:7-25). Then something fascinating happens. At the height of this revival, God sends an angel to give Philip his next missional assignment.

Now an angel of the Lord said to Philip, “Go south to the road—the desert road—that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza.” So he started out, and on his way he met an Ethiopian eunuch, an important official... This man had gone to Jerusalem to worship, and on his way home was sitting in his chariot reading the Book of Isaiah the prophet (Acts 8:26-28).

The Spirit told Philip, “Go to that chariot and stay near it” (v29). Philip then gets invited into the chariot, they chat around the meaning of Isaiah 53, which points to Jesus the suffering substitute-lamb (v30). A few hours later, the eunuch is baptized by Philip, who is then promptly whisked off by the Holy Spirit on to his next mission (v30-40).

There’s a saying: if you need something done, find a busy person. Perhaps God concurs, as he seems to give a person who already has a track-record of going, yet another person or mission field to go to. I suspect that God wants to break every believer into a readiness to go wherever and whenever God leads.

The book of Acts especially unpacks how the gospel spreads along relational lines.

What do a demon possessed man (Luke 8:39), a greedy swindler named Zacchaeus (Luke 19:9), a tax collector named Matthew (Mark 2:14-15), a

Centurion named Cornelius (Acts 10:2, 24), a businesswoman named Lydia (Acts 16:13-15) and a recently unemployed Philippian jailor (Acts 16:34) have in common? Two things. Each of them came to Christ. Each of them were then instrumental in introducing their oikos, their household, to faith.

Oikos, a Greek word used many times in the book of Acts, refers to the relational network every individual had. In the first century Roman world, it was common for 8-15 people to be part of a household (i.e. oikos).

If the early church is anything to go by, our relational network is our primary mission field. What's more, this pattern endures past the New Testament writings into the church of the second to fourth centuries. Church historians estimate that the church grew during that time at 40% per decade for 300 years in the Roman empire, despite heavy persecution. How did this happen? Not through public evangelists. After the martyrdom of Peter and Paul in AD 64, we know of no public evangelists. It was so dangerous to be a Christian that church deacons sometimes doubled up as bouncers, refusing non-Christian entry into church gatherings for fear that they were informants.

Given this faith-hostile climate, how did the church grow so much? One reason is that people shared the gospel with their oikos, their close relational network. So says sociologist, Rodney in his book, *Cities of God*, which pinpoints the method by which the gospel spread into ancient Europe...

Social networks are the basic mechanism through which conversion takes place... Most conversions are not produced by professional missionaries conveying a new message, but by rank-and-file members who share their faith with their friends and relatives... The principle that conversions spread through social networks is quite consistent with the fact that the earliest followers of Jesus shared many family ties and long-standing associations... Although the very first Christian converts in the West may have been by full-time missionaries, the conversion process soon became self-sustaining as new converts accepted the obligation to spread their faith and did so by missionizing their immediate circle of intimates.³

The enduring insight is that every believer should be on mission to the people in their social network – whether it's people they are related to, live with, live next to, play with, work with or regularly bump into. The same way a fire spreads from one tree to the trees nearest to it, so God's saving work in a life is most likely to spread to those nearest to that person. It's not surprising that about 90% of people who trust in Jesus came to faith fully or partly because of a Christian who knew and loved them.

Related to this point about mission to our oikos, we note how opening our homes to people can be a powerful missional tool. Nothing says, "You are welcome into our lives" like "You are welcome into our home." Michael Green, in his book, *Evangelism in the early church* notes that, "One of the most important methods of spreading the gospel in antiquity was the home."⁴

In an age where most churches have a formal meeting venue, we forget that in the early church the home is where the action was. Whether it was Mary's home in Jerusalem, or Lydia's home in Philippi, Jason's home in Thessalonica, Titius Justus' home in Corinth, or Nympha's home in Laodicea, Priscilla and Aquilla's three consecutive homes in Corinth, Ephesus and Rome, Philip's home in Cenchrea, or Philemon and Apphia's home in Colossae, the missional pioneers of our faith showed us that the most powerful relational and spiritual weapon we have is a home open to those close to us but far from God (Acts 12:12, Acts 16:40, Acts 21:8, Romans 16:3,5, 1 Cor 16:19, Acts 17:5, Acts 18:1-2,7 Philemon 1-2).

It's a simple truth but one that can be overlooked in our busy lives and high-walled homes: the best way to reach people far from God is to bring them as close as possible – which includes inviting them into our homes to share our lives, faith and food with them.

4. Paul: he provides an inspiring example of missional living.

Paul did public evangelism, where he preached to crowds. Like I said earlier, this kind of evangelism is something only a few of us get to do. Encouragingly though, Paul didn't only do public evangelism. He did what every believer is born again to do. He built relationships with all kinds of people. And these relationships became the bridge across which the gospel could effortlessly progress.

He followed Jesus' example in this, and then he instructed us to follow him as he followed Jesus (1 Cor 11:1). At the very least, this reflects the kinds of people he had learnt to relate to as he lived his life on mission with and for Jesus:

“Though I am free and belong to no one, I have made myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible. To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those not having the law I became like one not having the law (though I am not free from God's law but am under Christ's law) so as to win those not having the law. To the weak I became weak, to win the weak.” (1 Cor 9:19-22).

Notice his proclivity and ability to relationally connect with religious people (the Jews), secular people (those not having the law), and poor and marginalized people (the weak).

What about your life? Of all the people you have socialized with in the last year, how many of them were substantially different to you – socio-economically, culturally, age group and stage of life? That question can hurt, I know. But it also creates a chance for God to grow us. There are many people that God wants us to reach that are almost invisible to us at the moment, because it's just far easier to notice, be drawn to and invest our time with people just like us.

Now, I'm not saying it's wrong to relate to people like us. Besides, the most biblically mentioned example of Paul's relationship-enabled converts, Priscilla and Aquila, were Jewish tentmakers – just like Paul was. God uses us to reach people like ourselves, but – as we follow Jesus – we should notice that the Spirit nudges us to grow our relational range, leading us to serve and love people very different to ourselves.

Here's my challenge: the next time you find yourself in a room full of people, very possibly a room where there are a lot of people just like you, look to the margins... to those people who don't necessarily fit in. Then be the first to talk to them, to walk across the room and make them welcome, to bring them into your ever-widening circle.

Chapter 4: The Biblical Priority of Catalytic Discipleship

I am purposely going to keep this section shorter than the previous two, because I'm taking it for granted that we all agree that spiritual maturity is either the supreme goal or one of the most important goals of the Christian life. Another reason for the shortness of this chapter is that this booklet is part of a series on evangelism and mission primarily.

I'm also not going to detail any methods, either ones that Scripture puts forward, nor ones that my church or other churches practice. I simply want to assert that leaders of churches should place a non-negotiable priority on helping the people in the church make progress in becoming closer to and more like Jesus in their everyday lives.

