

IS YOUR CHURCH MISSIONAL?

By Dr. Ed Stetzer, director of Research and missiologist, NAMB

Still trying to decide whether your church is “traditional” or “contemporary”—and which is better? That’s the wrong question. The real issue is whether your church is a biblically faithful church able to relate to the culture around you. In short, what matters is if your church is *missional*.

The M word has been around for a while, but has recently become more accepted. That’s good. It means that churches are asking hard questions about biblical ministry in community. What kind of church will be the most biblical and faithful in their community? If we’re going to reach a changing North America, we have to contend for the unchanging faith (Jude 3) using forms that are relevant to all kinds of people (1 Corinthians 9:22-23). That’s a *missional* church—a church acting like a missionary to the community around it while partnering with others to be missional across North America and around the world.

Why all the fuss over a word? Can’t a church do what it’s been called to do for more than two millennia and not mess with semantics? It certainly can. But, the reason is not the word, it’s the emphasis. Churches are discovering the need to be missional in their communities. So, the important question is, “What is a *missional* church?”

WHAT IS A MISSIONAL CHURCH?

Missional is not the same as “missions-minded,” though they are both important and related. A missions-minded church is one that cares about missions around the world. It gives to missions, it goes to mission contexts, it’s involved in cross-cultural missions. *Missional* leaders, however, know the mission field is here—now. They realize they need not only to support missions, they need to be missionaries where they are.

In its simplest form, the term *missional* is the noun “missionary” adapted into an adjective. For example, an “adversary” is your enemy. So, someone who is “adversarial” acts like your enemy. A church or a follower of Christ who is viewed as *missional* acts like a missionary. They do the things that missionaries do, regardless of the context. They can be parachute-dropped into a village in India, or into the hustle of any North American city and be *missional*. They study and learn a culture, live and proclaim the good news and contextualize it for that culture. *Missional* churches take Acts 1:8 literally and act like missionaries—sharing the gospel in word and deed—in their own Jerusalem (city or area), Judea (state or region), Samaria (North America) and to the ends of the earth.

THE MISSIONAL MATRIX

There are three emphases that every church in every culture needs in order to faithfully proclaim the gospel. They need to understand what Jesus called them to do, what culture they are in and what a biblical church looks like. A missional church lives at the intersection of three things.

- Who Jesus is and what he has sent us to do (Christology);
- What forms and strategies we should use to most effectively expand the kingdom where we are sent (Missiology);
- What expression of a New Testament church is most appropriate in this context (Ecclesiology).

The shaded circle below illustrates the necessity of the scriptural and theological foundation and its Holy Spirit-enabled application. Missional churches must begin and end with a solid foundation of rightly-understood biblical theology. Only within this circle should Christology, ecclesiology and missiology interact. Otherwise the church would be unbalanced and outside the bounds of scripture.



WHAT DO MISSIONAL CHURCHES LOOK LIKE?

They are more than the things listed below, but certainly they are:

- **Incarnational:** Missional churches are deeply entrenched in their communities. The church is not focused on its facility, but is focused on living, demonstrating and offering biblical community to a lost world. It looks a lot like the Atlanta-based Logos Church, a new church sponsored by First Baptist Atlanta in an effort to reach the biker community. Church planter Danny Presten has become part of the biker community by working at a motorcycle store while planting Logos Church.
- **Indigenous:** Missional churches are indigenous. They have taken root in the soil and reflect, to some degree, the culture of their community. An indigenous church looks different from Seattle to Senegal to Singapore. We rejoice in an African church worshipping to African music, in African dress and with African enthusiasm. Shouldn’t we rejoice at

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SERMON OUTLINES

Fresh material for busy pastors

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MATTHEW 16:13-20

I. THE QUESTION ABOUT JESUS (V.13)

- A. The Question by Christ: Jesus asks the same question everyone else is asking, "Who do people think I am?"
- B. Echo from Eden: This question rings in our ears and has since man was expelled from Eden "Who will be the Redeemer?"
- C. Everyone asks this question (from the Pope to Oprah Winfrey)
- D. Humanity's Answers:
 1. We know Jesus existed. It is a historical fact.
 2. We know that Jesus did many good things.
 3. We know Jesus taught about the kingdom of God.
 4. But is He the Savior?

II. THE ANSWERS OF MEN (V.14)

- A. Ascetic like John the Baptist

- B. Fiery like Elijah
- C. Weeping like Jeremiah
- D. Prophetic like one who tells the truth of judgment and mercy
- E. Today's answers are no different: prophet, holy man, teacher, etc.
 1. Prophet – Proclaimed the truth with forcefulness
 2. Holy Man – Lived out an example of the truth
 3. Teacher – Taught the truth in love
- F. But are these answers complete?

III. THE TRUTH FROM GOD (V.15-20)

- A. Jesus asks His followers (v.15)
- B. Peter answers correctly (v.16)
 1. "The Christ" means He is the one sent to fulfill the special task of redemption.
 2. "The Son of the living God" means He is able to complete the task of redemption.
- C. He is unique for the work at hand.

CONCLUSION:

- Knowing Jesus is not something we can discover on our own.
- Peter is able to answer because of God's revelation to him (v.17).
- We can know Christ only because of the gracious revelation by the Father.
- It is upon the revelation from God that the church will be built; not on Peter, not on our confessions.
- Only by virtue of the fact that God reveals Himself to us can we know Him.

SERMON STARTER

Who is the real Jesus? Video

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churches like The 411, a new Southern Baptist church in the theater district of New York City that reflects the inherently unique cultures found there?

- **Intentional:** Missional churches are intentional about their methodologies. Biblical practices for preaching, discipline, baptism and other functions are vital. But negotiables such as worship style, evangelism methods, attire, service times, locations and other man-made customs are determined by their effectiveness in a specific cultural context. Johnson Ferry Baptist Church in Atlanta is a perfect example—a church committed to biblical practices but intentionally using different forms of worship (from contemporary to traditional to emerging) to be missionally appropriate to several population segments in their community.

A missional church responds to the sending commands of Jesus by becoming an incarnational, indigenous and intentional gospel presence in its context. When Jesus said, "As the Father has sent Me, so send I you," (John 20:21) that mandate was not to a select group of cross-cultural missionaries. Instead, that was a commission to you, me and our churches.

We have a sender (Jesus), a message (the gospel) and a people to whom we are sent (real people in culture). It's worth the effort to go beyond our personal preferences and our attractional methods to move out and proclaim a faithful gospel in whatever context we find ourselves—inside our church services, but very often outside the walls. That's a missional church.

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