

The Herald

· OF THE CHRISTIAN REFORMED CHURCH OF SRI LANKA ·

“AS YOU HAVE RECEIVED CHRIST, SO WALK....”
Public Profession of Faith - Good Friday 2022.



“OUR MISSIONAL GOD AND OUR MISSIONAL LIVING” - SEE INSIDE
ALSO INSIDE - “PURPOSE FOR LIVING IN HOPELESS TIMES”

The Missionary ? And The Mission Field ??



There is a phrase that I have been using, quoting someone else, especially when I preach and teach on Missions. It goes like this, "Every heart with Christ a Missionary. Every heart without Christ a Mission Field." I wonder how many have had an understanding of Christian Missions from that kind of a perspective ? I am sure not many and that is why I thought, that such a phrase could definitely set the tone for this editorial, in an issue of the Herald that focuses on the theme, "Missional Living" (Every Christian called to mission!)

As I thought further, I was led to dwell on a passage of Scripture that is part of the letter of the Apostle Paul to the Colossians – Colossians 4: vss 2 – 4 - *"Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful. And pray for us, too, that God may open a door for our message, so that we may proclaim the mystery of Christ, for which I am in chains. Pray that I may proclaim it clearly, as I should. Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity. Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone."*

It is a passage which I felt could throw up some important pointers, as we strive to seek to live Missionally, wherever God has called us.

The **first** thing that stands out from these verses that should motivate us towards being Missional is Prayer. We must learn to pray. Paul says that our prayers should be steadfast and watchful. God wants us to understand that our fellowship with Him through prayer is the key to Missional living. In other words, really effective Evangelism begins with diligent, watchful prayer. God wants us to talk to Him before we go out to talk about Him. As another said, "We must first talk to God about others before we talk to others about God!"

In the passage, Paul also transitions from the teaching on prayer, to asking for prayer. So he asks the Colossian Church to pray for him. Paul, at this point is in Prison, but he does not ask them to pray that the prison doors be opened so that he

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REVD. CHARLES N. JANSZ
JP (All Island)
Editor

2, Mudaliyar Avenue,
Kohuwala, Nugegoda.

Telephone

Residence : 2852835

Office : 2360861

: 2582469 (Fax)

e-mail : cnj@eureka.lk

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could be free. But on the contrary, he asks, that the door of opportunity be opened, so that he could tell others about the mystery of Christ. (vs 3).

Secondly, we must learn to live. As someone once said, "Effective missionaries live distinctively amongst a specific culture of people." Writing to the Ephesians, Paul once said, "Be careful, then, how you live – not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil. (Eph 5: vss 15& 16) And in Colossians Ch 1 vs 10, he says, "...live a life worthy of the Lord...bearing fruit in every good work..." - to evangelism. In other words, as we live in relationship with others who do not know Jesus, they should get a glimpse of Jesus and His character. We are billboards for Christ - that reveal how worthy Christ is. One of the very effective ways of doing missions today – especially in our changing and oppressive missionary context, is "Incarnational" missions. In other words, letting our lives and life styles do the talking!

Thirdly, Missional living would definitely involve our talk. And we must learn to talk. Listen again to the great Apostle, "let your speechbe gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person." (vs 6) An effective missional life, involves being in conversation with unbelievers. Share your stories as you share the gospel. Make sure when you speak that they do understand. I have always had the feeling that a good number of Christians must learn how to communicate the Gospel freely and not holding back. Sadly, when it comes to "giving an answer for the hope that lies within"...many get tongue tied!!

Go back to the statement I quoted at the outset of this editorial..."**Every heart with Christ a Missionary**" – I certainly hope and pray that all of us can identify with that statement... and "**every heart without Christ a mission field.**" So that's where our challenges lie ! The harvest is plenteous. The field is vast. Maybe even at our doorstep. (often times the most unreached people are those who live next door !)The opportunities are plentiful. By God's abundant grace let us strive to be mission minded with missional living !

MEDITATION

by Shane Dirckze

PURPOSE FOR LIVING IN HOPELESS TIMES

From our date of birth upon this earth to our date of physical death, knowingly or unknowingly every single human being, does have a mission to live out and it should begin with questions such as, **why have I come into existence upon this earth and what is my overall goal for life?**

Unless we turn inward and truly yearn to find answers to the aforementioned questions, the purpose for life stays bleak.