Some of the more widely used Scriptures that inspire this priority include:

Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age' (Jesus in Matt 28:19-20).

We know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters (Paul in Rom 8:28-29).

My dear children, for whom I am again in the pains of childbirth until Christ is formed in you (Paul in Gal 4:19)

So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up ¹until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of people in their deceitful scheming. Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ (Paul in Eph 4:11-15).

Christ is the one we proclaim, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone fully mature in Christ. To this end I strenuously contend with all the energy Christ so powerfully works in me (Col 1:28-29).

Let us move beyond the elementary teachings about Christ and be taken forward to maturity not laying again the foundation of repentance from acts that lead to death, and of faith in God, instruction about baptisms,^[b] the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment. And God permitting, we will do so (Hebrews 6:1-3).

His divine power has given us everything we need for a godly life through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature, having escaped the corruption in the world caused by evil desires. For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; and to godliness, mutual affection; and to mutual affection, love (2 Peter 1:3-7).

All these Scriptures underline that when a non-Christian person crosses the line of faith, they have only just started a journey. The goal of which is to walk closely with Christ, and to make progress toward increasing levels of Christlikeness.

Pertinent to the topic of this book, it is clear that one of the major goals of worship gatherings is the edification of believers. In one of the few passages in the New Testament on what worship gatherings are meant to achieve, Paul lays his cards on the table:

The one who prophesies speaks to people for their strengthening, encouraging and comfort... the one who prophesies edifies the church... The one who prophesies is greater than the one who speaks in tongues, unless someone interprets, so that the church may be edified... If the trumpet does not sound a clear call, who will get ready for battle?... Since you are eager for gifts of the Spirit, try to excel in those that build up the church (1 Cor 14:3-12).

Whatever else worship gatherings need to accomplish, they must not skimp on trying to deepen discipleship and strengthen the faith of Christ-followers.

As church leaders, we should be very thoughtful about doing church in such a way as to catalyze constant progress toward greater levels of maturity in God's people.

PART 2

Sacred Synergy

Having established the biblical imperative to prioritise discipleship, magnetism and mission in our churches, let's now explore how these three values intersect in a kind of sacred synergy.

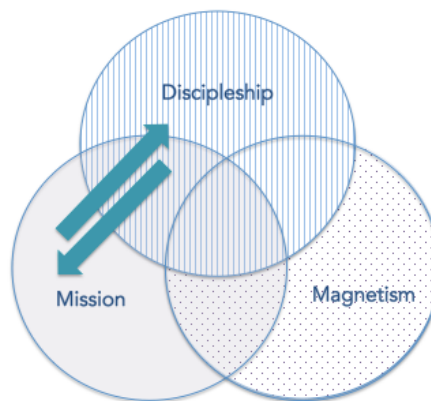
Conversely, a lop-sided or myopic view of these values leads to a bunch of unintended dysfunctions in our churches (as I'll show in this section). But as we're about to discover, it's possible for these three to not simply tolerate one another, but to spark new life in one another.

You see, when mission, magnetism and discipleship cease to compete with one another, when we give up on our winner-takes-all mentalities, we find that the whole truly is much greater than the sum of its parts.

Chapter 5: Centrifugal Mission & Catalytic Discipleship

In this section, I want to demonstrate the way discipleship and mission cannot fully thrive apart from each other.

I'll first look at how I see mission supporting and sparking discipleship, and then show how discipleship supports and strengthens mission. Instead of seeing these two values in opposition to one another, the exact opposite is true. Disciples are forged and driven deeper into their faith not primarily by sitting in Sunday services but also by going out and articulating their faith in their own words, and living it out in their contexts, amongst their mission field. Similarly, if like begets like, then those evangelised by those on mission will tend to settle or shoot for the same level of discipleship they were initially impacted by. This should incentivise us toward growing each disciple, not just growing our churches, lest we end up "a mile wide and an inch deep".



How does mission support and spark discipleship?

1. Jesus put mission at the heart of discipleship.

As wonderful as it is to become like Christ in his character, Jesus calls us to more. He calls us to become like him in his mission. Tony Morgan's "The Unstuck Church" (p83-84) makes this point very well:

When Jesus called the first disciples into ministry, he said, "Come, follow me, and I will show you how to fish for people!" (Matt. 4:19). Let's consider what Jesus didn't say when he summoned those first disciples into ministry. He didn't say, "Come, follow me, and I will teach you spiritual insights!" He didn't say, "Come, follow me, and I will show you how to sing worship songs together!" He didn't say, "Come, follow me, and I will gather you together in a home group!" He didn't say, "Come, follow me, and I will show you how to pray!" He didn't say, "Come, follow me, and I will make you members of the church!"

I think we can all agree that Jesus was fairly insightful, so I think it's interesting that of all the things he could have said, he chose to put the focus of ministry on reaching other people. It's not that any of the other alternatives are wrong. In fact, we can find plenty of examples in the Gospels where Jesus intentionally taught, prayed, and shared fellowship in small groups with his disciples. But I believe it's important to acknowledge that Jesus did all of that for the purpose of getting these disciples on mission.

Generally, that's not how we disciple people in the church today. Rather than putting the focus of ministry on reaching people, we prioritize different activities. Doesn't it make you wonder if there's something significant about the initial vision that Jesus shared with these first disciples? Maybe discipleship is really more about helping people serve God by serving others. Maybe it's more about disciples making disciples.⁵

Something is very wrong with our so-called spiritual depth if it does not overflow into a yearning for, and a greater effectiveness in engaging people far from God.

In the words of Allan Hirsch, in his book, "The Forgotten Ways":

If we're going to impact our world in the name of Jesus, it will be because people like you and me took action in the power of the Spirit. Ever since the mission and ministry of Jesus, God has never stopped calling for a movement of "Little Jesuses" to follow him into the world and unleash the remarkable redemptive genius that lies in the very message we carry. Given the situation of the Church in the West, much will now depend on whether we are willing to break out of a stifling herd instinct and find God again in the context of the advancing kingdom of God.⁶

How does mission spark discipleship? It does so by placing itself in the very definition of what it means to be a disciple.

2. A lifestyle of mission is a major catalyst for ongoing spiritual growth.

The Reveal Survey, a massive 2007 survey of 80,000 Christians across 100s of churches, tested the hypothesis that, *"The more a person far from God participates in church activities, the more likely it is those activities will produce a person who loves God and loves others."*⁷

To their great surprise, this assumption was found to be invalid by the research. To quote the study:

Does increased attendance in ministry programs automatically equate to spiritual growth? To be brutally honest: it does not.

