**The Missional Church**

By Ed Stetzer

***“Peace be to you! As the Father has sent me, I also send you. (John 20:21)***

Most believers readily grasp the idea of Jesus being sent to the world. While speaking to his disciples at the well of Samaria, Jesus said, “My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me” **(4:34)**. In **John 4-8** Jesus spoke of being sent by His Father in 14 separate occasions, such as saying, “I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me” **(6:38)** and “I am One who bears witness of Myself, and the Father who sent Me bears witness of Me” **(8:18)**. Paul wrote of the same Truth in **Rom. 8:3** referring to God’s “*sending* His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh.” When Jesus says, “the Father has sent Me” it is not a surprise. The fact that Jesus was the “sent one” is one of the most fundamental identifications of Jesus. The incarnation of Christ is the definitive occurrence of being sent on mission—and a model for us to represent Christ in the world.

Believers know that they are sent on mission into the world. The word “sent” is replete through Paul’s epistles as he mentions those such as Timothy and Titus who have been entrusted with a message and a mission. In the Book of Acts, sending is a common occurrence as well. Ananias is sent to pray for Paul and open his eyes. Paul and Barnabas are sent out from the church of Antioch as missionaries with the gospel. “As they ministered to the Lord and fasted, the Holy Spirit said, ‘Now separate to Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.’ Then, having fasted and prayed, laid hands on them, they sent them away” **(Acts 13:2-3)**. Most know that Jesus “sent” some, but often do not consider the breadth and depth of that sending (cp. **Gen 12:1-3; Ex. 19:5-6; Is. 6:8; Matt. 24:14; 28:18-20; Luke 24:46-48; Acts 1:8; 1 Peter 2:9-10).**

All of God’s people are sent on mission, the only questions are “where?” and “among whom?” So, God has a kingdom mission and He entrusts that mission to the church—in other words, the church does not have a mission, but the mission has a church. Some are sent cross—culturally as missionaries (we call that missions), but all are sent (we call that missional).

To understand the depth of this *“sentness”*, consider that the source of our missional identity is located in the nature of God. Further consider that this sending is as central to God’s nature as His love, forgiveness, righteousness, and holiness. It must be, since we are given example after example of it in His Word. Without God’s sending nature, we would not see the “bridegroom coming out of His chamber” in creation (Ps. 19) culminating in Jesus presenting “to Himself a glorious church” **(Eph. 5:27)**.

God’s sending is as tangible as any other attribute of the Godhead: The Father sent His Son and the Holy Spirit. The Father, Son, and Spirit in indivisible unity send the church. We are to be missional; we are the live sent. Our sent-and-sending identity is connected with the very nature and existence of the church. That is, just as it is the nature of God, it is connected with the very nature and existence of the church. That is, just as it is the nature of God, it is the nature of the church. When Jesus proclaimed, “As the Father has sent Me, I also send you,” His mandate was a commissioning act for the disciples of that day. His command then develops into a missional task described by Peter in his first letter. “But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light” **(1 Peter 2:9)**.

The concept of a missional church is recognition that God is a sending God and we, the church and individual believers, are to live sent. The missional church is shaped by the idea that every believer is to live on mission. Being sent means that we move outside the walls of our church buildings and our Christian homes in order to engage all people with the gospel. The missional nature of the church calls for us to engage in and support the work of international missionaries to take the gospel across the world and the local mission-shaped believers to take the gospel and show the love of Christ across the street. There is a *sentness* inherent to being a follower of Jesus. It is the way of Jesus in us. We are not sent on mission alone. God’s people join Him on His mission. We are commanded and empowered to participate with Him. We know this because Jesus promised, “I am with you always, even to the end of age” **(Matt. 28:20)**. We are sent on mission with the Sender. As believers, we don’t decide if we are on mission. We are on mission by our calling—and because of God’s nature. The only question is whether or not we are living up to the calling we have been given. Is our identity (sent on mission) aligning with our life (living on mission)?

Missional churches engage the people with the redemptive message of the gospel. To do so, the church emulates Christ in the engagement of the mission. He came announcing that He would serve the hurting **(Luke 4)** and save the lost **(Luke 19:10)**. We are called to join Him on that mission and show and share the good news of Jesus to a world Jesus loves. The missional church contends for the truth.

The missional church engages and inhabits the culture while seeking to remain separate from its sin and sinful structures. Jesus Christ was a thoroughly Jewish, first-century man who engages believers, doubters, scoffers, friends, and foes, yet never sinned. He was truly in the world without being of the world. We can engage the greedy without becoming greedy, the hateful without becoming hateful, the proud without becoming prideful. The existence of temptation should not hinder us from missional living. Instead, we are to be a culturally relevant, counter-culture community for the Kingdom.

Last, being sent by Jesus as the Father sent Him means that the seed of the gospel will take root. The seed of the gospel must be sown in the soil of the culture, which necessitates Christians being engaged there. Scripture calls us salt and light and that requires presence and proclamation.

The sending nature of the Father, the commission by Christ, and the empowerment of the Spirit creates a missional church. As believers, we should revel in the invitation by Christ to join His missional people.

*Prayer, Care, Share Handout*