

VOICES from the  
**MISSIONAL MOVEMENT**



VOLUME THREE

**LOVING GOD WITH ALL OUR HEARTS**



NORTH AMERICAN BAPTIST CONFERENCE

# LOVING GOD WITH ALL OUR HEARTS

VOICES FROM THE MISSIONAL MOVEMENT

—VOLUME 3—

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## INTRODUCTION – MISSIONAL VOICES

ANTHONY BROWN, REGENT COLLEGE  
VANCOUVER, BRITISH COLUMBIA

This e-book is a compilation of articles originally published between 2008 and 2015 in *The Missional Voice*, the journal of Forge Missional Training Network. The articles were written by a variety of authors with a wide variety of academic and practical experience as a way to encourage pastors, church leaders, and thinking Christians everywhere to reflect on the challenges facing the church in North America. Our hope in gathering this collection is that we will once again challenge your thinking and encourage you as you seek to follow the missional God.

## FRAMEWORK FOR A MISSIONAL SPIRITUALITY

LEN HJALMARSON, FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH  
THUNDER BAY, ONTARIO

It isn't the church of God that has a mission in the world, it's the God of Mission who has a church in the world. Saints cannot exist without a community, as they require, like all of us, nurturance by a people who, while often unfaithful, preserve the habits necessary to learn the story of God.<sup>1</sup>

Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.

A missional spirituality is a spirituality for the road, a spirituality for those who are actively following Jesus. Mission is about daily life in the world, and this is why God is breaking down our definitions and resetting the boundaries. Becoming missional has to do with where the boundary markers are being placed as we define the church. What is in-bounds? What is out-of-bounds? Who is included and on what basis? The boundary markers for the church should be determined by where the gifts and callings of God's people take them. In order to impact the world, we need to be in the world.

In these days many are asking why we have so many orthodox believers but so few Jesus followers. Part of the problem is that we have built lecture halls aimed mostly at forming the mind. James K. A. Smith, in a slightly different context, is asking the right questions:

What if education was primarily concerned with shaping our hopes and passions—our visions of “the good life”—and not merely about the dissemination of data and information as inputs to our thinking? What if the primary work of education was the transforming of our imagination rather than the saturation of our intellect? And what if this had as much to do with our bodies as with our minds?

What if education wasn't first and foremost about what we know, but about what we love?<sup>2</sup>

The first necessity in missional change is a shift in imagination. This is required in order to move from attractational to missional/incarnational practice. We need to shift from bounded-set thinking to centered-set, from believing before belonging, to belonging before believing. James Smith is right that our pre-cognitive disposition is love or desire.

We love before we know. Belonging is about love.

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<sup>1</sup> John B. Thomson, *The Ecclesiology of Stanley Hauerwas* (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2003), 11.

<sup>2</sup> James K. A. Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom: Worship, Worldview, and Cultural Formation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009), 18.

## New Boundaries for the Church

The renewal of the church will come not through a recovery of personal experience or straight doctrine, nor through innovative projects of evangelism or social action, nor in creative techniques or liturgical worship, nor in the gift of tongues, nor in new budgets, new buildings, and new members. The renewal of the church will come about through the work of the Spirit in restoring and reconstituting the church as a local community whose common life bears the marks of radical obedience to the lordship of Jesus Christ.<sup>3</sup>

If it were simply a matter of following Jesus on mission, the challenge would not be so great. But this is not where we are as a church in the West. We have baggage we cannot carry on this journey, therefore we must work with existing paradigms to bring change. Those paradigms, and the imagination that roots them, are deeply embedded.

Through modernity, “believing” has been conceived as the starting point for faith. Christianity within Christendom has been highly cognitive: information or content oriented. Moreover, our primary concerns for inclusion have been boundary markers, measured mostly by belief and secondly by behaviour. When these first two qualities are met, we allow people to belong. But a missional instrument sounds a different tune. Missional spirituality, like spiritual formation, is about what we love. Similarly, belonging is shaped by presence and love, while believing is shaped in the mind. Belonging is a physical and affective social process. In believing, we know at a distance. In belonging, we know by experience.<sup>4</sup>

When we first opened our Metro Central coffee shop, we knew we would be strained to staff it. Some of the most likely candidates had not yet made a commitment to Christ. George, for example, was fresh out of jail and not long ago had been seen selling his prescription meds on the street corner. But he felt accepted among us, and he liked what we were about, serving the street community. He wanted to help. We put him through the barista training. He became our most faithful staffer. But more than this, he realized he had something to give. His felt he had found a home among a people on a journey. He gave his life to Christ.

Belonging is the heart of the matter, yet has tended to follow believing and behaving. Believing relates to the big story; belonging relates to the people on the journey.<sup>5</sup>

How people belong, and how they enter a social grouping, can be described by what Paul Hiebert called bounded and centered sets. In their first book, Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch link attractional explicitly to bounded-set thinking, and incarnational explicitly to centered-set thinking. Then they tell a story that offers a metaphor: fences and wells. Fences and wells describe two different ways of imagining the dynamics of believing and belonging in terms of faith community.