The survey found that the church and its ministries (worship services and small groups for example) seemed to have the most influence at the beginning of a person's spiritual growth process. This approach appears to be necessary in the early stages of a Christian's faith journey. However, as with adolescents who long for independence, the more mature believers do not seem to benefit so much from programmatic hand-holding. To quote the study, "The institution of the church becomes less central to their faith development."

The study divided church attendees into groups according to their level of spiritual formation: those who are "exploring Christianity", those who are "growing in Christ", those who are "close to Christ", and those who are "Christ-centered." The study tried to uncover what catalysts – personal and relational practices – would most likely transition:

- those exploring Christianity to move to the next level of growing in Christ.
- those growing in Christ to become closer to Christ.
- those close in Christ to become fully devoted Christ-centred people.

What it revealed was that attending church and serving in church ministries within the church are particularly helpful in the first and second transitions, but that if a person was to make the final transition to full-throttle discipleship, it is most likely that they would need to:

- pray for non-Christians and seek out opportunities to have spiritual conversations with them.
- be ready to serve those in need on their own - not just through the church.

To conclude, if the study is correct, and given the thoroughness of it I have no reason to doubt it, we can conclude that a missional lifestyle is a basic catalyst to continual discipleship growth, certainly in the more advanced stages of our walk with God.

Of course, we did not need a study to ultimately prove this. Paul prayed for his friend Philemon:

As you share your faith with others, I pray they may come to know all the blessings Christ has given us (Philemon 6).

Similarly he argued that discipleship maturity is not the result of knowing alone, but of a lifestyle of doing the work of God. Our spiritual leaders who preach God's Word to us on Sundays are meant to equip us for works of service, which then lead to us growing into greater maturity and a greater knowledge of Christ (Eph 4:11-13). A church that does not mobilize its people to mission is a church that is undermining its own discipling efforts.

I'd go even further. If we fail to equip people for ministry, we might lose them from the discipleship track altogether. Currently in America, there is a dismaying trend of 18- to 30-year-olds leaving the church in record numbers. One of the reasons for this, based on the studies I have read on this trend, is that too many churches never gave ordinary people the opportunity to be used by God in a powerful way. At best, we asked them to serve in the church, but never equipped them for missional living. Under-engaged young people handed in their swords of the Spirit, helmets of salvation and shields of faith as the church gave them offering plates instead.

We cannot, must not, perpetuate any further passivity in the church. Church is not something we attend in order to receive the ministry of the experts. Church is who we are. It's the ministry we all do throughout the week, especially towards the lost, the last and the least.

How does mission fortify discipleship? It feeds ongoing spiritual progress especially as one advances into higher stages of spiritual maturity.

How does discipleship spark mission?

1. The depth of our knowledge is basic to spiritual conversations with others.

As we grow in our discipleship, we should grow in our understanding of the gospel in particular, and of biblical theology in general. If we fail to grow our people in these things, they will be less empowered to explain their faith to others, to answer common objections, and to clear up common misunderstandings. Conversely, disciples who are growing in their faith and theology should have a growing confidence to share their faith with others.

How does discipleship strengthen mission? Since part of discipleship involves knowledge of the Word, gospel and theology, it resources people to talk meaningfully about their faith to others.

2. The quality of our discipleship gives credibility to our message.

Especially when it comes to spiritually influencing our family members and long-time friends who know us well, any big inconsistencies between our lives and our message will not do. The messenger is the greatest advert for the message, after all.

My earlier quote by Allan Hirsch reminds us that,

*"Ever since the mission and ministry of Jesus, God has never stopped calling for a movement of "Little Jesuses" to follow him into the world."*⁸

We ourselves are not Jesus, but we will struggle to point people towards him if we don't have some of the fragrance of Jesus on our lives.

After all, the gospel is not only the message we carry and share with others. It is the message which transforms us – if we will let it. Our disciplined lives become a living sample of the difference the gospel we share can make in a life. When the gospel spreads through our hearts, minds and way of life, it is more likely to spread through us to others.

How does the gospel transform us? Here are just a few examples:

- As we understand God as Creator, we become more grateful.
- As we realize our sinfulness, we become more humble.
- As we find our identity in Christ, we become more confident.
- As we ponder Jesus' incarnation, we become more accessible.
- As we grasp God's grace, we become more wonder-filled.
- As we delve into Jesus' self-sacrifice, we become more servant-hearted.
- As we are rooted in God's love, we become more loving.
- As we live before the Audience of One, we become integrous.
- As we experience God's relentless pursuit, we become more tenacious.
- As we seek first God's kingdom, we become more unshakeable.

Of course, none of us are going to be perfect, but some progress should be evident in our lives to those close enough to witness our lives.

When Christian people are ungrateful, proud, insecure, aloof, uninspired, self-serving, unloving, duplicitous, irresolute or tempestuous, our actions work against the credibility of the very gospel we claim to be banking our lives on.

Our lives are letters (2 Cor 3:3), billboards if you will, spelling out what we believe before we've even opened our mouths.

How does discipleship spark mission? The gospel-formed quality of the messenger's life gives credibility to our message.

3. We learn the art of spiritual conversations through Christian community first.

In the development of all competencies we need to perfect one level to go to a more challenging one. As Jeremiah states it: "If you have run with footmen and they have tired you out, then how can you compete with horses?" (Jer 12:5)

The same is true with the skill of having great, unforced, not awkward, life-giving spiritual conversations.

One of the great myths of education is that if we hear someone communicate to us compellingly, and we feel we understand what they are saying, that we have learnt that content. The truth is that it is only as we attempt to articulate that content through our own lips, or fingertips as I am doing now, that those truly become ours.

This is one argument for the importance of small groups that talk over the Sunday message. We grow as each of us “speaks the truth in love” (Ephesians 4:15). It’s as we express our faith to others that our faith is meaningfully impressed deeper into us. The ancient Jewish method of teaching children to quote from memory the Torah recognizes this same fact. Our beliefs are only truly ours once they come out of our own mouths. We have not adequately disciplined our people until they can, in their own words, articulate the basic ideas of their faith.

If a lifestyle of mission means that Christ-followers are ready to articulate their faith to outsiders, where do they practice this? The answer: on each other! We learn to communicate the gospel and the reality of God in our lives, not only by hearing other people preach to us, but just as importantly by sharing our own stories as we mutually disciple one another in community. It is here that we learn to verbalize the gospel, and communicate aspects of it to varied life situations. More often than not, a failure to be disciplined in a faith-vocalizing community will lead to a failure to vocalize our faith to others.

How does discipleship spark mission? Discipleship involves commitment to a community where we speak the truth to each other in love. As we learn to vocalize our faith to each other, not only do we own our faith more deeply, we become more adept at explaining it to our friends and family.

