



# MISSIONAL LIFESTYLE

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**ACTS 29  
COMPETENCIES**

## Biblical Foundations

In 1 Peter 2:9 Peter says: “you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light”. Peter is describing the identity of the church and he does so by alluding to key identity-forming moments in the history of Israel, particularly to Exodus 19:4-6 and Isaiah 43:20-21.

Exodus 19:4-6 are the words God spoke to Israel at Sinai to introduce the Mosaic covenant. As he is about to give his people the ten commandments, he tells them how they should see themselves and outlines the purpose of the covenant. He says: “Now therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is mine; and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.”

Israel is called to be a priestly kingdom. Ordinarily priests made God known to the people and offered sacrifices. Now the whole of Israel as a community is to be priestly: making God known to the nations and calling the nations to find atonement through sacrifice. Peter's reference to a royal priesthood is more than an affirmation of the Reformation doctrine of the priesthood of believers. Peter is talking about our corporate identity as God's priestly people whose life together commends the goodness of his kingdom. Similarly, God's people are to be a holy nation just as God himself is holy. They are to reflect and display the character of God in their lifestyle. God is carving out one place on earth where the goodness and freedom of his kingdom can be seen. In other words, the community of God's people is to be a missional community. The law is missional in intent, defining the distinctive community life that will draw the nations to God.

The same missional ideas are present in Isaiah 43. God says: “I give water in the wilderness, rivers in the desert, to give drink to my chosen people, the people whom I formed for myself that they might declare my praise” (43:20-21). Isaiah is looking ahead to the exile of God's people in Babylon, an exile in which Peter sees his readers (1 Peter 1:1; 5:13). Exile was the curse that Moses warned would fall if Israel failed to be a light to the nations through her faithfulness to the covenant (Deuteronomy 28:49-68). But Isaiah says God is going to lead God's people through a new exodus. The One who brought his people through the Red Sea and gave them water in the desert is “doing a new thing” (Isaiah 43:16-20). Peter has already described the death of Jesus as a new Passover (1 Peter 1:18-19). Through Jesus God's redeemed people are re-formed to declare his praises.

This missional identity, says Peter, is fulfilled in the church. So he applies these Old Testament allusions to saying: “ Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul. Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation” (2:11-12). Christians are to make God known through their good lives and good deeds. Peter does not call his readers simply to run a programme, put on an event or adapt their meetings. He calls them to a missional lifestyle.



This does not mean that good works are sufficient. Proclamation matters. We are called to “proclaim” God’s praises (2:9). We are to be “prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks [us] for a reason for the hope that is in [us]” (3:15). The gospel is a word. But the primary context in which that word is proclaimed is everyday life.

1 Peter 2:11-12 are just the headline. Peter then goes on to apply this mission strategy to our life in society (2:13-17), in the workplace (2:18-25) and in the home (3:1-7). We reach a hostile world by living good lives in the context of ordinary life.

A mission lifestyle is a lifestyle in which the whole of life is oriented towards mission. Mission is not confined to evangelistic events, activities or courses – though it might properly include these. Instead, all of life is lived with mission intentionality. How we function as friends, neighbors, colleagues, family members is shaped by a commitment to proclaim Christ.

It is important, however, not to miss the starting point for a missional lifestyle. Peter’s gospel logic is important. He does not tell his hearers that they will be missionaries if they live a missional lifestyle. Instead, he first reminds them that they already *are* missionaries. A missional identity is given to us in the gospel. A missional lifestyle flows from this new gifted identity.

## Theological Reflection

In the traditional image of ‘mission’, people leave the West to go to the non-Western world. The mission field is ‘over there’. Whether it was ever appropriate to speak of the West as anything other than a mission field is questionable. But the secularization of the West means we are being forced afresh to view Western society as a mission field. David Smith says: ‘The culture-shock that I experienced [as a missionary] in West Africa over thirty years ago has now become familiar to Western church and mission leaders as they struggle to make sense of a context in which their organisations look increasingly like boats stranded by a retreating tide.’<sup>1</sup>

One of the first people to alert us to the fact that the West is a missional context was Lesslie Newbigin.<sup>2</sup> Newbigin was a missionary to India for many years. When he returned, he realised that the context to which he was returning was just as much a missionary context as India. There were still many individual Christians, but Christianity was no longer the predominant influence on the culture.

