

‘Can’t Someone Else Do It?’

REFLECTIONS ON LIVING OUT THE FIVE MARKS OF MISSION AS GOOD NEWS HABITS



BY CHRIS DUFFETT

I quickly learned what his favourite phrase within his colourful vocabulary was, it featured prominently in most sentences and was shared with even more gusto when we spoke about faith. The expression became his answer to any of my gentle explanations of how he could be known and loved by God. The phrase was ‘bull-poo’. Only he used another word for the manure part of the idiom. As I sat next to the driver of the old taxi, late at night on my way from the train station,

I uttered a silent prayer asking that somehow I may get through to him on my way home. It was then that he declared his *doctrina absoluta*, ‘I know that it’s all bull-**** as they didn’t find the bones!’

The bones? I paused for a moment trying to work out his argument, as to why he could prove that Christianity was all made up. Perhaps he meant dinosaur bones, or the bones of the missing link. I gave up. I had to gently ask him

what he was talking about. They didn’t find the bones of Jesus, did they?!’ he declared victoriously, whilst fist-pumping the air, followed by placing his e-cig firmly in his mouth as he gave a wry smile.

‘You muppet,’ I firmly said, justified that my school playground profanity was appropriate within the context of his more grown-up swearing. ‘That’s the whole point.’ I explained to him about the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, and why, because of that, my

life had changed, as I had exchanged my old life for the new. I shared my testimony, of how my life used to be, and how I had met with the living Jesus leading to my new way of life now. His wry smile turned to one of puzzlement. 'So, they didn't find the bones, because Jesus is still alive?' he asked. 'Bingo!' I declared, as I got my wallet out to pay for the ride home.

As I reflected on my conversation with my new taxi-driver friend, an overwhelming burden I often feel as an evangelist came upon me. It often causes me to ask, 'How can the people of this nation be reached with the good news of Jesus? How can people come to know God when their experience of the good news seems so minimal?' The vast majority of people know nothing of the story of Jesus, so should we, as the church, resign ourselves to the fact that people just won't become followers because they won't have an opportunity to hear and experience the gospel?

I must admit, as I opened up my front door on that late night coming home, I cried out to God, 'How can people come to know you?!' People coming to faith can seem like a large chasm, but it shouldn't be. Faith comes as a result of people hearing the good news. So surely we need to tell it more, for it is when people hear and experience the good news of Jesus that the impossible happens, and people like you and I become followers of Jesus.

There is a wash of books and resources out there to help us stay true to that call to be people who faithfully follow Jesus into this broken world to let others come to hear the good news. One of the missional resources that's been a 'mainstay' for nearly 3 decades is the 'Five Marks of Mission.' These marks have been adopted by many churches as a kind of health gauge of whether they are engaging in the mission of God.

These 'Marks' began life as a

mission statement for the Anglican Communion way back in 1984, during a meeting in Badagry, Nigeria. While they started out as Four Marks, the fifth, about creation care, was to be added some 6 years later. The report succinctly declared: 'Deliberately and precisely Jesus made his mission the model of our mission to the world. For this reason, our understanding of the Church's mission must be deduced from our understanding of what Jesus considered his mission to be.'

The marks have been further simplified by the words: Tell, Teach, Transform, Tend and Treasure. These are, indeed, worthy pointers to help us live within the slipstream of Jesus. This article is a plea for



missional and evangelistic praxis of them. It is vital to ask 'How can we actually live them out, not compartmentalising them under the filename: 'Can't someone else do them?' My prayer is that we adopt them as a day by day habit, with them being integrated into our lives as disciples of Christ.

What I fear has arisen in reaction to the Five Marks in many of our churches is akin to the fabled 'Woman who hears about a hungry family':

'Once upon a time there was a woman who was part of a local church. She heard of a family in

need as they were struggling to pay the bills and put food on the table. She emailed the pastor to ask if the church could help, but there was no response. She telephoned the church secretary and left a message explaining the problem, but once again there was no reply. Eventually she took out some casserole from the freezer, bought some milk and bread and delivered the food parcel to the needy family, who were very grateful. "The church didn't do a thing to help," she moaned the following Sunday after the service to a patient friend. "Really?" her friend gently replied. "You helped, didn't you? So I guess the church *did* help in the end."

This simple story illustrates a common expectation that many ordinary believers might hold. They do not see themselves as part of the body of Christ, and hence the church is considered to be the official leadership doing something to respond to the needs of the world. This raises the question: 'What is it that you could do to make these Five Marks a part of your lifestyle?' so that others may learn from your example, copying what you do and adapting them to their own contexts.

