



# Missional Journal

From the desk of Dave Dunbar

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## Upcoming Events

Eastern Region  
Conference  
Evangelical Theological  
Society

**Friday, March 23, 2007**

8:00-9:00 a.m. registration

9:00 a.m.-6:30 p.m. event

Location: Biblical's campus,  
suburban Philadelphia

[More information](#)

The Gospel and the  
Church that is Emerging

a symposium with

Scot McKnight

and

John Franke

**Saturday, April 21**

8:30 a.m. to noon

Cost: \$10

[Registration limited](#)

Biblical Golf Tournament

**Friday, May 18**

**Lederach Golf Club**

More information coming soon.

Quick Links

[Our website](#)

## Getting a Handle on "Missional"

In 2003 the board of trustees of Biblical Seminary endorsed a new statement of vision and mission. This came as a result of many discussions within the faculty and board regarding the nature of the gospel, the calling of the church, and the shape of theological education. This letter is the **first of a series** of communications designed to help you understand what has happened and to invite you to think with us about these issues.

### *Getting a handle on "missional"*

If there is one concept or theme that is impacting our reflection and teaching at Biblical in a fresh and powerful way, it is summarized in the word "missional." The use of this term in the last decade points to the concern of a growing number of Christian leaders, scholars, and missiologists that the Western church needs to re-conceptualize its understanding of mission(s). Among the more crucial points being raised are these:

- 1) Mission is not primarily what we do to spread the gospel. It is ultimately a divine activity in which the Father sends the Son to be the savior of the world. It is to this mission that Jesus refers when he says to the disciples, "As the Father has sent me, I am sending you." (Jn. 20:21) In his recent article in *Christianity Today* (January 2007, pp. 42-46) Christopher Wright says: ". . . **mission is and always has been God's** before it becomes ours. The whole Bible presents a God of missional activity, from his purposeful, goal-oriented act of Creation to the completion of his cosmic mission in the redemption of the whole of Creation—a new heaven and a new earth" (p. 45).
- 2) The Western church still labors under a conception of mission(s) which sees it as an activity which takes place "over there and far away." Mission is usually still seen as the activity of a minority of the church specially "called" to this task. An attendant assumption is that the culture of America is already "Christian." But to quote Christopher Wright again: ". . . **the rest of the world church sees the West as one of the toughest mission**

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**fields in the world today"** (p. 44). We find ourselves in a similar position to the first Christians: we cannot assume that people know the Christian message, or even that we will be talking about the same thing when we use the word "God."

- 3) So the missional "movement" has begun to ask the challenging question: what are the implications for the church in the West if we begin to take seriously that *our culture* is a mission field and that the whole church (not just a minority in the church) is called to join God's mission?
- 4) **"Missional" is not just another way of talking about evangelism.** That's why Tim Keller, pastor of Redeemer Presbyterian Church in Manhattan, says, "We don't simply need evangelistic churches, but rather 'missional' churches." (Keller's article "The Missional Church" is a good introduction for those of you who are just getting your feet wet. The author is a former professor at Westminster Theological Seminary, and his comments were influential with our board of trustees when we decided to move in this direction. You can access the article on the Redeemer Church website: [www.redeemer2.com/resources/papers/missional.pdf](http://www.redeemer2.com/resources/papers/missional.pdf))

I first joined this conversation about seven years ago when I read the landmark book *Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America* (Darryl Guder, ed., Eerdmans, 1998). **The book impacted me deeply because I felt that the issues it surfaced had extraordinary implications for the life of the church, and also for theological education.**

Since that time the "movement" has grown considerably. Significant voices from a wide spectrum of ecclesiological and theological positions (reformed, baptist, anabaptist, etc) have expanded the conversation in positive ways. If you wish to get more of a handle on what they are saying, you can check out the missional bibliography that is published on our website:

<http://www.biblical.edu/pages/belong/alumni-directory.htm>.

I have written to you because **I want you to understand better what we feel God is calling us to do in training leaders for the 21<sup>st</sup> century.** I also wanted to invite you to explore these crucial questions with us. If this letter or any of the suggested readings spark questions that you would like me to respond to, feel free to e-mail me at [president@biblical.edu](mailto:president@biblical.edu).

Blessing and peace,  
Dave

