

churchinaction



THE MISSION OF THE CHURCH  
**CHURCH IN ACTION**

# THE MISSION OF THE CHURCH

The calling of the church is to proclaim and live out heaven on earth. The church is a community of people that experiences, announces and passes on the in-breaking shalom of God. Since Paul calls the church the Body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12), the church is not only there to preach Christ on a Sunday morning but to actually look and act like Christ in this world.

The church should live as Christ lived. If this were the case, Mahatma Gandhi might have joined Christianity. He once said: “I like your Christ, I do not like your Christians. Your Christians are so unlike your Christ.”<sup>1</sup> As long as the church preaches Christ but does not look like him in her essence, actions, and DNA, the church cannot be the church God had in mind.”

A church that looks like Jesus does not simply exist in the service field, but it engages in society at every level. “It’s not just about saving souls but about seeing that the poor are fed and the oppressed are freed. It’s about caring for the orphans and providing good education for our children. It’s about challenging ideologies that counter biblical truth. It’s about effecting change in public policy and creating social systems that are more in line with God’s intentions for this world. It’s about seeing his reign fleshed out wherever we set foot in our world.”<sup>2</sup>

The church should look and act like Jesus through proclaiming and living out the kingdom of God and expanding that throughout our world. “The church is called to be now what the world is called to be ultimately.”<sup>3</sup>



# FOUR PRINCIPLES THAT MAKE UP A HEALTHY CHURCH

To provide a practical understanding of what the church is, here are four principles that contribute to developing a healthy church that lives as Jesus did: Share – Inspire – Grow – Serve.

## SHARE - WE WANT TO SHARE OUR LIVES WITH PEOPLE WHO ARE NOT YET A PART OF OUR COMMUNITY.

Share is about being part of the lives of others that do not belong to the church. A church should not hide from the world, but rather live incarnated as the body of Christ in it. The church imitates Jesus if she lives out the incarnation when Jesus came into the world and “dwelt among” us (John 1:14). Peterson paraphrases this passage with “Jesus moved into our neighbourhood.”<sup>4</sup>

“Spend more time listening to, eating with, and playing with the neighbourhood you live in. Work toward not merely identifying with the locals; seek to become one.”<sup>5</sup> Jesus lived among people for thirty years before he did three years of public ministry. Either at work, through a hobby, or through communal living, we are called to join with other Christians and live among the people that God has sent us to love. “Perhaps the heaviest cost of incarnational ministry is choosing to identify with only one people, one place. Choice is at the very heart of incarnation. As John Perkins used to say, nailing one’s feet to the floor limits one’s horizons and can feel like dedication to smallness.”<sup>6</sup>

Choosing to dwell amongst God’s creation can feel limiting when we prioritize living daily, mundane life in the same place. “It is difficult not to have plans, not to organize people around an ur-

gent cause and not to feel that you are working directly for social progress. But I wonder more and more if the first thing shouldn’t be to know people by name, to eat and drink with them, to listen to their stories and tell your own and to let them know with words, handshakes and hugs that you do not simply like them - but truly love them.”<sup>7</sup>

Being on mission and the idea of incarnation are at the heart of what the church is for Frost and Hirsch: “In our view, the church should be missional rather than institutional. The church should define itself in terms of its mission - to take the gospel to and incarnate the gospel within a specific cultural context.”<sup>8</sup> The first principle, Share, shows that Christians are not against culture and don’t want to create their own culture, but desire to transform the culture that they live in. God loves the whole world (John 3:16).

## INSPIRE - WE WANT TO INSPIRE PEOPLE TO FOLLOW JESUS.

Christians have been deeply convinced for over 2000 years that Jesus Christ, his life, his words, and his actions have changed this world forever. It is the mission of the church to inspire people of all nations, origins, and educational and income levels to follow Him. (Matthew 28:19)

Jesus’ method of changing the world was novel. Even Napoleon Bonaparte had to admit: “I know men and I tell you that Jesus Christ is no mere man. Between him and every other person in the world there is no possible term of comparison. Alexander, Caesar, Charlemagne, and I founded empires. But on what did we rest the creations of our genius?

Upon force. Jesus Christ founded His empire upon love; and at this hour millions of people would die for Him.”<sup>9</sup> Jesus’ approach to sharing God’s love and creating a new world were not typical. He changed the power dynamic not through a demonstration of power, but through love, shared life, and fostering the in-breaking of the shalom of God. The great scientist and Nobel Prize winner Albert Einstein expresses his enthusiasm for Jesus Christ as follows: “No one can read the Gospels without feeling the actual presence of Jesus. His personality pulsates in every word. No myth is filled with such life”<sup>10</sup>

Jesus showed us that we have a God who is for us and not against us. He showed us that more is possible than we can imagine and helps us change our contexts and expand our minds to embrace God’s kingdom mindset. He came to proclaim and live the kingdom of God. Jesus did not want to create a new religion, but came to start a political, social, economic, and spiritual revolution that would bring about a whole new world. A world characterized by love, hope, joy, and forgiveness. A world brought about not by force, but through inspiration. The church must inspire as many people as possible to follow Jesus, who altered the trajectory of the world through his love, life, death, and resurrection.