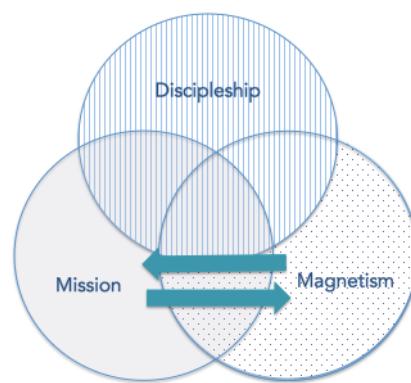
So what is at stake if we fail to find synergy between these two vital values of mission and discipleship? Well, if we prioritize discipleship but don’t emphasize mission, we might enjoy a seeming depth in our theology and purity in our lifestyles, but it will fail to fulfill one basic job description as disciples – to be salt and light to an unsavoury and dark world. And if we sacrifice discipleship for the sake of mission, we may grow in numbers, but new converts will not be significantly challenged and equipped to grow more like Christ – thereby reducing their own joy and their witness in the world. Neither of these options is desirable. We must fight for both mission and discipleship in our churches. We must prioritize both. If we don’t, we run the risk of losing the true essence of both.

Chapter 6: Centrifugal Mission & Centripetal Magnetism

The inward pull of magnetic church vs the radiating outward push to go to the ends of the earth... are these two forces really mutually exclusive?

Not at all.

In this section, we'll explore how the presence of one actually increases the potency of the other. Far from being competing impulses, mission and magnetism are like the two pedals on a bicycle – seemingly going in different directions, but in actual fact, working together to propel the church forward.



How does magnetism spark mission?

1. Seeing people come to faith gives us all more faith.

I've found that the more unchurched people are drawn first into our meetings then into the kingdom, the more we all grow in our faith to reach people. Witnessing prodigals returning home and the lost being found are the highlight moments in church life.

Indeed, there are few moments as celebratory for the entire church as when new people respond to the gospel. Of course, not every convert needs to make such a public declaration of their faith, but when I as a preacher ask everyone to close their eyes and then ask people to respond, it's not just the angels in heaven who rejoice as sinners come home (Luke 15:10). It's the brothers and sisters in that meeting too who join in the celebration as more siblings are added to our forever family.

Sure, it's wonderful that the "99" faithful believers who regularly come to our church are there, but there's another level of wonder and joy when even "1" comes home.

But more than giving us joy, these moments, where people share their salvation story as well as those moments where people take their tentative first steps across the line of faith, also strengthen our faith. When you see what God is doing and has done in these particular lives, you can hold out faith for him to save the friends and family you've been praying for too.

So how does magnetism support mission? Seeing people saved boosts our faith for him to save yet more.

2. Inviting not-yet-believers to vibrant spiritual community works.

When Philip hit an impasse during his spiritual conversation with his skeptical friend Nathaniel, he was not left without options. He could say, "Come and see."

If Acts 2 is anything to go by, people are very likely to come to faith if they are in a setting where God's presence is powerfully felt, where people in times of singing and worship enthusiastically declare the goodness of God in a way they can understand, and where the preacher pointedly but winsomely proclaims the gospel in the power of the Spirit.

There is something powerful about coming to a meeting where volunteers demonstrate the servant-heart of Christ through their helpfulness, where worshippers proclaim their praise to God in their singing, where preachers declare the goodness of God in their message, where the Spirit of God touches hearts and minds with his power.

Of course, not all the 'sowing' was done in these meetings but, in my experience at least, they tend to be really effective places for 'harvest'. It's in a Sunday meeting that the joy and peace I might have shown in my interactions with my guest over the years are vividly portrayed in the faces of other worshippers in the room. It's here that the message I have fumblingly communicated in my few minutes of spiritual conversation with a family member or invited colleague are now communicated with greater clarity, comprehensiveness and anointing.

Understandably, not everyone responds to Christ the first time they come to church gatherings. But if we communicate that people are welcome to come and belong before they believe, people are far more inclined to come back. And in my experience, most people who continue to come, eventually cross the line of faith.

How does magnetism spark mission? As I walk a spiritual journey with my non-Christian friends, I have the chance of inviting them to a church meeting as a major part of my missional arsenal. In a magnetic meeting (where thought has been given to my friend) all the sowing just may give way to a glorious moment of reaping.

3. Your people will practice what you preach.

When preachers preach in a way that engages not only Christians but also non-Christians in every message, the church gets to learn how to do a little of that in their own conversations during the week.

Many people have told me that they became more confident in addressing the objections of their non-Christian friends and finding some effective gospel angles after hearing a compelling example of this preached from upfront.

Of course, if Christ-followers are to live missionally they will need more interactive training than is possible in a Sunday message. But nonetheless, if our messages continually reference the questions and context unbelievers are facing, all the believers listening in are coincidentally being sharpened for missional conversations too.

How does magnetism spark mission? As the preacher skillfully engages non-Christians in their message, they also equip Christians to do the same in their everyday conversations.

How does mission spark magnetism?

I have only one point to make here, but it's so important, I wish it were all in capital letters! Let me answer this question with a question.

1. How else will unchurched people find their way into our magnetic meetings?

Non-Christians generally don't mosey into the church uninvited (although that does happen now and then). Very few unchurched people just come to church on their own – they need to be invited. If the person inviting them is someone who is invested in them relationally and has engaged them in helpful spiritual conversations in the past, they are far more likely to accept that invitation.

Looking back on our journey at Common Ground, for a while we over-prioritised the planning of Sunday meetings to be something that will have evangelism potency, but under-prioritised equipping our people to live missionally. The result: less effectiveness and fruit allround (in the individual growth of disciples and the growth of the church through new converts).

No matter how 'double-impact' your Sunday meetings are – ready to both edify and equip believers as well as evangelize and entice not-yet believers – it will only benefit the people who arrive. In Common Ground we naively believed that if we build it they will come. This became most obvious by a waning amount of people coming to the guest section every week. Our people were happy that the leaders were doing church for them and for people far from God, but they were not doing their part – bringing friends far from God.

I suggest that a church's true missional potency is not measured by how fantastic the Sunday meetings are, but by what percentage of unchurched people are in those meetings on any given Sunday. What this number reveals is the degree to which the Christ-followers in that church are living missionally, or whether they are in a Christian cocoon of myopic discipleship and missional unfaithfulness.

JD Greear makes a similar sobering point in his book, "Gaining by losing":

Increasingly in a post-Christian society, unbelievers will simply not make their way into our churches no matter how attractive we make them. This means that if we don't equip our people to carry the gospel outside of our meetings, events, gatherings, and programs, we are going to lose all audience with them. A few of the flashier mega churches will likely keep fighting for larger pieces of a shrinking pie. There is another alternative; we can grow the pie. But that means teaching our people to engage people outside of their individual churches.⁹

It's only as all followers of Jesus do the patient, persistent work of sowing gospel seeds through friendship and conversation, that there can be a growing number of unchurched people invited and present in our church meetings.

