



# Missional Journal

From the desk of Dave Dunbar  
President of Biblical Seminary

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## You Respond

I've appreciated the thoughtful responses I've received from my e-mail letters. I'll be sharing some of them with you in this newsletter.

Dear Dave,  
Great job on the missional material. We have been attempting to focus the church in that direction. I actually hand out copies of your missional communiques to our board for training and discussions purposes.

Nathan Tuckey, Pastor  
South Ridge Community Church  
MDiv '94

Hi Dr. Dave,  
I'm a 1977 grad of Biblical presently serving as an Assistant Pastor at Hillside Baptist Church in Pembroke, NH. We're a small church and I am working with the youth. Things are so much different now than when I was a teen back in the 60's! I've enjoyed your articles on the "missional" concept for evangelism-keep the ideas coming!

Don Yeaton  
MDiv '77

## Upcoming Events

GET THE SCOOP!  
Information Night at

## The Missional Congregation-Part 1

In our last issue I raised the question, "What would a congregation look like that seeks to embody a missional lifestyle in a post-Christian world that is increasingly biased against the Christian message?" In the next few newsletters I'm going to suggest a few possibilities, starting first with . . .

### Authenticity

Western culture is saturated with phoniness and hype. The line between reality and fantasy is blurred. "Reality TV" is anything but real, and the "real life" of celebrities encourages all of us to think that we can live in a fantasy world . . . someday we will hit the winning lottery number!

**The church has not escaped this culture.** In fact, in many ways we have become consumers and imitators of what we critique. How much Christian television programming strikes you as hype and oversell? Not all of it certainly, but altogether more than you would like, right? How about abstract, theoretical preaching that does not connect with the difficult realities of living for Jesus outside the walls of the church? What about sentimental worship songs that are more concerned with making us feel good than challenging our hearts and minds with life-transforming truth? And do we need to mention the epidemic of failed leadership within the church?

We should not be surprised that many people will not listen to us, and that even Christians are turning away from the church. Michael Frost discusses the emergence of a "new realism" which is a backlash against the phoniness and hyper-reality of our day. "Political or economic clout won't be enough. . . . **We need to earn the right to be**

Biblical Seminary

Tuesday, June 5th

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**reheard. Is it too simplistic to say that we earn that right through our authentic lifestyles?"** (Frost, *Exiles* [Henderson, 2006], p. 99)

Missional leaders are not afraid to confront the question: "Have I been guilty of false advertising? Do I advocate a theoretical Christian life that no one (including me) can really live?" In addition, as leaders most of us need to be more honest about the spiritual dynamics of our own lives.

1. **Take sin more seriously.** Many evangelical and fundamentalist churches lack a forceful doctrine of sin. Not that they don't talk about sin or point out clearly what counts for them as sin.

The problem is that too often sin is trivialized or externalized in ways that make it easy for us to give ourselves a passing grade while we exercise quick judgments on others. There is little acknowledgement of our struggles with interior sins like envy, pride, lust, or greed. Prayer chains become gossip loops and we can't see it. Minor offenses become enduring roots of bitterness that we will not admit. Until we become more concerned about the inside of the cup than the outside, we will find it hard to follow Jesus, and will have little to say to a world starved for reality.

2. **Take grace more seriously.** We don't take sin seriously because our understanding of grace is not sufficiently robust. Grace after all is for sinners. The church is a mission outpost in a foreign land, but it is also a hospital. The great physician is a healer who cures life-threatening diseases, not just hangnails and boo-boos! If we don't really believe in grace--that salvation is God's work, not ours--we will continually be tempted to minimize our illness and pretend that all the sick people are outside the hospital.

As my friend Bruce McNicol has written: "Such pretending covers the real us. That pretending may be fueled by a sincere desire to want to make God look good by having our act together. . . . So, we cover our dirty laundry and think we're doing the right thing by 'modeling' to the world how well God improves the lives of Christians. Instead, we usually just come off as weird, stiffly religious, proud, and working way too hard" (Bill Thrall, Bruce McNicol, John Lynch, *True Faced*)

[Navpress, 2003], pp. 21-22).

3. **Give up an intellectualized Gospel.** There is a common tendency for conservative Christians to value intellectual assent to the gospel above committed discipleship--"faith expressing itself in love" (Gal. 5:6). I grew up in a circle of fundamentalism where spiritual maturity was evaluated primarily in terms of acquired biblical knowledge. Orthodoxy (right belief) was valued over orthopraxy (right living).

Such intellectualism continues today in many seminaries and churches. Pastors and professors (!) assume that talking about something is the same as doing it. If we can define sanctification, we must be holy. If we talk about compassion, we are compassionate people! But this is obvious nonsense. Paul exhorts Timothy, "watch your life and doctrine closely" (1 Tim. 4:16). Authentic missional congregations will continually seek fresh ways to incarnate the gospel.

4. **Slow down!** Authenticity depends in part on our ability to spend time together. Biblical alumnus Paul Zazzo is the founder and pastor of Grace Alliance Church in New Jersey. At Grace they have a saying: "Too much church is a bad thing." I like that, and I agree with the sentiment.

Over-programmed churches have turned their best people into the Christian equivalent of stressed-out soccer moms. Does this come from the gospel or from a high-adrenaline 24/7 culture? Many Christians suffer from permanent soul tiredness because they never get more than activity-based connections with other believers (let alone their neighbors!). How might strategic abandonment of programs deepen the authenticity of our discipleship? Think about it!

In the next issue we will consider another critical component of a missional congregation: **spiritual formation**.

