

We are missional disciples because our God is missional

Were you shocked to read that Jesus used mission to catalyse the discipleship of the early disciples? I find that is how most people react. Indeed, I was shocked when it was pointed out to me. I was brought up with the model that church attendance, receiving the sacraments, bible study; these things are the primary cause of spiritual growth. I was shocked to learn that Jesus used a different model.

Why does Jesus do this? Jesus uses mission to catalyse discipleship because we have a missional God. The Bible tells the story of a God who, having brought creation into being and blessed it, sees it all go awry. What does God do about it? In Genesis 12 we see God's missional strategy begin to be revealed. He calls Abraham to trust Him and in two imperatives in Genesis 12:1-3, tells him to

- 1) 'go' and
- 2) 'be a blessing'

Through Abraham and his descendants all the nations of the world will be blessed. This God is a God of Love. It's a love that searches, reaches out and invites: it is 'missional'.

Just like the disciples when Jesus calls them in Luke 9, Abraham knows absolutely nothing! He learns as he 'does.' Through the next ten chapters, in spite of some horrendous mistakes, God works in and through him.

Fast forward to the Exodus and God's mighty deliverance of a people who had become enslaved after 430 years in Egypt. God gives Abraham's descendants a charge: be a light to the nations of me, the God who has redeemed you.

Israel being this 'light' is one of the stated purposes of the Law (Deut 4:6-8) and a strong theme in the Old Testament (e.g. Isaiah 42:6, 49:6, 60:3); that the nations might be drawn to God.

Jesus sums up the story of this missional God, and thus the entire Bible, in the one and a half verses of Luke 24:46b-47.

“This is what is written (i.e. Old Testament): the Messiah will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance for the forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.”

So understanding that mission catalyses our discipleship helps even the Bible make sense! As Christopher Wright writes in his book, *The Mission of God*:

“The whole Bible renders to us the story of God’s mission through God’s people in their engagement with God’s world for the sake of the whole of God’s creation.”

So our role as missional disciples is to be part of that ongoing story of God’s missional love that started with Abraham; that, like Israel, we will be God’s light to the people around us (Matthew 5:14-16) and be part of the ongoing sharing of God’s love in Jesus name (Luke 24:46b-47). As we do this, God catalyses our discipleship and causes us to grow in faith, trust, love and understanding, for missional discipleship reflects His very character.