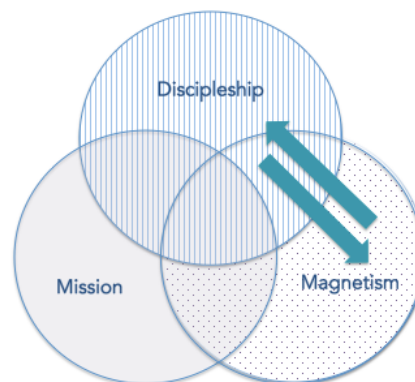
If we fail to simultaneously hold up the values of centrifugal mission and centripetal magnetism, and opt to focus primarily on magnetic meetings rather, we will most likely end up attracting a kind of person we didn't quite bargain for: not unbelievers, but consumer Christians looking to be fed by the church's great teachings and worship services, who enjoy the magnetic energy of the church, but who don't intend to take it with them to transform their networks and neighbourhoods.

So how does mission spark magnetism? The answer is that if people are not doing mission in their relational networks then there will be very few non-Christians to experienced your magnetic meetings.

Chapter 7: Catalytic Discipleship & Centripetal Magnetism

Let's talk about the relationship between reaching greater depths in our faith, and drawing more unchurched people into our meetings. As disparate as these two ideas may seem at first glance, they are profoundly interwoven.

Which is why it's such a pity that these are the two values that are most often pitted against one another. You see, you really can't have one without the other, or at least, it should be very difficult to do so.



How does discipleship spark greater magnetism?

1. A commitment to disciple-making will create more co-harvesters.

Jesus prepared the church he led for the Pentecost harvest, where 3000 people would be magnetically added in a single day. How did he do it? By develop full throttle disciples. We know of his deep work in the three, the twelve, the seventy-two, who eventually became the 120 in the upper room. These workers became the harvesters and disciple-makers of the new converts that God added. Without them, the 3000 could not have come in the front door without soon after walking out the back door.

Preparing these workers was a major ministry focus of Jesus. Over a period of three years he took disciples who move from a readiness to 'come and see' Jesus to a place where they were ready to 'come and die' on mission for Jesus.

In the same way, 'workers' are our most precious commodities. Even outside of Jesus' example, most church leaders (of both small and large churches) realize that the depth of a few is the basis of keeping the many God might add. As numbers swell, we feel acutely our need for more disciple-making leaders and sacrificial volunteers. We realize that our potential to attract, hold and grow people is linked directly to how many fully devoted followers of Jesus we have.

I don't know of a church leader with a growing church who is not begging God for more committed leaders and volunteers. Think about this very practically for a moment. Is it even possible for a church that appeals to unchurched people to function and multiply its efforts without increasing numbers of fully devoted disciples? Who will teach, or pastor, or lead ministries and small groups, or volunteer to park cars, or clean toilets? The efforts a preacher puts into preparing a message tends to be about 3% of the overall human effort that is involved in doing a Sunday meeting that is likely to host guests well, and win them to Christ.

And what of the costs of creating magnetic meetings that draw more unbelieving people in? Church buildings cost money. Staff cost money. But here we hit the hurdle. Who will give the money? Only committed disciples will part with their hard earned cash for the sake of the kingdom!

I would add that, especially in a Post Christian world, we are in danger of losing the ones we already have! Mark Sayers, in his book "Disappearing Church" articulates the powerful and recent cultural forces that are penetrating the mindsets of once-committed Christians in the increasingly Post Christian Western church:

(There is) the disappearance of a mode of church engagement characterized by commitment, resilience, and sacrifice among many Western believers. In its place a new mode of disengaged Christian faith and church interaction is emerging. This new mode is characterized by sporadic engagement, passivity, commitment phobia, and a consumerist framework.¹⁰

We would be utterly foolish if we do anything less than taking on this trend by calling our people in a focused and persistent way to not be squeezed into the mold of the world but rather be renewed in their minds – repledging themselves to doing God's will with commitment, resilience and sacrifice.

I sometimes imagine a church as a swimming pool with a deep and shallow end. My goal as a Christian leader, as I picture it, is to first get people into the pool by becoming Christians. Although some people go straight to the deep end, the majority of us start out in the shallow end. The discipling work of the church community is to progressively move people into ever-deeper levels of commitment to Christ until they are in the deep end. Those in the deep end – those marked by an unreserved love for Christ, and commitment to the lost, the least and the last – become the workers that we have been praying for (Matt 9:37-38).

I must admit to having been very naïve about the fact that our surrounding culture continues to exercise an influence not only on every Christian but even the most committed. What I failed to recognize for a long time was that while I as a church leader have been doing most of my work trying to get people to go deeper and deeper in, many in the deep end have been slowly drifting to

the shallow end. Without these whole-hearted workers, the battle for the lost is lost.

As passionate as we are about getting people in the pool, we must match that passion with keeping those in the deep end in the deep end. Said plainly: our commitment to discipleship must match our commitment to evangelism.

So how does discipleship support greater magnetism? It does so by creating the sacrificial workforce who will do the work of reaching, integrating, discipling and leading the people whom God sends.

2. No matter how magnetic our meetings are, a lack of Christlikeness in Christians is powerfully repelling!

When unchurched people check out a church, they don't only come to explore the gospel. Whether they acknowledge it or not, most are assessing the difference this gospel will make to their lives. They'll listen to our songs and sermons, but do you know what will shout even louder? The lives of the people who profess to love Christ who are sitting alongside them. Only a commitment to radical and real discipleship can help our people be the gospel-adverts of changed lives that they are meant to be.

An example of this is Paul's instruction to Titus in Titus 2:9-10:

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 Saviour attractive.

So how does discipleship support greater magnetism? In the view of an onlooker, the message is no more attractive or credible than its impact and effect on those who already claim to believe it.

3. Magnetic meetings are seeker-sensible not seeker-centred.

Being mindful of unbelievers in our meetings need not come at the expense of exhorting and edifying believers. In fact, the opposite is true.

I earlier explained that when a preacher winsomely engages unbelievers, it is not wasted on believers who learn how to more skillfully engage their unbelieving friends in their daily lives.

And conversely, when a preacher challenges believers to apply the gospel to their daily lives, it is not wasted on unbelievers, who can then clearly see the difference Jesus could make in their lives (should they choose to follow him).

You see, most unchurched people who come along do not expect nor appreciate a special kind of ‘sanitized’ service in their honour – a kind of dumbed-down version of church for beginners. What they want to see is what real Christianity is really all about. They want to ‘listen in’ on our team talks.

