

Surprise the World
Identifying Ourselves as Missionaries
Colossians 4:2-6; 1 Peter 3:15; Isaiah 61

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When our vehicle needs repaired, we take it to a mechanic. When the pipes in our home leak, we call a plumber. When we have questions about our taxes or finances, we contact an accountant or financial advisor. When we're sick, we go to a doctor to diagnose our illness and prescribe medicine. And when it comes to "running the church" and evangelizing, we hire pastors and financially support missionaries. Pastors preach and teach the Bible, care for and counsel those in need, disciple followers of Jesus and lead people who don't know Jesus to Him. And missionaries spread the Good News of Jesus in other countries or in challenging settings like the inner city or secular college campuses. Amateurs (or lay people) might dabble in certain things, but when we want quality work done, we hire professionals. While that line of thinking is common, it's a major impediment to the work God wants to do in and through his Church.

Leslie Newbigin was a prominent 20th Century British theologian who emphasized a concept known as "The Priesthood of All Believers"—the idea that all Christians have ministry roles in the church. Some ministers were critical of Newbigin, claiming his teaching would destroy the clergy. His response, "*Far from it. I'm trying to destroy the laity.*" Pastors and missionaries mobilize, equip and resource the Body of Christ, but every follower of Jesus is called to minister to others and we're all called to be missionaries. In the book we're focused on in this series, Surprise the World, author Michael Frost claims 99% of Christians have no sense that what they do matters in the Kingdom of God. In contrast, I view Missional Living as—**Living with the understanding that all I do and say has the potential to point people to Jesus' love for them.** I'm not anti-pastor or anti-missionary by any means, but as followers of Jesus, we're all called to do the work of advancing Jesus' Kingdom.

Frost points to the Apostle Paul's words in Colossians chapter 4 to illustrate that all of us in the church have a role to play...

Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful. And pray for us, too, that God may open a door for our message, so that we may proclaim the mystery of Christ, for which I am in chains. Pray that

I may proclaim it clearly, as I should. Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity. Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone. Colossians 4:2-6

Paul asks the 1st Century Christians at Colossae to pray for him and Timothy—as gifted evangelists—for open doors to proclaim the Good News of Jesus clearly. And he then encourages all of them make the most of every opportunity in their interactions with those who don't know Jesus, so they'll be prepared to answer anyone.

Effective evangelism occurs when those gifted as evangelists use their gift and when all of us make the most of opportunities we have to point people to Jesus. And the Apostle Peter makes our responsibility to point others toward Jesus more explicit when he writes, *“But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect.”* 1 Peter 3:15

Michael Frost wrote [Surprise the World](#) and developed the BELLS concept of...

BELLS

Bless
Eat
Listen
Learn
Sent

to help followers of Jesus elicit questions of those who don't know Jesus about the differences they see in our lives. I think many of us would acknowledge that we're rarely asked questions about the hope we have in Jesus. These simple tools are designed to help raise those questions.

Over the past 3 weeks we've explored the habits: Bless, Eat, Listen and Learn. The habit I'll be helping us focus on today is **Sent—beginning to identify myself as a missionary.** The Latin word *mission* means *to send or to be ejected or pushed out*. That definition fits what churches or mission organizations do as they commission missionaries and send them out to a distant country, but if the mission of every follower of Jesus is to alert others to God's reign on the earth, we're all missionaries.

During my time as a pastor I've been on multiple short-term mission trips as a leader and as a participant. I've read comments from people claiming that the money raised to send

teens and adults on short-term mission assignments could be better used by giving it directly to the people or town where the missionary is going. Those comments miss the point—a primary goal of short-term mission trips is to help students and adults realize their service isn't limited to helping out in another country, but they're missionaries in the places where they live, in their schools and in their workplaces. Short-term mission trips are designed to help those who go on the trips view themselves as missionaries—people who have been sent by God to minister where they live, work, play and go to school. As followers of Jesus, we're missionaries who point people toward Jesus' love and our mission field is wherever we are.

Michael Frost likens our lives to movie trailers. He writes,

Trailers are tasters, short film versions of the soon-to-be-released feature, and they usually include the best special effects or the funniest scenes or the most romantic moments, depending on the film, of the upcoming feature. Now, watch those around you in the theatre at the end of each trailer. If it has done its job, usually one person will turn to the other and say, "I want to see that movie."

This is a great metaphor for the missional church. If it does its job well, people will see what it does and say, "I want to see the world they come from." Michael Frost

In his BELLS initiative Frost suggests journaling as a habit we practice that helps us embrace our calling as people who are sent. And I want to pair walking in community for accountability with others into this habit. We're encouraging you to set aside several times each week, or perhaps even daily to journal how you've seen God at work in your life as you seek to live missionally. In your journaling you might ask questions that come to mind, and record insights God has given you in the hope that you'll identify yourself differently, as a missionary. Frost says, "*What you've done during the previous week is only as important as the meaning you assign to it.*" The habit of journaling can help assign meaning to aspects of your life that you might normally ignore or dismiss.