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<sup>3</sup> Jim Wallis, *Agenda for Biblical People* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1976), 100–101.

<sup>4</sup> For a lucid summary of these issues, see Stuart Murray's *Church after Christendom*.

<sup>5</sup> Joseph Myers describes four types of social space. In particular, see his book *The Search to Belong*.

It goes like this:

In the American west, fences are used to keep cattle from roaming. A visitor to an Australian outback cattle ranch was intrigued by the seemingly endless miles of farming country with no sign of any fences. He asked a local rancher how he kept track of his cattle. The rancher replied, "Oh that's no problem. Out here we dig wells instead of building fences."<sup>6</sup>

We are accustomed to defining the church within a certain circle. We work at clarifying who is in, who is out; what the leadership structure is to be and not to be; what we believe and do not believe; which activities belong, which do not; what behaviour is appropriate and what is not. So the line between insiders and outsiders is clearly drawn. Belonging is a bounded-set. Bounded-set thinking makes it about boundary markers, and these are black and white. One either qualifies or is rejected; it's pass or fail. We need to move from bounded-set thinking to what Hiebert refers to as centered-set thinking in our understanding of the church.

In a centered set, what counts is how each member is moving in relation to the center (Jesus). The focus is upon the center, and each individual is in dynamic relationship to it. Belonging, in this case, is not a matter of performing according to an agreed-upon profile, it is a matter of living and acting out of commitment to a common center. The focus is on the center and on pointing people to that center – Jesus.

It is not that bounded sets are always bad and centered sets are always good. Boundaries do exist. Salvation is a bounded set. One is either in Christ or not in Christ. Discipleship is a centered set. To be a disciple is to be constantly moving toward the center, which is Christ. The church is not the center. The center is Jesus: the Head of the body. All members of the body are to function in relation to the center: Christ.

Remember Pentecost? God's people are those who are indwelt by the Holy Spirit, who is transforming their character and giving them gifts they are to use in reaching out to a lost world. Exercising our gifts and functions, according to the enabling of the Holy Spirit in response to needs and opportunities, will determine the boundaries. I'm not advocating everyone moving in whichever direction he or she pleases, doing whatever strikes him or her as a good idea at the moment. I'm talking about the difference between form and function. In the New Testament, ministry was accomplished by believers exercising certain functions. Form and structure followed, giving substance and permanence to their efforts. It is that process that needs to be repeated and reproduced, not the existing forms.

The bounded set is hard at the edges, soft at the center. It's like the traditional ranch with high fences. Fences keep my cattle in and keep everyone else's cattle out. Fences are mostly about possession. The centered set, on the other hand, is like the Outback ranch with the wellspring at its center. The Outback ranch has no fences, just a water hole. We know that we don't have to control the animals; they always come back for water. The centered set has clear definition but no boundaries. It is hard at the center, soft at the edges. In the

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<sup>6</sup> Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch, *The Shaping of Things to Come* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 2003), 47.

centered set lies a clue to the structuring of new missional communities in postmodern culture.

The traditional church makes it quite difficult for people to negotiate its maze of cultural, theological, and social barriers in order to get in. If we had pushed a set of doctrines on George, or on Miranda, or on Sundjit, they never would have scaled the fences. Their foundational need was acceptance and love. When it's about the fences the model is attractional. By the time newcomers have scaled the fences, they are socialized as churchgoers. We extract people from their natural habitats and substitute attractional and come-to structures for outward and missional life.

However, we observe something interesting in the gospels. We see a group gathered around Jesus who are very ill-defined. The group is mixed: men and women and children, lawyers and tax-gatherers and priests, ordinary people like carpenters and shepherds, and among them all, Jesus and His disciples. Among this same group are those who have already responded to His call and left everything.

The two groups are mixed together: a bounded set of disciples and an ill-defined centered set. But as we observe, Jesus continually calls the listeners to deeper commitment: to take up their cross, to live in a new way, to imitate His life and proclaim the good news. Jesus is working with a centered set to create a covenant community – a bounded set within the centered set. George and Miranda, Sundjit and Papa participate in the life of our community, caring and being cared for, before they have “crossed the line.” They get to know our culture from the inside-out.

Shifting language, Stuart Murray notes that we need more than one category of belonging.<sup>7</sup> It is here that membership language has failed us. And of course it is more than a language problem; it's a question of practice. Murray notes John Drane's proposal of a “stakeholder model, in which there could and would be a place for diverse groups of people, who might be at different stages in their journey of faith, but who would be bound together by their commitment to one another and to the reality of the spiritual search, rather than by inherited definitions of institutional membership.”<sup>8</sup>

Murray goes on to say that centered-set churches need custodians of the story and guardians of the ethos. Inclusivity and open-ended belonging without core maintenance is unsustainable. This is why many emerging and missional groups adopt monastic patterns based on a rule of life. They create a bounded set within a centered set. Groups like The Order of Mission exist around a rule, as does the Northumbria Community or The Simpler Way. We really need two structures of belonging: an open community membership and a core membership, open to those who voluntarily accept its demands.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Stuart Murray, *Church after Christendom* (London: Paternoster, 2004), 37.