Let me quote a 2016 article by Erik Raymond on this very point:

Recently I was talking with a new friend about his church background. I asked him if he went to church. “No,” he said, “I’ve not been to church in quite a while.” As I pushed a bit deeper he told me a number of things that helped me get to know him a bit better, but he also said some things that helped me to see how unbelievers view evangelical churches. This is particularly enlightening because my friend had been to a megachurch in a metropolitan Midwestern city. From the outside looking in this church seems to be reaching all kinds of people. The parking lot is full, they have multiple services and an annual budget in the millions. But my new friend hasn’t been back since.

I asked him why. “The music was a joke,” he said bluntly. “Who sings like that?” At first I was taken back and wondered if it was the doctrinal content that offended him. Preparing to make an argument for biblical singing I had my reply interrupted... as he told me that instead of it being offensive for content it was offensive because it lacked content...

I asked about what else informed his decision to stop going. “The preaching.” He went on to say that the pastor was simply a motivational speaker. He talked about all kinds of things but rarely talked about God. I checked for myself. Sadly, he was right. It grieves me to consider the ministry of a church that says Jesus’s name a lot but rarely preaches Jesus. There is a difference.

As the discussion went on I was able to figure out why he had so thoughtfully engaged with this experience. He went to church looking for something. You might say he was a seeker. In his case, he was truly seeking to learn about God. He wanted to see how Christians worshiped. But notice the painful irony: the church in its effort to be relevant to the unchurched was actually irrelevant to this seeker. They had unwittingly unchurched the church. At the time of his visit my friend wanted answers to some important (and extremely relevant) questions he had. He went to what seemed like the right place—a Christian church with a lot of people. However, what he found was a ecclesiological Potemkin village. This church’s unhealthy quest for relevance led them to a startling place of irrelevance.¹¹

Erik’s point is well made. Years ago, I used to believe that God wanted us to be a church for the unchurched. But the weakness of that term is that it sounds like the church is only for the unchurched. It’s obviously first and foremost for Christians. Although I don’t like the term ‘a church that unchurched people love to attend’ because it sounds consumeristic, it is an

improvement because it suggests that this is just one of the many aspects to this church. I prefer to speak of a church who are called to be a church that empowers followers of Jesus to go full-throttle as well as a church where you're welcome to belong before you believe.

So how does discipleship support greater magnetism? Our emphasis on discipling our Christians with the gospel in the preaching, liturgical and lyrical content is part of what makes us more evangelistically appealing.

When I interviewed some leaders from Holy Trinity Bromptom (of Alpha fame) they told me that preachers are taught to especially lean into the practical application of the gospel to our lives. The rationale? Most unchurched people in this current generation are not seeking after the truth (like they should be) as much as they are seeking after a life that works. When we only proclaim the gospel many unchurched people simply write it off as yet another truth claim but by yet another group of people. But when you also preach the practical difference the gospel makes to your finances and relationships, to the use of your time and body, they lean in – because this is a faith that can try on for size even while the process the truthfulness of the claims.

How does magnetism strengthen discipleship?

Having just made the point that we'd be crazy to try win the lost without pouring our deepest discipling energies into the already-found, I want to unpack how working together to win the lost can be one of the best ways to deepen discipleship.

Perhaps the greatest criticism of churches that try attract non-Christians to their meetings is that they 'water-down' discipleship in the church. This, of course, is a valid danger. But it is not automatic. In fact, the opposite can be true. Trying to draw far-from-God people into our community and meetings can be a great catalyst for spiritual growth...

1. Seeking other's welfare above our own is a mark of true discipleship.

The church is one of the only entities in the world that exists not only for its own members, but for its non-members too. And yet all too often, we forget this – becoming overly attentive to the demands of our members whilst forsaking our call to the absent ones – the silent sea of not-yet-believers we hope to reach.

Churches that proudly declare that they don't hold back from preaching the 'meat' of the Word, seem to have a natural disdain for the young and fragile in faith. When Paul and the author to Hebrews speak about the fact that people who should be ready for 'solid food' are nonetheless only able to ingest 'milk' (1 Cor 3:2 and Heb 5:12), he is talking about disciples that should

already be mature but who are still so self-centred. He was not decrying spiritual newborns and their need for milk.

Here's some meat to chew on (feel free to spit out the bones): There is something terribly immature, selfish and un-Christlike about Christians designing churches and church meetings to meet their own needs – even their advanced needs for spiritual growth. When ought-to-be mature disciples put their needs above the needs of others, when they fail to make the outcasts feel welcomed, or stoop to rid their church of unhelpful jargon and unnecessary practices that only serve to alienate the uninitiated, they are the ones to whom Paul is addressing this diatribe. To withhold milk from babies is neglectful and I believe, will incur God's righteous wrath. Conversely, spiritual 'meat' should not be withheld from the mature either. The idea of 'double-impact' preaching means that in any message, there is some milk for beginners and there is some meat for the more mature.

There are many reasons why non-Christians don't tend to flock into most churches. But at least one of them is the ugly tendency in Christians to treat their church as their own private club. Friends, we must not underestimate the gravitational pull we all experience towards self, not towards others. Since collectives begin to reflect the biases of the composite individuals, churches can all-too-easily become self-orientated too. We begin to focus primarily on our needs, including our needs for spiritual growth.

How does magnetism strengthen discipleship? It does so by getting the church to do something very unselfish – factor in the needs of nonChristians and new Christians in their meetings.

2. Contextualizing is basic to Jesus' salt and light call.

This point takes the previous point even further.

Of course we're not called to capitulate to our culture and conform to the world in terms of our core doctrines and beliefs. But making it difficult for non-Christians to connect to our faith (through our inability or unwillingness to enter into their shoes and reality) is not more spiritual, it's stupid, not Christlike and it's lazy.

It's easy to do church for Christians, especially for those already part of your church. It incurs far less kick-back too. Ask any church leader who's tried to bring about significant changes in the area of magnetism in a church... the complaints from the disgruntled godly come thick and fast. Yet at the heart of these protests are people who believe that this is their church, and so it should be arranged around their preferences, their weird church subculture, their in-house jargon and their worship song preferences. Whilst their point is half-true (they are the church), if we build our meetings around the needs and

preferences of insiders, we might as well give up on significantly reaching outsiders.

Another reason that playing to the cries of the disaffected insiders is a terrible idea is that it cannot be done! Even in small churches, perhaps especially in small churches, it's impossible to please everyone who feels they have a right to decide how things get done.

So what's the solution? Incarnation.

When everyone who calls themselves the church decides to put aside their preferences and walk in the shoes of others, a wonderful opportunity for unselfishness and deeper discipleship arises.