Newbigin highlighted the division between public truth and private faith. Public truth means the truth we operate with in public life: in politics, the media, education, science and culture. In public truth, God-talk has no place. Public discourse in a secular society is godless. Faith and values are relegated to one’s private life. You can hold beliefs in God, but you must not let them intrude into public life – they are private. This worldview is rooted in rationalism. The only truth that can be commended universally is truth based on reason and observation.

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<sup>1</sup> David Smith, *Mission After Christendom*, DLT, 2003, xii.

<sup>2</sup> See especially Lesslie Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, SPCK, 1989.

So Newbigin called for a missionary engagement with the culture. He said we should proclaim the gospel as public truth. He wanted Christians to think about the implications of the gospel for politics, economics, education and so on, so that people within the culture might be confronted by its claims. Newbigin was not arguing for a return to Christendom. We should proclaim the universal lordship of Christ, but Christ is the King who rules by serving, by laying down his life. It is this model that shapes our engagement with the world.

Although there are always signs of common grace in a culture, there is no earthly culture which is 'Christian' or even naturally disposed to Jesus. While Jesus has been given all authority in heaven and on earth (Matthew 28:18), what we see at present is a world opposed to his authority (see, for example, John 15:18-21; Revelation 13:1-7). When Paul wrote of people "who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth" and so "worshipped and served the creature rather than the Creator" (Romans 1:18-25), he was describing not just his contemporaries but ours as well. If you're reading this in a western context, we must not think that we live in a 'Christian country' or that 'Western culture' is 'Christian culture'. Rather, we must see how the gospel speaks a word of judgment and of hope into our culture of individualism and materialism — just as much as it speaks into, say, Arab culture or Chinese culture. Then we shall see that, just like the early church, our task is to proclaim Christ's lordship and the forgiveness of sins to our rebellious society. We have been entrusted with the gospel message of reconciliation and have become Christ's ambassadors (2 Corinthians 5:17-21). In this sense, we are all 'missionaries', all sent to make disciples of Jesus (Matthew 28:19-20).

## Cultural Engagement

In his book *Mission After Christendom* (DLT, 2003), David Smith identifies three "frontiers of mission".<sup>3</sup> One hundred or 200 years ago, people would have assumed the frontiers of mission were geographical. They were the places where the gospel was entering new territory. But Smith's frontiers are sociological or ideological:

- secularization – God and religion are not proper discussions for the public forum
- pluralization – many people no longer believe in 'absolute truth' and instead believe truth is 'plural'
- globalization – the people who live next door might be culturally different from me

So, while the areas where we live are not new *geographical* territories for the gospel, we nevertheless find ourselves on the frontiers of an *ideological* mission field. That is, many people around us have no place for Jesus in the way they view the world. They may have heard the name 'Jesus', but have never properly heard the gospel, let alone understood it. So our whole life is about mission. As Darrell L. Guder says:

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<sup>3</sup> David Smith, *Mission After Christendom*, DLT, 2003.

“Mission is not just a program of the church. It defines the church as God’s sent people. Either we are defined by mission, or we reduce the scope of the gospel and the mandate of the church.”<sup>4</sup>

This reality – of being missional people in a missional context – decisively shapes our attitude to the world around us. Tim Keller identifies the following characteristics of a missional church:<sup>5</sup>

A ‘missional’ small group is not necessarily one which is doing some kind of specific ‘evangelism’ programme (though that is to be recommended). Rather:

1. If its members love and talk positively about the city and neighborhood.
2. If they speak in language that is not filled with pious tribal or technical terms and phrases, nor disdainful and embattled language.
3. If in their Bible study they apply the gospel to the core concerns and stories of the people of the culture.
4. If they are obviously interested in and engaged with the literature and art and thought of the surrounding culture and can discuss it both appreciatively and yet critically.
5. If they exhibit deep concern for the poor and generosity with their money and purity and respect with regard to opposite sex, and show humility toward people of other races and cultures.
6. If they do not bash other Christians and churches.