<sup>8</sup> John Drane, *The McDonaldization of the Church* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 2000), 159.

<sup>9</sup> Murray, *Church*, 37. This is the same argument offered by Alan Roxburgh in *Introducing the Missional Church* or Jim Belcher in *Deep Church*.



The whole imagination surrounding a rhythm of life or missional orders has to do with dealing effectively with both process and inclusion. We want to welcome all who want to belong, while also recognizing that we can't ask of beginners what we ask of the mature. We walk with beginners along the road of discipleship, assisting and encouraging and challenging as they give more and more of their life to Jesus.

God's dream for radical newness will require discipline. Not discipline connected to punishment or shame, but discipline that roots us in Christ, deepening our connection to God and one another. This rootedness will come from having consistent, ordered ways in which we remain open to grace, and they will be unique to each one of us. Grace constantly seeks entrance into our souls in order to effect change, but grace will never force her way in. Discipline is the means by which we open ourselves to the sort of radical change that has always been God's intention for us.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Jeff Bailey, "An Interview with Gordon Cosby." *Cutting Edge Magazine* 5,2 (2001) 4-8.

## SPIRITUAL FORMATION FOR THE SAKE OF THE WORLD

SCOTT HAGLEY, PITTSBURGH THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY  
PITTSBURGH, PENNSYLVANIA

I have breakfast once a month with a group of guys. It's a fairly eclectic group in terms of life experience and stage of life. We don't necessarily have that much in common. But we live near each other and because we have committed to the same missional community, we meet for discipleship. This means that we ask one another questions and hold one another accountable. But mostly we help one another practice or apprentice in the good life in Christ because we know that we are called to make disciples. We hope that our life together might be a sign of the good news in our neighborhood.

Even though we have done this for awhile, it can still be a little bit fuzzy. What is it that we are doing together? In what follows, I will suggest that discipleship is a means for learning to live the good life in Christ. As such, discipleship groups—like the guys I meet with—exist to help us learn and experiment with basic Christian practices, for we know that practice makes possible. As discipleship partners, we encourage and teach one another things like prayer, hospitality, Sabbath, generosity, and dwelling in the Scriptures for the sake of learning to live the good life.

And learn we must, because we come to our faith already formed in other, counter-productive ways of life. We come to the Bible, to Christian community, to the church, and to Jesus as those that have drunk deeply from the messages of advertisers and the blather of talk radio and the conversations at work and the hopes and fears we've inherited from our family, our city, our national history, our neighborhood. And so while we might receive Jesus and enter into His Father's kingdom, we must now re-learn who and whose we are. We must be re-formed in the way and hope of Jesus. And this is discipleship: learning to live again. It is formation in and through Jesus Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit.

### **Modern De-Formation(s)**

For any of us who have tried our hand at discipleship, we know that it is hard. It is difficult to learn to live in new ways. I think that this is partially because we fail to understand the ways in which life in the modern world de-forms us, or shapes us in ways that confuse our faith and lead us to live fragmented lives. While there may be plenty of ways that this happens, I want to draw attention to two particularly insidious modern de-formations that we carry within us: we are fragmented and dis-oriented.

### **We Are Fragmented**

One of the crises of the modern age is a sense of angst or a loss of meaning. We live Lost in Translation: fragmented, everywhere and yet nowhere. We jump from relationship to relationship and world to world without any overriding sense of how it all fits together. When we are at church, our lives are oriented by spiritual things. When we are at home, we

are concerned with home things. When we are at work, we are concerned with the bottom line of our corporation.

Modern life is fragmented into all these little pieces, and we live in all of them—going to one thing after another—but we only rarely sense what it is all about. We have largely learned to accept this feature of modern life; we accept that life is fragmented. But when it's fragmented it's also meaningless. It is difficult to know what connects our life together. We are distracted and unfocused.

The Danish philosopher Søren Kierkegaard famously said that “purity of heart is to will just one thing.” While Kierkegaard lived at the beginning of the modern era, he is responding to the same problem we notice here.

How can our lives be made whole? How can we “seek only the kingdom of God” and so entrust all these other realms—work, church, school, family, neighborhood—to God? We do at least two things. To start, we must work to reflect on our lives and to talk about them in light of God and God's kingdom. How can we begin to work as though we are working for the Lord? How can we approach our resources from the perspective that the earth is the Lord's and everything in it? Second, we do this work of reflecting in community and with those among whom we live. We de-fragment our lives by committing our lives to those among whom we live and worship. This is why we need discipleship partners and missional communities.