I've come to believe that all missional enterprise needs to flow out of a heart of worship to God, and deep committed love for Him. Without devotion, any evangelism I do becomes a loveless task. Encountering God through worship, doing what He calls me to do, is a sure way that the Five Marks may stay fresh, vibrant parts to my own life.

Practical theologian Will Briggs writes:

'One of my greatest concerns for the contemporary Western church is our entrepreneurialism. When that speaks of innovation and focused pursuit of the gospel, I cheer it on. But sometimes it lapses into pragmatism, or even task-oriented rationalism, and, more often than we might care to realise, self-glorification. When we are at risk of asserting control for



the sake of our own existence or empowerment, even as we pursue the five marks of mission, we risk losing the way of faith. We must return to worship, attuned to a King who will bring all things under the Father at the end, by being a living sacrifice now, hallowing his name. That is the chief mark of mission – to glorify God.’ (Missional Worship: A Mild Critique of the Five Marks of Mission - Journeyman) (briggs.id.au).

So how can we marry together a life of obedience to Jesus, to do what he asks of us, as an integrated part of a life of worship? Here are my top 5 suggested disciplines, that have helped me over the years to live out my missional calling. I hope they might resonate with you, and correlate with the Five Marks of mission - moving them from just being a mission statement, to something that we can seek to live out day by day:

Stop for someone

What does a radical commitment to proclaim the good news of the Kingdom look like? This radical yet simple rule of life is something I have learnt from Heidi Baker. Taking time for one person at a time. Being

intentional each day, to stop, engage and bring Jesus to someone I meet. She writes, ‘I believe that Jesus would have given His life for just one person. Jesus emptied Himself, He humbled Himself and, He so yielded Himself to His Father’s love that He had no ambition of His own. He was not looking to build an empire. He did not want praise or adulation, or to impress people with who, or how many followed Him. He stopped over and over again for just one person, for just one life.’ (Heidi Baker, *Learning to Love: Passion, Compassion and the Essence of the Gospel*). Ask yourself this question each day: In what way can I share my faith with just one person?

Ask

What a mystery: When we pray, God works. It’s when we ask to be used by God that coincidences seem to happen. I have heard over and over, recently, from people who don’t yet know what it means to be a follower of Jesus, saying, ‘our chance meeting was meant to be.’ Prayer to be available to be used by God requires submission. The oft-quoted ‘You don’t need to be qualified to be used by God, you just need to be available’, is one I keep coming back to, as I

equip men and women within a theological academic college setting! It’s often the students who have struggled academically, and yet yielded themselves to God, that have gone on to pioneer powerful ministries.

Meet with people who are not Christians to study the Bible

Have you ever just invited people to study the Bible, so they can talk about it with you? There are a wealth of tools and techniques out there, but simply reading the Bible, asking what Scripture says, and how it applies to our lives is a powerful technique. One of the joys of ministry, which I have experienced, has been serving as a chaplain in a city centre context, meeting in a pub to do Bible studies – inviting anyone and everyone to join in. Bible study really can be simple. I take the example of Big Life, which I observed first hand, as a team in Kolkata, in the rural villages around Western Bengali, engaged in mission as they planted churches. Through doing simple Bible studies, they have grown in a decade from 3 people in one group to 10,000 new believers in 7,000 groups.

They used 7 simple questions:

1. What did you like about this passage?
2. What did you find challenging about this passage?
3. What does this passage teach about God?
4. What does this passage teach about people?
5. How will you obey this passage?
6. Who will you train with this passage?
7. With whom will you share your story or God's story?

Get involved in serving the poor in whatever way you can

How can you volunteer to help those who are suffering in your community? As I minister bi-vocationally as an artist and a co-principal, I have been challenged how I can plough profits into causes that seek to help the world's

poor. This is also a principle that our community café lives by. We seek to purchase what we need to make the café run, from cleaning materials to Fair Trade coffee, asking ourselves: Who are the benefactors of our purchases? What impact upon the environment do our purchases make?

Take public transport

This really is a wonderful way to care for creation, and to slow down our frenetic, fast-paced lives. I am committed to taking public transport wherever I go, and in so doing, I get to meet people. I have lost count of the opportunities I have had to pray with people, sharing with them what I believe as a follower of Jesus. This has led to making many friends over the

years, whom I'm still in contact with through social media.

These are just 5 simple ways that I seek to live out some of the Five Marks of mission. Being as practical as possible with the way we seek to live them out seems like the most appropriate way to help every believer contextualise them into their everyday lives. I leave you with a simple reflective question: 'In what ways can you live them out personally?'

I would love to hear your ideas and to read your stories. Please do email me at:

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