Many journey through life wasting it on fleshly desires which have originated from our sin nature.

Our lifestyle is part of the upbringing and values installed through our family, and circle of associates.

Some may go through life's motions aimlessly due to ignorance of the overall purpose for life.

The right perspective of **a purpose for living** derives through the aforesaid challenging questions as nature/creation reveals to us the glory of the Creator which is supplemented by the nurture and care of God-fearing parents, the Church family founded on the WORD OF GOD or even Caretakers willing to invest their time on building God's word into souls that are lost.

True believers in Jesus are eager to stimulate the warped minded to think and act in a God intended manner.

Therefore, Christian upbringing is of utmost importance, as our will should be surrendered to our overall purpose for living.

If so, what about the individuals who have not been exposed to such an ambiance of a God-fearing circle?

This is where Christians come into the equation, as they can't evade their responsibility in **Missional Living**.

Therefore, the deeper understanding of missional living is the adoption of the posture, thinking, behaviors, and practices of a missionary in order to engage others with the gospel message.

The missional perspective is that every believer is sent by Jesus to carry out His Kingdom work while being clothed in this fleshly body so that many others are saved from eternal condemnation.

Therefore, **missional living is embodying the mission and message of Jesus based on Matthew 9:37-38** (Then He said to His disciples, "The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into His harvest field.")

As followers of Jesus, we ought to seek Jesus and be Jesus to everyone, everywhere.

Therefore, to whom will you and I "be Jesus" today?

Being convinced that there is no salvation apart from faith alone in Jesus Christ, according to the promises of God in His written Word, we must aggressively proclaim this gospel message to every man, woman, and child so that they have a clear opportunity to respond in faith to the grace of God.

Missional Living is a mark of a true believer in Jesus Christ as per Matthew 28:18-20 (Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely, I am with you always, to the very end of the age.")

(Shane is an Elder with the Local Consistory at Dehiwela and is the Book Keeper within the CRC SL Officers Committee and a Lay Preacher.)

OUR MISSIONAL GOD AND OUR MISSIONAL LIVING

By Pastor Dhanaraj Ajendran.

Asking some serious questions yourself will motivate you. One day I asked a question to myself: "What is the chief end of my life? And what would be the best job I can do in this fallen world?" This question led me to take some serious action. If I am wise enough I will submit and surrender my whole life to "The Potter".

I always believe that "Every true believer is a disciple and every disciple is a missionary". The true Christian life is a missional pilgrim. This mission has been inaugurated by our "Missional God" and when you are born again you are born again to this new missional life. We believe in "a God of ex-nihilo" - who created everything out of nothing and He was before everything. His divine creation is a fruit of His mission. He moved out of His

comfort zone and began this mission. Simply, “the mission means moving out from the comfort zone”. The world we live in is fully wrecked and there is no need to explain this fallen world but what is important to know is “How does God undertake to restore this broken world?” or His next missional move?

“Missio Dei”

“Mission of God” theology has become adequately familiar over the last few decades that I don’t need to explain it but I will however explicate why I think it is important; “If you know the mission of God then you will know the purpose of your existence”.

The mission of God means; “God the Father sends the only begotten Son into the world in the power of the Holy Spirit to bring salvation and restoration in all its dimensions, including ultimately the reconciliation of all things, the kingdom of God in its fullness”. The believer’s missional life derives from this action of the Triune God. It is to exemplify and explain the “good news of the kingdom”—of salvation through Jesus Christ. God wants to bring this broken world back into Eden where the holistic peace “Shalom” is.

“The Idea of Biblical Theology of Missional Life”

God calls out His special redeeming people and gives them a special land—the Promised Land and Shalom. God is concerned, however, not just about His chosen people, Israel, but with all the nations of the earth. Israel is elected to show forth the mission of God and be a blessing to all nations. God tells Israel, “If you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation” (Ex. 19:5–6). God set the Israelites as His Light to this fallen World.