In these ways, discipleship addresses our fragmentation: in discipleship we sit together and ask each other questions so that we might re-form our world around the gospel of Jesus Christ. Discipleship is the work of being made whole.

### **We Are Dis-Oriented**

Along with a sense of fragmentation, we moderns are also lost. It is not just that we live and work and play in multiple worlds that don't necessarily meet or make sense, but we also struggle to keep ourselves focused on the things that matter. Our hearts are distracted and fickle because the fragmentation of our lives gives us a Twitter-sized attention span. One minute, we want to learn to devote our heart to God in prayer and then the next minute we are giving our heart to the Canucks or Packers or our child's soccer team.

Advertising and consumerism play a big role in this. If the structure of our lives—being pushed and pulled between neighborhood, church, job, shopping—makes our lives fragmented, it is our relationships and habitual behaviors that make us dis-oriented. Almost all advertising in our consumer age promises gain with no pain, that we can “expect more, pay less.” And because we buy and sell things every day, we tend to become formed in the habits of consumerism: expecting the world at our fingertips, imagining that we can experience gain without pain. The result is that we are driven by our own fickle desires. We are like the man in the book of James who is “tossed about like a wave on the sea.”

We must realize that our discipleship takes place in something like the above context. We bring to discipleship some kind of modern de-formation. We have been shaped, we have learned habits, we have learned to engage the world in a way that makes orienting our lives

by the gospel and integrating our lives in the story of God difficult. But this is something that Jesus has promised to help us with, and just as we have been formed one way by our relationships and culture, we can be transformed by the Holy Spirit as we practice Christian life together.

So what is discipleship? It is apprenticeship to Jesus in life. It is learning what it means to live in Christ and with Christ in us. Because modern life is so fragmented and dis-orienting, discipleship to Jesus is about integration and orientation.

By regularly engaging the practices that help us to love God with our whole selves—heart, mind, and strength—and by allowing ourselves to learn the habits and practices of loving our neighbor and one another, we begin to see and experience our life as complete, as integrated, as lived within and for God's coming kingdom. Learning spiritual practices in obedience to Jesus helps us to integrate our lives according to the one thing that matters. But we also need to gain a sense of orientation for our lives, and so discipleship is also about being able to tell the story of our lives as one lived in and for Jesus by learning to see, reflect, and talk about the ways in which God is present and at work. Like a compass in the woods, the gospel gives us a sense of true north and helps us focus our activities and our lives on the hope that we have in Jesus Christ.

We learn to follow Jesus by practicing the Christian life so that we might integrate all the various things that we do according to the gospel. And, we learn to follow Jesus by reflecting on God's presence and activity so that we might find our orientation in the world. This means that there are two elements to every discipleship meeting: storytelling and apprenticeship. In storytelling, we practice noticing God at work in our lives. Where have you seen God? What is He teaching you? In apprenticeship, we work on engaging Christian practices with intentionality. We learn from one another and hold one another accountable.

Because we come to discipleship already de-formed, learning to follow Jesus can be messy and indirect. My discipleship group is committed to helping one another learn to live whole and holy lives in Jesus. And so we focus on learning to give the whole of our lives—our heart, mind, strength, and relationships—to God. And so while we allow the five core practices of our church (prayer, scripture reading, Sabbath, hospitality, and blessing one another) to frame our time together, we also help each other learn how to do these practices better. Our five core, shared practices work together to integrate and orient our lives, to re-form us in the image of Christ.

### **Discipleship in Practice**

In light of these modern de-formations, what do we do together? We have found that our meetings need to have two different movements: storytelling and apprenticeship.

In storytelling, we ask one another questions that help each person to attend to the ways in which God has been present or prodding: where have you seen God at work in the past couple weeks? What is God teaching you or challenging you to do? The second part of the meeting, apprenticeship, focuses on our shared practices. Here, we help one another grow and learn in the practices that constitute the Christian faith. We ask one another things like: Which practice is God inviting you to go deeper in? What do you need to learn? There are

lots of different ways to do this, but we have found this particular format a helpful way to engage discipleship in a consistent manner that attends to our need to integrate and orient our lives in the kingdom of God.

### **Storytelling**

Where have you seen God at work in the past week? Where has He given you life? Where have you struggled to see or experience God?

### **Apprenticeship**

- What was your experiment from last time? How did it go? What did you learn?
- What value(s) or practice(s) is God calling you to grow in? Express your intentions: I think God wants me to grow in . . .
- Declare an experiment: In light of what I am hearing, I will do . . . over the next month. Be as specific as possible.
- Ask for help: I will need my discipling partner to help me in this practice in the following way . . .

Write these down and then pray for one another.