### **GROW - WE WANT TO HELP PEOPLE FIND THEIR PLACE TO GROW SPIRITUALLY.**

The church is not merely a place where people should be inspired to follow Jesus but also where they can spiritually grow. A healthy church allows us to discover an expanded family and gives us the safety and guidance to deepen our faith. “The-

refore let us move beyond the elementary teachings about Christ and be taken forward to maturity” (Hebrews 6:1).

In Ephesians, the apostle Paul explains how valuable spiritual growth is for Christians. Through spiritual growth, we learn more and more about God’s calling for our lives and the power with which God is able to work in us (Ephesians 1:17). At the same time, he enables us to resist all the evil powers in the world and live a victorious Christian life (Ephesians 6.10-18), in which “we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of people in their deceitful scheming” (Ephesians 4:14).

As we grow in our faith, we understand what is right and wrong and are more sure of how to live fully into our calling. God gets more and more room in our lives and helps us live from an identity that accepts that we are beloved children of God (Ephesians 5: 16-19). Perhaps the most beautiful promise we receive when we grow spiritually is that God will do much more than we can “ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us” (Ephesians 3:20).

“In the end, it is important to remember that we cannot become what we need to be, by remaining what we are.”<sup>11</sup> Our spiritual growth is a constant process. We will not reach an ending point or grow out of the ability to improve. “Becoming like Christ is a long, slow process of growth.”<sup>12</sup> A healthy church fosters growth for people in all stages and phases of faith. No one stage is greater than another - each individual is able to teach, learn from, and grow with their entire community.

## SERVE - WE WANT TO SERVE OTHERS.

Serve is about using our lives to care for others in our community and in this world. As Christians, we are called to be the light and salt of the world (Mt 5:13-16). The church should be known for their love for other people - it is not an organization that exists for its own members. The church isn't called to come to a place, to take a seat, and to simply listen, but is called to go out and serve people. God doesn't want to bless his people for their own sake, but empowers them to be a blessing to all people (Genesis 12:2).

The task of the church is not only to preach the good news, but also to live the good news by serving the needs of a community. Caring for your community can start by addressing the following needs for the people you serve: (1) physical needs; (2) spiritual / moral needs; (3) social / relational needs; (4) emotional needs; (5) educational needs; (6) training / mentoring needs.<sup>13</sup>

“Christianity must be a force that moves outward, and a Christian community is basically in existence ‘for others.’ That is the whole meaning of a Christian community. A Christian community, which spends all its resources on a building campaign for its own needs has long ago left Christianity high and dry on the banks. Or all its resources on an education program or youth program for that matter. A Christian community is in existence ‘for others,’ not for ‘its own good.’”<sup>14</sup> The Serve principle requires the church to be active, not only within its own walls or in small ways when it is convenient.’

“Mission is more than just doing good things for people. It's a primary means of helping people see what a Christian really is.”<sup>15</sup> True service often stretches us outside our comfort zones, because it requires us to fully and honestly bring our whole selves into community with strangers. Service, however, fully defines who we are as Christians.

# BEING BORN AGAIN

To truly understand the vision and mission of the church, we need to fall in love with the message of the kingdom of God and see the big picture that motivates us to be the church. “Ivan Illich was once asked what is the most revolutionary way to change society. Is it violent revolution or is it gradual reform? Neither. If you want to change society, then you must tell an alternative story, he concluded.”<sup>16</sup> If we want to change the church we also need an alternative story. This alternative story is the kingdom of God.

A healthy church can be summarized in four words: Share - Inspire - Grow - Serve. These four words are not about methodology (since the church will look very differently in different contexts), but are about the essence of what it means to be the Body of Christ in this world.

“The church now seems to stand in the same place God stood some 2,500 years ago: misrepresented, accused of bigotry, portrayed as narrow-minded and in love with power, only interested in buildings, ready to smite the dirty and sinful, over-occupied with sex, and ready to lend support for unjust wars... And so we must do as God did, as Christ commanded and exemplified: we must be born again. Become nothing, removed of strength and power and voice and means and language. We must re-emerge and grow up again in the place we are meant to serve. Understand it, learn from it, be in it, love it, listen to it, wait thirty years before speaking to it.”<sup>17</sup> The church in the western world needs to be born again.

A western newspaper reporter once asked Mahatma Gandhi, “Mr Gandhi, would you please tell us in one short sentence what your message is?” Gandhi answered, “My life is my message.”<sup>18</sup> Let us also make the life of the church its message again.



# ENDNOTES

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