Israel is to be God’s priestly kingdom among the nations, a contrasting society to show who God is and His Shalom. The missional life of Israel, then, involves not only Israel’s relationship with God but also her relationship with the earth and all its peoples. God is not just the God of Israel; He is the God of all the nations, of the whole earth. Through Israel, He establishes “Shalom”—peace with God, peace with people, and peace with nature.

Israelites failed to be God’s light and produced only bitter fruits, they failed in their missional life. Israel’s prophets promised however that God would in time send His chosen servant-king, the Messiah, who would accomplish God’s missional plan. Through the Messiah, God would himself bring perfect “shalom” and “light” as pictured so delightfully in Isaiah 11,42 and many other passages. The first covenant would be superseded by a New Covenant through which sin would be atoned for, God’s Spirit poured out, God’s law written on human hearts, and God’s purposes finally fulfilled. God’s kingdom of justice and shalom would come in fullness.

What do we discover in the New Testament? God’s missional plan is stated in many ways. Paul says that through Jesus Christ God is reconciling the world to Himself (2Cor. 5:19). God’s missional plan is “to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ” (Eph.1:10). The Lord Jesus Christ has been given the power “to bring everything under his control” (Phil.3:21). The missional plan of Salvation as pic-

tured in the New Testament is continuous with the Old Testament revelation. In the Old Testament, we see God's concern for all peoples and the whole earth. So also in the New Testament: God is concerned with all people and with the whole earth towards Shalom and under his Light.

John testifies; that Jesus is that "True Light" (Jn.1:9) and light to this world (Jn.8:12) which is full of darkness and purposefully Jesus poured His light to His disciples and said, "You are the Light of the world" (Mt.5:14), the missional life is imparted to his disciples - that is you and me. Peter confirms that and gives a new missional meaning to Christian: "You are chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into His wonderful life". We are predestined to this missional life.

"The Missional life"

God always accomplishes His missional plan through mediators - His people. Being missional is not about what the churches do, but what the churches empower people to do in their everyday lives - bringing "Shalom". The Great Commission is not merely about spreading the gospel in words, it is about embodying the gospel message: "Shalom-peace with God, peace with people, and peace with nature". As we live in the body of Christ this is our call and this is our life and chief end.

This is what it means to be missional life of a believer: We experience the transforming life of Jesus Christ and bring it as a witness to everything we do. The witness is not just a little activity we do now and again. "A witness is who we are". The world will encounter God's Shalom in Christ through our identity because true Christians are equipped by God's Spirit using Scripture to demonstrate the truth, the relevance, and the healing power of the gospel and bring Shalom.

The major call for our life is that we find our life and vocation within the mission of God. We live with a transcendent mission that does not belong to us. We are not our own; we were "bought at a price" (1 Cor. 6:19-20). A cost is involved to bring Shalom. This is holistic because it involves not just our professional vocation but every aspect of our lives. To know God's mission is to be called to live under His Light and live out that mission to bring "His Shalom".

Finally, this is what is going to come and we will soon experience; "God's Shalom" and "His Wonderful Light" in its fullness. We are the people whom God has anointed to carry His Shalom and Light to our broken world. What would be the best job that you and I can do in this world apart from bringing God's shalom and light to the hopeless, broken, and desperate in our society? Open your eyes and see the brokenness around you. Open your ears and listen to the cry of the lost. Open your heart and feel the pain of agony and acknowledge and engage His missional life today. Purely it's a privilege and purposeful to submit to the "Potter's Will".

(Pastor Ajendran, presently pastors the CRC congregation in Hatton.)

The Everyday Commission!



"Mission is not merely an activity of the church. It is the very heartbeat and work of God. It is in the very being of God that the basis for the missionary enterprise is found. God is a sending God, with a desire to see humankind and creation reconciled, redeemed, and healed. The missional church, then, is a sent church. It is a going church, a movement of God through His people, sent to bring healing to a broken world" (Shaping of Things to Come, p. 18).

Jesus calls every Christian to a life of complete transformation and devotion to Christ and His mission. The Great Commission is given to every Christ-follower, not just the pastors and elders and super-spiritual Christians! God does call some of us to missions and to missional activity that is specific, and in some cases, for a specific place and time. But we're all called to be witnesses.