## SPIRITUAL FORMATION AND THE NEIGHBOURHOOD

HOWARD LAWRENCE, ABUNDANT COMMUNITY INITIATIVE  
EDMONTON, ALBERTA

This summer my daughter crashed our van into my neighbour's pickup truck . . . or . . . should I say she bumped into it. As you can tell, the issue became that of crash or bump? "Is the damage worth a thousand dollars or a hundred?" My neighbour's name is Paul. He and his wife, Becky, and their son, Jason, are all very connected to my world. We share mutual friends. Our kids are playmates, and we work on community associations together.

Following the bumping/crashing incident, our relationship became strained to say the least. I think it would be fair to say that in my heart, Paul became an enemy.

At this point, the question of my spiritual formation came to the forefront. The subset of questions that prompted this were: Is Paul a neighbour who I am to love? Is he an enemy who I am to love? Is the money that I am reluctant to provide God's or mine? Is my attitude, leaking out into my behavior toward him, contaminating the body of Christ's witness in our neighborhood? The answer to all these questions, I think, was yes. This pointed me toward the conclusion that perhaps I have not been formed into the kind of person that I had hope that I was, that my neighborhood needs me to be, and that God longs for me to be as a member of His body. What then am I to make of my thirty-five years of spiritual formation? Could it be that something is missing?

Spiritual formation, to be true to its historic roots, must be oriented to the real world, rooted in our experience of suffering, and responsive to community. These three important and interdependent dimensions of spiritual formation in the real world are an important part of the testimony of Francis of Assisi. Speaking of him, Richard Rohrer says this:

First, he walked into the prayer-depths of his own tradition, as opposed to mere religious repetition of old formulas. Second, he sought direction in the mirror of creation itself, as opposed to mental and fabricated ideas or ideals. And, most radically, he looked to the underside of his society, to the "community of those who have suffered," for an understanding of how God transforms us.<sup>11</sup>

I think we would agree that prayer is essential for spiritual formation. However, prayer is a great example of the fact that formation cannot be made distinct from our life in the world. Prayer—and the whole of our spiritual formation—must be done in the real world. We pray in our neighborhood community. Historically, the great saints prayed in monastic

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<sup>11</sup> Richard Rohr and John Bookser Feister, *Hope Against Darkness* (Cincinnati: St. Anthony Messenger Press, 2001), 14.

communities and rubbed shoulders daily with brothers and sisters. Life was not lived in the abstraction of ideas and ideals.

So also, we are called to be a real people in real places. It is this dimension of spiritual formation that has drifted away from us and we have become dislocated, no longer anchored in the “local” of local church. Leaving the comfort of affinity groups and people who are just like me is threatening. At church and through selecting friends, I can easily find people who mirror back to me all of my values, desires, and aspirations. For those brief moments in the week when I connect with my community and my friends, I can be assured that nothing will threaten the security of who I am. Paul, however, is not like me. We do not share the same values and aspirations. His beliefs about life and justice and material possessions threaten my espoused vision of reality. He is very “other” and I don’t like it.

Although I regularly pray for wise stewardship and a generous heart, my prayer needed a network of relationships for Christ to be formed in me. I needed my neighbour Paul’s confrontation and I needed Dan, a local brother in Christ, to guide and hold me accountable to our shared neighbour. My prayer needed a crash in the world, and the crash needed my prayer.

Because spiritual formation must take place in the world, it also draws upon experiences of poverty and suffering. Spiritual formation in the world requires a commitment to those at the margins. This foundational commitment to powerlessness is particularly threatening in a world dominated by consumerism and wealth.

Aspiring to downward mobility and vows of simplicity are not common fare in the circles I associate with, though it is something accessible to us all. Let me explain.

This summer, the daughter who crashed/bumped my van also spent a week living and working in a Christian community that lives in our downtown. Those who live as this church have taken a vow of poverty. My daughter introduced me to one of the leaders of that community. After a week spent there she was particularly taken by this gentleman’s godliness and his winsome way with the poor who are his neighbors.

Intrigued about his spiritual formation I asked Gerard about his spiritual practices. In our conversation he pointed to prayer, to his neighbours and his neighbourhood, and to his vow of poverty. While understanding most of what he said about prayer and the stability of his staying in one place, even a poor place and living shoulder-to-shoulder with other Christians, I did not understand his vow of poverty. We spent some time discussing this commitment, and I was encouraged to understand that, while he lived in a community whose members were interdependent with one another and the larger Christian community, his vow of poverty primarily meant that he submitted to the community all of the financial decisions he made with the money he held privately.

With this view of the vow of poverty, I recognized that all of us within our community of faith have access to this dimension of spiritual formation. Committing ourselves to prayer and seeking God and His kingdom come on earth, in our neighborhoods, as it is in heaven, we can begin this journey of transformation. Committing ourselves to the real places that we live and the real people who are our neighbors, and the real neighbors who are

following Christ and who are therefore our brothers and sisters in Him, as different as they may be, we will connect our transformation to the real and not to the abstract.