For example, we get to lay aside our preferences about music styles. If we insist on choosing music styles that reflect the styles of music that we enjoyed when we were 20, but now we're 40, we guarantee that any 20-year-old that visits this church is bound to feel like they have walked into a time capsule. What if instead, we lay down our preferences and insist on theologically-sound songs that will appeal to the widest demographic of our city or town? Songs that not only declare the truths of who God is and what he has done for us, but do so in a language that is comprehensible and a style that is more compelling to outsiders?

Or think of hospitality. Churches that hope to reach people far from God in their meetings quickly realize they need to work on being more welcoming. This means removing the "pastors parking only" sign that's closest to the entrance. It means all of us learning how to be truly warm to all kinds of people in the meeting, especially those we do not recognize or look like.

Or think of our attachment to décor and buildings. When we evaluate these things through the eyes of an unchurched person in our culture rather than whether aunty Pat made the lace curtains with love and good intentions, we might come up with many things we need to adjust (hint: remove the lace curtains).

Think of people in different seasons of life. When we think of an unchurched mother and father coming to a meeting with their baby and two-year-old toddler, we find ourselves wondering how we can better look after these people, if only as a gesture of hospitality. When we think about older and possibly more physically frail people coming to our services, we wonder how we can ensure they're well served and made to feel as welcome and as comfortable as possible.

Think of meeting times. Committed Christians tend to prefer earlier meeting times, but few unchurched people would like to wake up early to visit a church (at least in my part of the world).

Think of how we preach. Whilst preaching the “whole counsel of God” means that we must tackle subjects that are unpopular and possibly off-putting to our culture, when we do so in love, we will change not what we preach but how we preach it. We will make an effort to engage these topics in ways that are more likely to bring people along with us, rather than easily leave them behind.

How does magnetism strengthen discipleship? The mere discipline of doing church in a way that thinks of others, not just ourselves, is in and of itself a powerful means of corporate sanctification. Incarnation (entering into the experience of another with the purpose of better understanding and loving them) is not a cop-out, it’s sublimely Christlike.

3. True discipleship is both culture-engaging and counter-cultural.

Culturally freeze framing a group of committed Christians into a holy enclave forever stuck in one particular Christian subculture does not reflect spiritual faithfulness, but rather a failure of discipleship.

We’re meant to be salt in society. This means more than being different to society. It also means engaging with the society we find ourselves in. At times our discipleship to Jesus enhances what we find in the culture. At other times, it contrasts. In short, the culture we live in is the divinely assigned context in which we are meant to be working out our faithfulness to Jesus. Inherent in the call to be salt, is the requirement that we do this important work of contextualization, engaging our ever-evolving cultural context with our unchanging faith. We adopt what can be adopted, reject what must be rejecting, redeem what can be redeemed, and transform what can be transformed.

One of the many advantages of aiming to draw more unchurched people, is that the very attempt to do this forces our church communities to engage the culture as it currently is. Is this hard work? Yes? It is worth it? Absolutely. Very few churches thrive for longer than 50 years, for the simple reason that they lose touch with their surrounding culture. As soon as we freeze our particular approach to ministry and stylistic preferences, at that moment, we begin to decline in our potential to win people to Christ.

One of the values of a church that is committed to host unchurched people in its meetings is the continual work of contextualizing. This means that we must continue to exegete the evolving culture we find ourselves in, so that we speak in the language of the people we hope to reach, adopt negotiable styles of music that are more likely to engage our culture, and communicate the timeless truths of the gospel and Scripture in a way that addresses the mindsets, idols, and questions of our host community. Of course, our convictions are not transient, but the methodologies we use to communicate them are not sacred and should never be seen as such.

So how does magnetism strengthen discipleship? It forces us to contextualize, which is a key ingredient in Jesus' vision of discipleship itself.

4. Magnetism leaves less room for mediocrity.

When it's just the family at home, we let things go a little. The dishes and laundry pile up, things aren't packed away very quickly and there's a general air of 'messiness' that abounds. But when we know guests are coming, we do our best to be at our best –cleaning up and hiding the clutter we didn't have time to deal with properly! The same goes with our Father's house.

Most people who've been part of a church that is not attracting new people over a long period of time may confess to a general sloppiness in how they do things – hosting new people, caring for kids and new mothers, venue upkeep, planning the components of the meeting well; from singing, to preaching and other liturgical components.

But when they're expecting guests, churches naturally begin to move from sloppiness to excellence in how they do things. Why? Because we intuitively understand that sloppiness and mediocrity undermine the confidence of Christians to invite people as well as the appeal that we have on guests who are likely to judge us on their first impressions.

Diligently and thoughtfully doing the best we can with what we have is not inauthentic or counter-faith, it's simply a matter of stewardship. It's a matter of discipleship! We do our best as a means of glorifying the God who has given us these opportunities, gifts and resources. More than that, excellence tends to inspire people.

I am not at all arguing for slickness or professionalism, just doing the best we can with what we have. We need excellence in both our stewardship of gifts and resources as well as excellence in our dependence upon the Spirit. At the end of the day, it's still the message of Christ and him crucified and the power of the Spirit that turns a rebel into a worshipper. No amount (or lack) of polish and professionalism will ever change that. But this does not excuse sloppiness either.

How does magnetism strengthen discipleship? It pushes us toward a greater stewardship of our resources, gifts and people, which is itself a discipleship value.

5. The presence of non-Christians means the gospel message stays ever-present.

A tragic myth that has befallen God's people time and again is the misconception that somehow the gospel is for non-Christians and that

Christians, having banked the gospel, can now go on to loftier truths, leaving the gospel behind at the starting line of our faith journeys.

Of course there is much in the Word of God that goes beyond the gospel truths, but the gospel message is not just the diving board from which we dive into the Christian faith. The gospel is the water itself. And its depths and breadth are unfathomable. We never outgrow our need to be steeped in it. It's not only the power to convert us initially, but to convert us continually toward the goodness and greatness of God. Far from trying to keep it in some church basement, or only bring it out for the seekers, I'm not ashamed of the gospel. For in it, I've found a power that saved me and continues to save me (Rom 1:16).

How does magnetism strengthen discipleship? Keeping magnetism in mind means that regardless of what part of the Bible we preach on, we will always point to how it leads to Jesus Christ – who he is, what he has done and the difference he makes in our lives and world. But this is good not just for unbelievers but also believers. Preaching the gospel every Sunday serves to bring two birds to life with one stone every Sunday. The gospel saves sinners and, at the same time, renews believers.

6. New converts tend to stick with where they know.

I can't point to empirical research on this, but years of reflection on the matter have led me to conclude that wherever people find Christ, that becomes their preferred environment as they venture into the Christian life.

As I reflect on my own conversion, two miracles had to take place. I came to faith during a surf trip organized by a church. As I heard the gospel, and the Spirit of God cut me to the heart, the first miracle occurred – I was saved. From that moment I was committed to coming to every surf camp organized by this group.