To me, 'Missional Living' is about doing my part to complete His mission while I am on this earth. It's about leading others to follow Jesus and giving people the gift of eternal life. It's about caring for the needs of others - not just to convert someone - but because you care!

With this in mind, we can start living out God's calling to serve in whatever we do with a Great Commission mindset. Let's all be missionaries wherever we are. Let's get that missional view of every vocation believing that every calling is a valid calling to serve God. But at the same time, let's get involved and let's read God's Word for all it's worth. Let's understand what He has to say to us there, and when we do that, I really believe we'll all see God at work in our lives and we'll all respond to the calling He has for us.

Living on mission I admit is sometimes difficult, but when we take practical steps of faith to live on mission for Jesus, His assuring words from the Great Commission become more precious and real than ever: "And surely, I am with you always, to the very end of the age" (Matthew 28:20).

Love,
Wish

A hand-drawn graphic on a light purple background. At the top, the words "to-do list" are written in a cursive, black font. Below the title, there are five horizontal white lines, each preceded by a small black square checkbox. The graphic is decorated with several small, hand-drawn red hearts.

Living on Mission Means Living on Purpose

(By Erik Raymond)

Evangelism is something that we know we are called to do but often struggle doing. In a 2012 Lifeway study, 80 percent of those surveyed believe they have a personal responsibility to share their faith, but more than 60 percent have not told another person about how to become a Christian in the last six months. To make the point further, Lifeway identified eight biblical attributes that are consistently evident in the lives of maturing believers and sharing the gospel had the lowest average score among those surveyed.

What does this mean? It means that the majority of people have a biblical understanding about our responsibility for evangelism but an incorrect application of this understanding. In other words, we know what we are supposed to do but are not doing it. It doesn't just happen; nobody falls into evangelistic faithfulness. Living on mission means living on purpose. It looks like an embracing of a biblical identity and responding with biblical urgency. Like most things in life, evangelism requires personal effort, endurance through difficulty, and the regular repetition of basic (unglamorous) tasks.

Do you see yourself as one God has sent into your community with the gospel? Many Christians don't. This is a problem.

The Bible teaches us that all Christians are called to be a part of the work of evangelism. It's not optional or only for the mature, extroverted believers.

"Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age". (Matt. 28:19-20)

Jesus is telling his followers to go and make disciples. This means followers of Jesus. How do we make followers of Jesus? We do this by speaking the gospel to them. Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of Christ (Rom. 10:17).

This very verse is a command that Jesus would have us teach others. In other words, the identity of the Christian is one sent as an ambassador or representative of Jesus. We are sent by him and for him.

Typically, the word missionary refers to someone sent across cultural lines in order to teach and persuade people of the gospel. We refer to missionaries who go overseas or cross cultures. But I think it might be helpful to see ourselves as missionaries. At least from the standpoint of an identity. In other words, imagine you were sent to live in China, Papua New Guinea, or the Dominican Republic as missionaries. How might you order your life? How would you pray? How might you read the newspaper? How would you interact with your neighbors? How would you talk to your boss or coworker? If you were sent there then, you would view your life and ministry as a missionary with the goal of reaching the people around you with the gospel.

Your life would be orientated around the mission. And this is the only way things actually get done. Nobody slouches into faithfulness. They do it on purpose. With our lives intentionally calibrated by the gospel and its expansion, we pursue what Christ has called us to do!

Youth Page

Edited By: Wishanka Gregory

5 Tips For Missional Living

#1 - Pray

At the core of prayer is the realization that we are 100% dependent on God. Prayer will bring you closer to the heart of God. Prayer will exchange your desires with His. Prayer will strengthen you where you feel inadequate. When you pray, ask God to give you his heart for people and to illuminate His Mission that has already been placed in your path.

Who can you begin praying for today in your community?



YOU CAN BE A MISSIONARY IN SMALL WAYS EACH DAY.



#2 - Love

Genuinely love and care about the people you want to reach. Be curious about their lives. Learn about their passions. Allow space for them to teach you their area of expertise. Our effectiveness will be severely limited if we don't authentically love the people we're trying to reach.