And the real involves our incomes, our budgets, and our acts of generosity. Taking spiritual formation seriously means submitting these things to those who are following Christ with us in the places that we live. So then the vow of poverty does not necessarily mean that we have nothing but that together as followers of Christ in a neighborhood we steward the gifts that God has given us. Our spiritual formation then becomes dependent not only on our relationship with God but in very tangible ways on the brothers and sisters in Christ, who I live with in my neighborhood.

We cannot afford to compromise our formation in Christ by leaving out the important historic dimensions of place and poverty. It sounds bad but prayer is not enough! Our spiritual formation is for the sake of the world, and for the beauty of the church, the bride of Christ. The need is for winsome and formed followers of Christ ligamented and joined together as the people of God, a living demonstration of the kingdom in our neighborhoods.

In conclusion, Richard Rohr says this of St. Francis and of spiritual formation:

The depth was an inner life where all shadow, mystery and paradox were confronted, accepted and forgiven. Here he believed God could be met in fullness and truth. The breadth was the actual world itself, a sacramental universe. It was not the ideal, the churchy or the mental, but the right-in-front-of-you-and-everywhere—the *actual* as opposed to the ideal.<sup>12</sup>

And, finally, he showed us the process for staying there, the daring entrance into the world of human powerlessness. His chosen lens was what he called “poverty” and, of course, he was only imitating Jesus. He set out to read reality through the eyes and authority of those who have “suffered and been rejected” and to come out resurrected. This is apparently the “privileged seeing” that allows you to know something that you can know in no other way.

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<sup>12</sup> Rohr, *Hope*, 14.



## RHYTHMS AND PRACTICE

LEN HJALMARSON, FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH  
THUNDER BAY, ONTARIO

### Rhythm and Rule

A rule of life is a spiritual rather than a legislative document. “It is simply a handbook to make the radical demands of the gospel a practical reality in daily life.”<sup>13</sup>

“A Rule offers ‘creative boundaries within which God’s loving presence can be recognised and celebrated.’ It does not prescribe but invite, it does not force but guide, it does not threaten but warn, it does not instil fear but points to love. In this it is a call to freedom, freedom to love.”<sup>14</sup>

The word “rule” has bad connotations for many, implying restrictions, limitations, and legalistic attitudes. But a rule is essentially about freedom. It helps us to stay centred, bringing perspective and clarity to the way of life to which God has called us. The word derives from the Latin *regula*, which means “rhythm, regularity of pattern, a recognizable standard” for the conduct of life. *Regula* is a feminine noun that carried gentle connotations rather than the harsh negatives that we often associate with the phrase “rules and regulations” today. We do not want to be legalistic. A rule is an orderly way of existence but we embrace it as a way of life not as keeping a list of rules. It is a means to an end—and the end is that we might seek God with authenticity and live more effectively for Him.

A rule then is a means whereby, under God, we take responsibility for the pattern of our spiritual lives. It is a “measure” rather than a “law.”

Some will recognize that this is old language. Missional orders themselves are an ancient structure, existing even before St. Benedict. However, “that which is oldest is most young and most new. There is nothing so ancient and so dead as human novelty. The ‘latest’ is always stillborn. [. . .] What is really *new* is what was there all the time. I say, not what has *repeated itself* all the time; the really ‘new’ is that which, at every moment, springs freshly into new existence. This newness never repeats itself. Yet it is so old it goes back to the earliest beginning. It is the very beginning itself, which speaks to us” (Thomas Merton).<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Benedict, as quoted from the Northumbria Community website:

<https://www.northumbriacommunity.org/who-we-are/our-rule-of-life/what-is-a-rule-of-life>.

<sup>14</sup> Henri Nouwen, as quoted from the Northumbria Community website:

<https://www.northumbriacommunity.org/who-we-are/our-rule-of-life/why-do-we-need-a-rule>.

<sup>15</sup> Thomas Merton, *New Seeds of Contemplation* (New York: New Directions Books, 1961), 107.

## Rhythms, Health, Shalom

In an article for Mustard Seed Associates in 2006, Christine Sine made the point that natural rhythms are all around us. Sunrise, sunset; fall, winter, spring; day and night; the tides wax and wane; our hearts beat with regularity; even at the molecular level there is rhythm.

It's no different in the Scripture. Eugene Peterson spends a few pages on rhythm in his book *Christ Plays in Ten Thousand Places*.

He demonstrates the rhythms expressed by the writer of Genesis.<sup>16</sup> There is a rhythm to creation and Sabbath, and at the textual level the author has developed a careful structure, represented in the numbering of the days. Initially the rhythm is 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 7 7, but in the second account becomes 1 2 3/3 4 5 6/6 7/7/7. Even the structure of the writing carries a message.