So, if our life is meant to alert people to God's reign—if our lives are like movie trailers—what are we pointing people toward? I find our answer in Jesus' actions and words in Luke chapter 4. At the beginning of his ministry, shortly after He was tempted by the devil in the wilderness, we're told that Jesus went to a synagogue in his hometown of Nazareth on the Sabbath. He was given the scroll to read the Scripture for the day and He read these well-known words from Isaiah chapter 61. "*The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed*

me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." Luke 4:18 & 19 Those words are powerful and I'm sure Jesus read them with authority, but it was what He did next that really got people's attention. *"Then he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him. He began by saying to them, 'Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.'"* Jesus identified Himself with the prophetic passage from Isaiah. And just as He'd stated, his life and ministry was the fulfillment of those verses. Isaiah 61 was well-known to Jesus' audience that day, but He only read a portion of the passage. I'd like to read other verses from this chapter to help us have a fuller picture of what Jesus said He had come to do.

Isaiah 61 selected

to comfort all who mourn and provide for those who grieve in Zion—to bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of joy instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair. They will be called oaks of righteousness, a planting of the LORD for the display of his splendor. They will rebuild the ancient ruins and restore the places long devastated; they will renew the ruined cities that have been devastated for generations. For I, the LORD, love justice; I hate robbery and wrongdoing. In my faithfulness I will reward my people and make an everlasting covenant with them.

Isaiah 61 is the message you and I are to proclaim and live as citizens of Jesus' Kingdom. Jesus' mission is our mission. Theologian N.T. Wright identifies 4 areas in which our lives can point people to Jesus' reign and these 4 areas can be prompts for our journaling as we pause and reflect on how God is at work in our lives...

4 Themes That Can Prompt Our Journaling

- **Reconciliation**—Sin has resulted in brokenness throughout our world between people and creation; between people and God; and, person to person. Through our actions and words we have the opportunity to announce and to demonstrate reconciliation.
- **Justice**—God's heart is for justice. Liberty and justice for all wasn't original to our country's founders. How are you showing justice in and through your life? We can do that through individual interactions we have and by being part of ministries or organizations that bring justice. I love hearing about the fruit borne by ministries focused on justice in our church: ATCR, Peace Promise, Our Father's Hope, Friends over Fences, Eternal Hope and Family Promise. On a side note, I have somewhat of a negative reaction when I hear the term "social justice," because the concept of justice has been co-opted from the Bible. Historically, justice has been the focus of the church, but in the late 19th and 20th centuries the church tended to minimize the idea of justice and focus strictly on evangelism, as if God

cared about people's spirits apart from their physical, emotional and relational needs. I'm partial to the term "Biblical justice," because it places justice where it should be—in the context of God's mission.

- **Wholeness**—As Jesus' followers, you and I are called to bring healing and wholeness and to pray for healing and wholeness in people's lives. This is Jesus' mission and it also ties back to Isaiah chapter 61. In John 10:10 Jesus said, *"The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I have come that they may have life and have it to the full."*
- **Beauty**—Like justice, the church sometimes downplays the significance of beauty, but beauty was God's idea. Look around at his amazing creation. As Jesus' followers we have the opportunity—actually, the responsibility—to enjoy beauty, to help others appreciate beauty and to create beauty. The 19th Century Dutch theologian and Prime Minister, Abraham Kuyper said, *"There is not one square inch in all of creation over which Jesus Christ does not cry, 'This is mine!'"*

We've covered a lot of ground during this series, but the goal has been to equip you, not to overwhelm you. I'm not wanting to add more things to do to your already full schedules. I'm hoping to help you tune into God's heart and gain his perspective for the people you encounter and the circumstances you find yourselves in every day. I've been enjoying the stories and examples I'm hearing from our church family thus far and I anticipate hearing and seeing more awesome things during Lent as we put the 5 habits together for 6 weeks. I'd like to conclude with the quote Michael Frost ends his book with...

"I'm not asking you to do something distasteful or unpleasant. Blessing people is personally satisfying. Eating with others is fun. Listening to the Spirit and learning about Jesus is spiritually enriching. And journaling the various ways you alert others to the reign of God is encouraging." Michael Frost

Throughout our series we've emphasized the importance of tuning into God's heart and seeking his direction, not simply doing stuff in our strength. As we conclude our time together today, I'd like us to take a moment to quiet our hearts and listen for God's whisper. As you do I encourage you to reflect on these questions: *"During this series, are there habits or steps God has impressed on me that I need to incorporate into my life?" "Who is a person God is laying on my heart, who He wants me to bless or initiate a meeting with over the next several weeks?" "What steps do I need to take to incorporate listening to the Holy Spirit, learning about Jesus and journaling into my life?"*