Do I love this community and the people in it? Do I see them as God sees them?

#3 - Schedule Margin

If we are constantly moving from one thing to the next, we will rarely have margin for the unexpected moments and encounters God allows in our day. Less is more. Leave room in your schedule for the unexpected to happen.

Do we have enough margin in our schedule to allow for unexpected relationships and extended conversations?



#4 - Do what you love with others

What hobbies or activities do you love and maybe already do? Begin to connect with people already active in these areas or invite others into these activities with you.

What do you love doing? How can you do it with others?

#5 - Share your story

People may be closed off to the scriptural details of the Gospel and resist God's truth at an intellectual level, but it is rare to see someone who is not open to hearing how your life has been positively impacted and shaped by the Good News of Jesus Christ. When they hear how the love and grace of Christ impacted a real life in tangible ways, it opens the door for acceptance of the Gospel in their life.

Can you share your story in a short, winsome way?



Hi

Have you ever wondered what it would be like to be a spy?
You would get secret messages and have to go on secret missions
and do very secret things! No one would know where you are or what
you are doing or even who you are! It could be very exciting and fun to
play spy..... but it would be very difficult to live like that every day huh?

Did you know, God has a special mission for us too?!
The Bible tells us that our mission is to live in a way that others will
know about Jesus. That means the things we do or say and the way
we react when things are difficult will show others that we love and
follow Jesus.

Do you think you can take up the challenge?
Go for it! I know you can and Jesus promises to help too!

Lots of love,
Aunty Mandy



SECRET SERVICE MISSION: TOP SECRET

Your mission if you choose to accept it is to Secretly Serve Others. For the next 7 days you will perform a random act of service, but you must do it without anyone knowing it is you. First, pick your targets, then decide on a kind deed or act to perform. Follow out that service secretly. DO NOT BLOW YOUR COVER!!