What happens when we remove rhythm from our daily lives? What happens when we become arrhythmic in our shared lives? Many of our faith communities have become attractional—centred around a gathering and even abstracted from the soil they grow in. They neglected the fundamental rhythm of gathering and dispersion, worship and witness, and something went wrong.

Rhythms are so close to us that they are transparent: the rhythm of the flow of blood within our bodies, sunrise and sunset, the tide flowing in and going out. Blood is the means of transportation for food and oxygen and bodily defenses. The blood receives oxygen and food, then is pumped outward by the heart muscle. When it has done its work, it moves inward for cleansing and nourishment, then it is pumped outward again. This inward and outward rhythm is not optional. When the rhythm ends, so does life!

French psychiatrist David Servan-Schreiber has recently introduced new treatments that are making Freud and Prozac obsolete. The treatments seem most powerful against two of the most common maladies of our time: anxiety disorders and depression. How fascinating that the treatments are related to natural rhythms. His discovery? "There is a constant exchange between the heart and the brain. Research shows that a coherent heart rhythm is able to bring the emotional brain to rest. When your heart is beating in a healthy way, you can heal stress, depression, tension and other mental afflictions."<sup>17</sup>

Similarly, we need encouragement, prayer, information, and sometimes correction. We need to love and be loved. And then we need to take that love out into the world, partnering with God in the redemption of His good creation.

Some argue that ecclesial rhythms could be spontaneous, similar in kind to the "distributed faith" models George Barna describes in his book *Revolution*. But those models are difficult to maintain in the fragmented world most of us experience, where there are so many

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<sup>16</sup> Eugene H. Peterson, *Christ Plays in Ten Thousand Places* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2005), 67.

<sup>17</sup> Tijn Touber, "Our Natural Instinct to Heal," *Ode Magazine*, Vol. 4, Issue 6, 36–40.

demands on our time and we participate in multiple communities. “Distributed faith” affirms choice, but it also reinforces a secular understanding of freedom where the self is the centre. It places us back into the conundrum of analysis paralysis: what do I choose and why? And it tends to neglect hospitality, genuinely welcoming the other, in favor of hanging with safe and clean people.

The answer of the Celtic monasteries to the need of their day was *roots, rhythms, and relationship*. Could a new call to simplicity, friendship, stability, mission, and attention to God . . . *lectio and opus Dei* . . . a new monastic movement, built around covenanted rhythms help us to rediscover the meaning of the Body? Could it assist us in forming faithful communities of Jesus apprentices, a community of friends on a missional journey together?

There is much to be said for spontaneity, but faith communities need to establish rhythm in their practices or they will have difficulty maintaining coherence. Fragmentation will continue to plague them, and non-covenantal reality will result in distractions and negotiations that contribute to stress and arrhythmia. Escaping the vestiges of the duality of sacred and secular life, the duality of theory and practice, will require us to rediscover essential rhythms.

### **Vows and Practices**

During his time in prison, Dietrich Bonhoeffer called for a new monastic movement. Not many years later, Thomas Merton issued the same call. Recently Alan Roxburgh, reflecting on his conversations in England, wrote of the whys and wherefores of a missional order:

How does [. . .] disciplined culture change occur? What makes the question so pressing is that even in the best training processes out there good leaders find it hard to stay with the journey over the long haul. [. . .] In brief, there doesn't seem to be a list of leadership “indicators” or best practices which, if followed, tend toward sustaining leaders over the long journey of culture change. But there is one element that does seem common to those leaders who sustain themselves on the way – they are rooted in some form of regular spiritual practices. This is the one factor that remains consistent.

Vows root our covenant, and practices give it shape in the world. In this way we recognize the unity of Word and Spirit. “The Word became flesh and moved into the neighborhood” (John 1:14 MSG).

## BRINGING OUR BEST

CAM ROXBURGH, NAB VP OF MISSIONAL INITIATIVES  
VANCOUVER, BRITISH COLUMBIA

When people tell me they are missional, I listen very closely for how they are using the word. Often I hear an emphasis on “outreach” and so little on worship as mission within the practices of God’s people. To be truly missional, one must understand that worship, in its proper sense, bears witness to the God we follow who is on mission and is rightly understood as missional.

In Leviticus 1, the Israelites found themselves in the wilderness, with the Promised Land in sight. I grew up thinking that in taking His people to the Promised Land, God was giving them a free ticket to Disneyworld as a result of winning the equivalent to the Super Bowl. This is not the case, but instead, if we understand Genesis 12 correctly, it was a part of the strategy of God to see people outside of the Israelites come to understand who He was and how He longed for relationship with them.

God knew that when His people entered the Promised Land they would be drawn to the ways of worship to the gods of the inhabitants of the land, and instead gave them instructions so that when they worshiped the “right” God in the proper way they would bear witness to who He was. Enter the peculiar prescription for worship in Leviticus 1.