But when the guys who organized the surf camp invited me to start coming to church when we got back home, I was not as excited. The surf camp was something I could relate to, but church meetings held no appeal for me. In my case, somehow they managed to get me to come though. Through the power of their persistence, I came back enough times to develop a taste for it. That was the second miracle – me starting to go to church.

I share this story to help us understand the mindset of an unchurched person – we need to trust God for this same double miracle in their lives. They are not only resistant to Christ. They are resistant to Sunday meetings.

I have seen the same with Alpha. Most people who come to faith doing Alpha still remain hesitant to start coming to church. They may have discovered faith in a chairs-facing in, informal and intimate environment where they get to talk.

Church meetings are chairs-facing-forward, more informal environments where you don't get to talk as much.

The problem in both of the above examples (salvation at a surf camp and at Alpha) is that surf camps and Alpha courses come to an end. We may have seen the first miracle taking place, but we are still shy of seeing the second miracle happening. This means that, unless we make special (and unsustainable) efforts, it is going to be very difficult to hold on to that new convert!

However, when a person comes to a few Sunday meetings and then finds Christ in one of them, they tend to take quite easily to the environment and keep coming. Having met Jesus here, they come ready to meet him again and again.

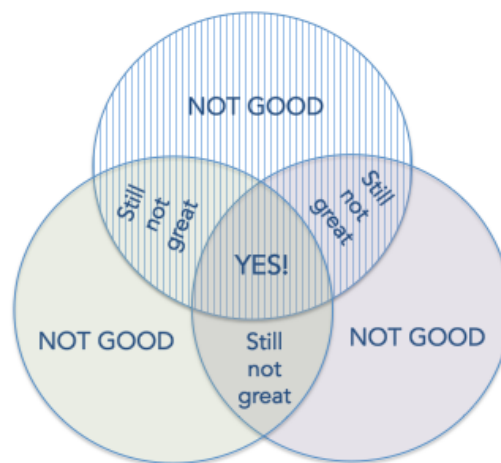
In comparison with Alpha and surf camps, Sunday meetings have one big advantage – they will keep happening once a week until Jesus comes back. Though we need to get new believers to take their faith beyond a weekly meeting, it is still God's will that they never do less than participate in corporate weekly worship (Heb 10:25) – an environment that will keep them connected to Jesus.

How does magnetism strengthen discipleship? It does so by helping new converts start coming to church so they can be discipled. People saved outside of Sunday meetings often do not make the jump into God's ordained meeting for their continued discipling.

Final Thoughts: What's at stake if we don't find synergy?

So far, we've looked at why each one of these three values is a biblical imperative. We've looked at how they spark, strengthen and support each other to ever-new levels of life, health and growth. I'm hoping you're now more inspired to move toward greater synergy in these respects.

But as a final wrap-up (just in case you need a little more convincing), let's consider what we lose when we don't make synergy a value.



If we solely focus on discipleship...

- Our discipleship may go deep theologically, but it will be inherently flawed by a lop-sided focus on us and our spiritual needs, rather than those who have yet to be added to our number.
- Our churches will not grow significantly if mission and magnetism are not valued. And what growth we do experience, will probably come from Christians not new converts.
- These churches will probably be in danger of being left behind culturally, getting stuck in a preferred past era, and losing their relevance in their current context.

If we solely focus on mission...

- As we put all our focus and energy into sending people out, the new converts we win will be less inclined to be brought back into the 'centre'. Many will prefer to live on the outskirts of church life.
- Without the corresponding pull back to the centre, individual missionaries themselves will be in danger of isolation, unchecked heresies, unaccountability and over-burden to meet all the needs of new converts (a strong church community alleviates these pressures).

If we solely focus on magnetism...

- The primary growth may be disaffected Christians from other churches and disconnected non-believers (not through the relational evangelism emphasised by missional values).
- Existing Christians in the church will not be challenged to go deeper in their discipleship and may feel under-fed by the teaching (aimed solely at new converts and seekers).
- We'll be in danger of staying in the shallow-end of doctrine and truth, not preaching the Whole Counsel of God lest we offend.
- Without an emphasis on missional lifestyles, Christians won't be sharing their lives with non-believers and are in danger of living quite insular lives that revolve around church meetings.

If we focus only on mission & discipleship...

- We will be helping to make disciples of Christ who are strong in the 'away game' (being on a mission into their world), but who's 'home game' is not as strong.
- They will build relationships with unbelievers, but most likely, feel the dissonance between these people and the church they are a part of. Inviting them to church will not feel like an easy next step, as when they do invite them (if they do), there is a high likelihood that the lack of thought given to possible seekers in the church will put them off entirely.
- Any new converts gained out there on the mission field will also find it difficult to integrate into the sub-culture of a church who pays no mind to its context.

If we focus only on magnetism & discipleship...

- We will have successfully made disciples who love the church, but who are potentially weak at living missional lives that meaningfully connect with outsiders.
- They will probably spend a lot of time in the church, serving the church, to the detriment of their witness and potency out in the world.
- Unbelievers who are drawn into these churches will thus do so primarily as disconnected individuals. This is better than not coming at all, but is not ideal in terms of integrating them naturally and meaningfully into the life of the church.

If we focus only on mission & magnetism...

- We'll enjoy maximum missional potency at first, but without a corresponding emphasis on discipleship, new converts will fail to grow in their faith and in a lifestyle of godliness.
- In the absence of discipleship, building healthy and sustainable church communities will become increasingly difficult – especially when tough times (in our individual or collective lives) hit.

Mission. Discipleship. Magnetism. None of these are optional extras in the way we do church. Putting an end to the false dichotomy that exists in so many of our ministry philosophies is essential if we are to become all we were destined to become as the body of Christ.

If we fail to do this, we will find that even the value we hold most dear will suffer for it.

The End Game

OK, let me assume you're convinced – we need all three values to really thrive as churches. We need to work to foster deep love and respect for missional lifestyles, drawing magnetism and deepening discipleship.

So are we aiming for a happy medium between the three? No! If you've been in church leadership for any amount of time, I'm sure you'll know that there's no such thing. There is no one-size-fits all approach to keeping these values alive and well, and different churches in different seasons will need to focus more on one than the others. But what we all should feel, all of the time, is a healthy amount of tension between these forces; the catalytic force of discipleship urging us to ever-deeper levels of Christlikeness, the grounding, gravitational pull of magnetism to a centre of spiritual life lived in authentic community and the propelling, radiating push of mission toward a world that is dark and in desperate need of Christ's light and love.

May God give us all wisdom as we chart new paths and plumb new depths in our desire to build up the church. May this triune God who is one and three, help us honour these three – mission, discipleship, magnetism. For the glory of the One whose catalytic life, radiating love and drawing Spirit left his home to bring us home.

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