

Commentary: Jesus on strategic visioning

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Building a congregation's life around a clear vision and purpose is an easy thing to believe in. Aligning that purpose with biblical teaching and witness is an agreeable notion. I seldom encounter a leader or leadership group who resists the idea that the path toward a vibrant and engaging congregation is to embody God's mission in clear, dynamic and powerful ways.



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The problems emerge when we begin to talk about the how of living out God's call to be his people on a mission. Like barnacles on a ship, our preferences, traditions, icons and cultural accommodations have encrusted the mission and threaten to smother it.

I've been thinking about using Jesus as a model for how to live out a clear and compelling mission. His life and practices provide insights for us in our struggle to stay true to our calling as Christians and churches.

How about this for a list of healthy habits of congregations on a mission?

Solitude: Jesus knew the value of time spent with a compass rather than a

calendar. He repeatedly frustrated those who prized efficiency. From the beginning, he was prone to pull back from the limelight and to reconnect with the divine dream and mission. Rather than allow others to sway his agenda and trajectory, he clearly defined who he was and what he came to do. The wilderness was his friend, and solitude was a regular habit. Planning and preparation claimed a healthy portion of his time.

Relentless adherence: For the kingdom vision to take root, Jesus found it imperative to avoid every temptation to water down or diverge from the vision with which he had been entrusted. Repeatedly, he declined opportunities that would have compromised the mission. Instead, he demonstrated an iron will that held fast to the calling, despite popular acclaim or the threat of rejection.

Right people: Jesus chose men and women to help him carry out the mission with an eye toward their visible and invisible gifts. He taught a diversity of gifts in the kingdom, and his followers were a living example of that lesson. He paid attention to individuals and pushed them to become what they had been intended to be. Missing in his actions was an insistence upon lock-step behavior or thinking. When he spoke of unity, it was a unity of purpose, not style. In the diversity of the disciples and other followers, he found a powerful combination that turned the world upside-down.

Repetition: On a regular and consistent basis, Jesus taught and re-taught the basics of the kingdom dream. Using parables, he helped those around him visualize what it would look like for the kingdom to come to earth as it was in heaven. Whether a story featured a waiting father, a good Samaritan, a lost coin or a bridal celebration, he repeatedly reinforced the new way of living and being God's people.

Reinforcement: Not content with mere theory, Jesus illustrated his prevailing vision with real-life examples. Blind men, innocent children, lepers, wayward women and demon-possessed men all served as vehicles

for him to reinforce and drive home the core teaching of this new kingdom.

Celebration: Along the way, victories needed to be celebrated, and Jesus focused on those successes to build a growing sense of movement among his followers. When bodies were healed or lives redirected, the resulting exclamations and joyful dances served notice this was going to be a kingdom whose end result was abundance and joy. The gospels are permeated by glimpses of joy and laughter.

Integrity: Jesus insisted all of his life with his disciples be congruent with his teaching. He was the one who noticed the beggars, the blind, lame and diseased. He was the one who stayed true to a life of simplicity and singular focus. When others wanted to crown him king or build him a temple, he redirected them to the deeper meaning of his coming. Even when the mission led him to the garden and the cruelty of the cross, he remained true to his calling and his divine mission.

If our churches were willing to exercise these habits in our quest to live out the mission God has entrusted to us, perhaps we would ask these types of questions:

1. How much time do you spend in quiet solitude reconnecting to the vision?
2. Are you willing to say no to lesser things so that you can say yes to the mission?
3. Are the right people leading the effort?
4. How often do you simplify, repeat, and reinforce your reason for being?
5. Does this journey make you smile, laugh and resonate with joy?
6. Does this mission embrace your whole being?

Lip service to the kingdom is easy. Missional living? That's another story—a Jesus story.

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