As we read the entire chapter, we may initially come away with little in the way of instruction for our corporate worship of God. Of course we no longer make sacrifices—that was done once and for all through Christ. But on a closer look, we see that there are principles of worship in the text that can be practiced today. These principles of worship will be important to churches that have bought into the reality of God being a God of mission.

First, the biggest idea that we glean is that worship is not primarily about what we receive but about what we bring. Although we do receive from the Lord and others in the midst of corporate worship, the purpose and posture of worship consists in what we bring: we are God’s children who bring gifts to the King of Kings. The Jews understood this in the instruction. We seem to have reversed the priority in our practice. Inadvertently we have participated in creating a consumer mentality through creating “worship experiences” (even that phrase is indicative) that are made for us to get something for our effort. We become good at creating “worship services” (another consumer term) so that we achieve the desired outcomes of emotion and action towards a goal instead of acting in faithfulness to bring to God our offerings out of gratitude for what He is doing.

What would it look like to gather together on a regular basis with each person bringing a gift to give to the King? What do we bring?

Certainly we bring our gifts of money as a reflection of giving back to God what He has given us, but what is more, we bring stories of where we have seen God at work during our weeks in the mission fields (work, neighborhood) where He has placed us. When we come together with these stories of God at work, it is not difficult to see how joy is produced through God at work rather than just what song we will sing. If we are telling stories of God at work, it doesn't matter much to us whether we like this or that song or the way this band plays it.

Second, the Jews also knew that one could not bring something to give the most Holy God unless it was one's best. It was a costly offering, not a cheap one. What they brought to give indicated who they thought He was. There was no room for bringing leftovers or that which one thought they might spare. Instead, they brought their best and their most costly. Often the animal sacrificed for the Jews had been carefully raised (as a part of the family) for profit and sustenance. In bringing their best, the Jews made a clear statement about who they thought God was and how He sustained them. What does our financial giving indicate about who we think God is? What does our unwillingness to give up some of our rights and comforts indicate about our worship of the one we call Lord?

Third, the process of dragging one's prize bull from behind the hut down the street to the temple and slitting its throat does not easily compare to the experience we try to create today. It is possible, and highly likely, in many corporate gatherings today to try to engage only our minds. Many seek an intellectual experience through preaching and other components.

Others seek more of an emotional experience through music, arts, and ambiance.

In giving the guidelines for worship that He did, God wanted the whole person to engage in worship—not just a part of them. Worship involves our whole being. It is not just a cerebral or emotional experience on its own but also the surrender of all of who we are to all of who He is. It is the engagement of our whole beings.

Fourth, the principle of participation is found in the text. Worship was never meant to be a spectator event but rather something in which all participated. Nor was it meant to be solely a private event. It was for the community. One cannot help but see in passages such as Psalm 122 that worship was for the whole of God's people and involved the participation of each person. Today we have drifted from this practice also. I have had the privilege of attending many churches in the past few years through teaching and consulting and have observed an incredible drift in the way we gather towards the "specialists" performing for the audience both in preaching and in singing. We need a renewed perspective on full participation by all of God's people in bringing Him our best gifts to adequately reflect God's character.

I was at a church planting meeting a number of months ago. There were two contrasting planting groups that were having a dialogue about "worship." One team was excited for their prospects because they had the neatest, greatest, latest band around. They knew they would grow as a result of their "tight" band that had even produced CDs. The other team was led by a middle-aged man that had been through the planting wars before. He

commented that they had a different philosophy of worship. They encouraged everyone to bring whatever instrument or noisemaker they had to their gatherings each week and to participate as they were able. They still had leadership but were not all about only the experts leading from the front.

The younger team was not convinced that would work. In fact, they were very convinced that it would not draw a crowd.

As I was teaching these and other principles from this passage on worship as mission out of Leviticus, one wise pastor found a moment of silence to add what he saw in the text. His comments were profound and have great importance to us all as we seek to allow God to use our worship of Him to draw others to Himself.

The pastor stated that in this text he saw the principles of worship allowing God's people to "act out" the drama of God's story of relating to His people. There is no question that this must include the sacrifice made ultimately by the Son, but it includes the whole of the good news of God on a mission to redeem individuals, a people, and indeed all things through the establishing of a new kingdom.

My guess is that you will find more worship practices in this text and others. But the main thing to focus on is that if we believe that God is a God of mission, then everything we do must reflect that nature of God. Everything we do bears witness to the reality that God in nature is about drawing a people into a relationship with Himself.

Worship is one way we participate with the King in His mission, and therefore we must treat it as such.

How different would Sunday mornings around North America be if we invited people to bring their best each week instead of coming to get something? What difference would it make if we seriously asked the question of how we were inadvertently producing consumers instead of missionaries through the way that we gather together corporately? How can engage all of the people in more holistic ways so that our worship reflects more of what God intended? How must we worship in order to give the world a better picture of the God we love? These are hard questions that deserve much thought and practice.