*Then* seekers and non-believing people from the city (a) will be invited and (b) will come and will stay as they explore spiritual issues. If these marks are not there it will only be able to include believers or traditional, ‘Christianized’ people.

We need to move from a come-to-us mentality in which we assume that if we put on a good Sunday service then word will get around and people will come. This may have been true in previous generations. But not in an increasingly post-Christian society. Instead we need to develop a go-to-them mentality in which we are building relationships with unbelievers, understanding their worldview, disarming their prejudices and meeting them in contexts in which they feel at home.

The Gospel and Our Culture Network has identified twelve hallmarks of a missional church:<sup>6</sup>

1. The missional church proclaims the gospel.
2. The missional church is a community where all members are involved in learning to become disciples of Jesus.
3. The Bible is normative in the life of this church.
4. The church understands itself as different from the world because of its participation in the life, death, and resurrection of its Lord.

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<sup>4</sup> Darrell L. Guder, *Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America*, Eerdmans, 1998, 5-6.

<sup>5</sup> From Tim Keller, ‘*The Missional Church*’, June 2001.

<sup>6</sup> Cited in Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch, *The Shaping of Things to Come: Innovation and Mission for the 21st Century*, Hendrickson, 2003, 11-12.



5. The church seeks to discern God's specific missional vocation for the entire community and for all of its members.
6. A missional community is indicated by how Christians behave towards one another.
7. It is a community that practises reconciliation.
8. People within the community hold themselves accountable to one another in love.
9. The church practises hospitality.
10. Worship is the central act by which the community celebrates with joy and thanksgiving both God's presence and God's promised future.
11. This community has a vital public witness.
12. There is a recognition that the church itself is an incomplete expression of the reign of God.

These characteristics of a missional church function equally well as characteristics of a missional lifestyle. A missional lifestyle is not simply about 'doing' evangelism, not if evangelism is viewed as discrete activity. It is about viewing the whole life as mission: *ordinary people doing ordinary things with gospel intentionality*. Whether it is helping out a friend, a day at the office or going to the cinema, there is a commitment to building relationships, modelling the Christian faith and talking about the gospel as a natural part of conversation. Gospel intentionality is the mentality or habit in which, as we share lives, we look for opportunities to talk about Jesus, to encourage, to challenge, to pray, to praise.

A missional lifestyle is not simply a life spent among unbelievers. The gospel is a message — it is a word. God does his work in the world through his word. So mission only takes place as we share that word with people. A mission lifestyle is not simply about building friendship with unbelievers. Otherwise we simply form good relationships which never lead anywhere. All we are doing is ordinary life, and everyone does that! Indeed, if we make relationships the priority then we may hesitate to share the gospel for fear of jeopardizing those relationships. But central to mission is the proclamation of the gospel. So a missional lifestyle must be an evangelistic lifestyle.

## Missional Significance

Of all the Acts 29 competencies this is the one which is most obviously missional. It is, after all, missional by definition. But it is important to realize that the Acts 29 competencies are *leadership* competencies. Every Christian is to adopt a missional lifestyle that flows from their missional identity. But it is *doubly* important for church planters because planters set the tone for the churches they plant. The culture of any church is to some degree a reflection of the personality of its leader. Our missional identity is first and foremost a corporate identity. But if that identity is to shape the lives of church members then it must be modelled by church leaders.

In many contexts it is still possible to grow a church by offering a better church experience than other churches. If you offer better worship, discipleship, preaching, theology or community then Christians in your neighborhood will be attracted to your church. But,

whatever the merits of this, we need to recognize that this is not *missional* growth. It is possible to plant a church and see it grow *without doing mission*.

But churches that experience genuine missional growth are normally those whose leaders are modelling an infectious missional lifestyle. Culture is set from the top.

A church in which the pastor lives among his books in his study will be known for its orthodoxy. A church in which the pastor loves to spend time with his people will be known for its family feel. A church in which the pastor openly expresses his emotions during Sunday gatherings will be known for its lively meetings. And a church in which the pastor is always sharing the gospel with unbelievers will see missional fruit. So if you want to see missional growth then you need to model a missional lifestyle.

***Further reading and reflection questions are available at [acts29.com/competencies](http://acts29.com/competencies).***