

Want to Be Missional? Equip Those in the Workplace

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I was recently invited to teach a session of a seminary class called “Pastoral Functions” at an extension of Trinity Evangelical Divinity School. In this class, the pastors-in-training had been discussing such topics as Worship, Disciplemaking, Evangelism, Visitation, Funerals, Weddings, Pastoral Counseling, Children’s Ministry, etc.—topics we’d expect in a class like this.

But I was invited to talk about something significantly different and paradigm-shifting. Pastors need to recalibrate their ministry philosophy so that the members of their congregations are affirmed, encouraged, and equipped to serve God through their various vocations. I challenged the students to help the people of God participate in God’s mission on earth through their vocations. Thankfully, seminaries are beginning to understand that they will need to transition their curriculum beyond the traditional topics if they want to train pastors to lead missional churches.

The Missional Church

An increasing number of churches are being planted with an intentional “missional” mandate. Also, many established churches are shifting their paradigm to become “missional.” We've written about this extensively at The High Calling, but you may still be asking yourself, "What does 'missional' mean?"

Some use the term "missional" to simply mean establishing more evangelistic programs, more overseas missions support, or a renewed effort to invite people to church.

However, a deeper missional theology is the key to truly being a missional church. In fact, Steve Knight recently said, "I actually think there are still many, *many* people who would *not* say they are missional, simply because they have yet to become engaged with any sort of missional theology."

If we are to correctly understand the mission of *God's people* in this world, we had better first understand the mission of *God* in this world.

J.R. Woodward, in his new book, *Creating a Missional Culture: Equipping the Church for the Sake of the World*, writes, "When we read the Scriptures, we learn that it is God's mission to set things right in a broken and messed-up world. God's mission is to redeem the world and restore it to its intended purpose."

Alan Roxburgh, a key leader with a collaborative group called The Missional Network, describes the missional church in *The Missional Leader: Equipping Your Church to Reach a Changing World*.

"Just as its Lord is a mission-shaped God, so the community of God's people exists, not for themselves but for the sake of the work. Mission is therefore not a program or project some people in the church do from time to time (as in 'mission trip,' 'mission budget,' and so on); the church's very nature is to be God's missionary people. We use the word missional to mark this big difference. Mission is not about a project or a budget, or a one-off event somewhere; it's not even about sending missionaries. A missional church is a community of God's people who live into the imagination that they are, by their very nature, God's missionary people living as a demonstration of what God plans to do in and for all of creation in Jesus Christ."

Ed Stetzer adds,

"In practice, this means that missionary congregations live out their spiritual life not only as the church, but also as God's people in the world, proclaiming the good news of Christ's work on the cross, and acting as a force to change society to more closely resemble the kingdom of God. The church is called to preach the Gospel of the kingdom, a gospel that has social and political justice consequences for the greater society."

Jeff Maguire produced this short video that explains the missional church succinctly and simply:

In *The Forgotten Ways: Reactivating the Missional Church*, Alan Hirsch asserts that a missional reading of the Great Commission (Matthew 28:18-20) "requires that we see that Jesus's strategy is to get a whole lot of versions of him infiltrating every nook and cranny of society by reproducing himself in and through his people in every place throughout the world."

Being Missional Through Our Vocations

After speaking with Darrell Guder who popularized the phrase *Missional Church* in the title of his 1998 book, The High Calling concluded, "Being missional is not about what the churches do, but what the churches empower people to do in their everyday lives. The Great Commission is not merely about spreading the gospel in words, it is about embodying the gospel message—its hope for transformational renewal—in our work."

The "nooks and crannies" of society upon which the missional movement needs to increase its focus are the places in which God's people spend the majority of their time: the workplace. Is this not the ideal place to be "incarnational?"

If you are a church leader, **The High Calling** wants to help you equip and empower those in your church to be missional—in and through their vocations. We want to encourage you as you develop a robust theology of vocation—a theology that can refuel the missional impulse that your congregation desires. The Faith channel here at The High Calling is being tailored for this cause.

But there is a problem.

The majority of those who attend North American evangelical churches and, I dare say, the majority of leaders in the various missional church movements that are gaining momentum in America, do not embrace such a high view of vocation. David Miller, Director of the Faith and Work Initiative at Princeton, writes in God at Work: The History and Promise of the Faith at Work Movement, *"Many people report feeling that they live increasingly bifurcated lives, where faith and work seldom connect. Many who are Christians complain of a 'Sunday-Monday gap' where their Sunday worship hour bears little or no relevance to the issues they face in their Monday workplace hours."*

Pastor Tom Nelson, in Work Matters: Connecting Sunday Worship to Monday Work, laments more recently, *"For way too long, I did not see work as an essential component of a broader, robust theology of calling. I failed to grasp that a primary stewardship of my pastoral work was to assist and equip others to better connect the professions of their Sunday faith with the practices of their Monday work."*

Skye Jethani, in the Winter 2013 issue of Leadership Journal ("Uncommon Callings") explains that church leaders often perpetuate a false "secular/sacred" dichotomy in which the "sacred" calling of the church is often pitted against their "secular" callings in the world.

"Rather than embracing the fullness of the Christian life comprising multiple facets—highest, common, and specific callings—the church unknowingly communicates that following Christ is a tension between sacred callings and secular work. Often the message is: 'You must sacrifice your specific, secular calling to do more of the sacred work that's important to the institutional church.'"

But there is hope.

Alongside the missional movements, there is a parallel movement of pastors and churches that is seeking to equip and empower their congregants, in the words of John Yates, Rector of The Falls Church (Anglican), "to get out into the difficult and dark places of the community and the city, and simply do the best they can to love their neighbours and work for the common good... to dignify all Christian calling to serve God in all sorts of ways."

Many church plants now focus on encouraging their people in their vocations. An increasing number of congregations are being missional by emphasizing the importance of Christians' calling/vocation/work.

Here at **The High Calling**, we will spotlight places where the missional movement and the vocational movement intersect, providing practical advice on influencing a congregational transition toward a vocation-as-mission model for outreach and discipleship.