Sunday : _____

Monday : _____

Tuesday : _____

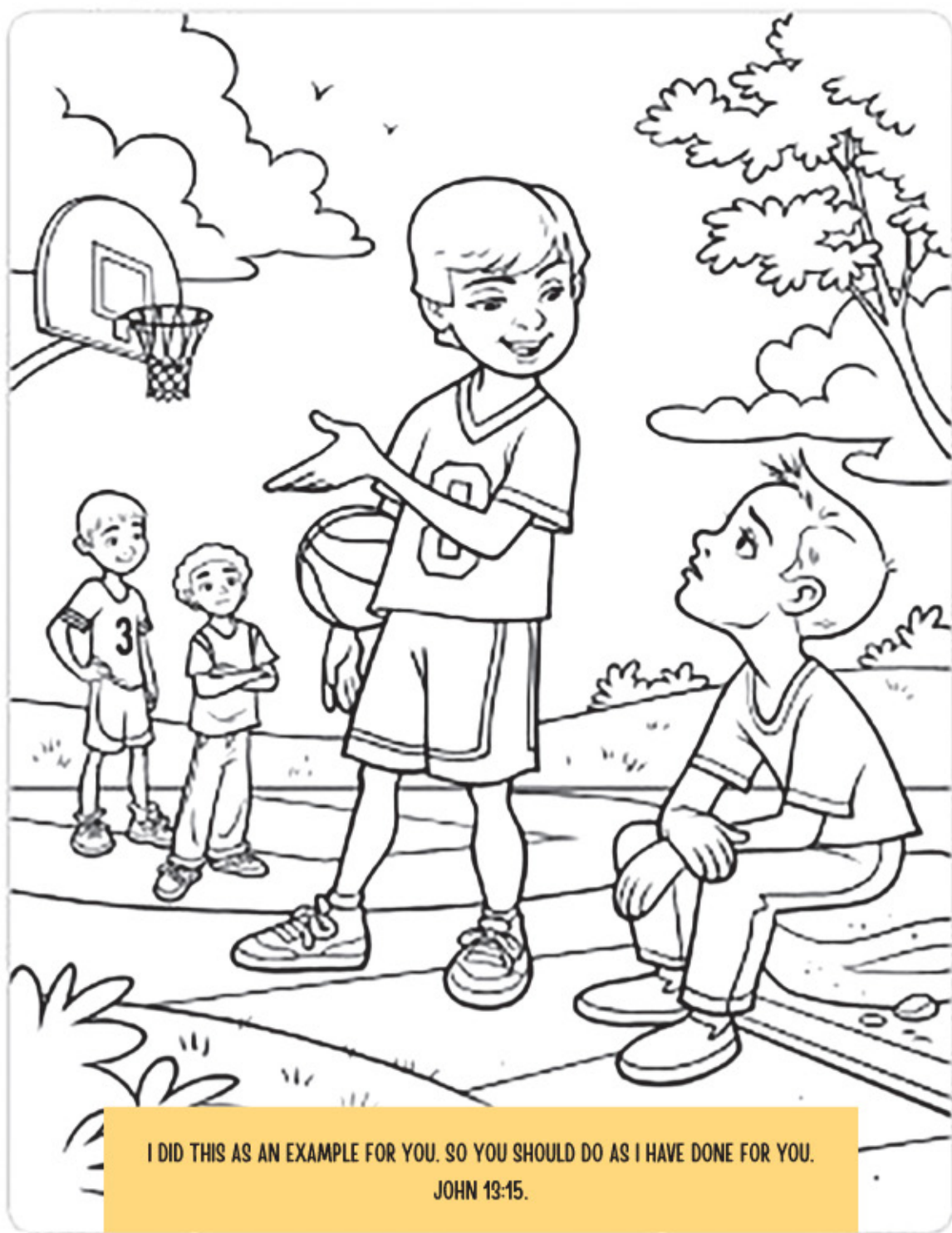
Wednesday : _____

Thursday : _____

Friday : _____

Saturday : _____

Jesus shows how to live



I DID THIS AS AN EXAMPLE FOR YOU. SO YOU SHOULD DO AS I HAVE DONE FOR YOU.
JOHN 13:15.

FAMILY WITH A MISSION

If someone you know was to describe your family with one phrase, what would they say about you? You might ask your children, "What is it that is unique about our family?" "How would you describe us to a new friend?"

Does your family have a mission? I know these days our mission may just be to survive, to have enough petrol to get our children to school, or gas to cook our food. But I hope we can think above our own problems and focus on how our family can be part of the mission of the church and in reaching out to people who are in more desperate situations than we are.

Can we make a difference where we live, in our school and community, and in the world? How do we involve our children in important issues we face today? The world is shrinking and we are encountering new problems every day. You might review the Herald Article written in September 2020 on Serving as a Family and how that helps your children develop a sticky faith, a faith that lasts.

Today we will focus on some practical ways your family can become a family with a mission from Lifeway.¹

1. Brainstorm Ways to Serve

One conversation can make a world of difference. Sit with your kids and talk about what it means to live on mission and the call to grow God's family. Talk about ways you can do this as a family. Pray together about it.

Ask your kids what they feel God would like them to do with their lives. What are their passions, what makes them angry, what issues do they care about? For example: lost people, hungry people, drug or alcohol abuse, child abuse, corruption, homelessness, environmental issues,



handicapped people, etc. and then as a family look for ways to get involved in helping in those areas. Maybe they noticed the garbage somewhere where it shouldn't be. Can you clean it up as a family or organize a cleanup with neighbors and friends? Just think if every family focused on one area of need and did what they could, what a different world we would have.

2. Write a Family Mission Statement

After doing this you can write this up in a family mission statement. Start by completing this statement, "We believe God wants us to do ____." Then decide how you can answer this call in your own family, with your neighbors and friends, at church and around the world.

3. Put the Mission Statement on Display

Work together to create a fun and artistic display for your mission statement in a place where the family can see it.

In this family,
WE HONOR GOD THROUGH
FAITH & SERVICE.
WE THINK BEFORE WE ACT.
We work together.
AND
We show respect for others
& ourselves.

4. Hang a World Map

Find a world map and place it in your home where everyone can see it. Choose a country for which you will pray. Learn about the people, cultures and religions.

Ask God to bless these people. You can also do things like find a recipe from the country and cook it for dinner, or celebrate a tradition from their culture.

The Joshua Project is a website you can check out with your children. It is a database of the least evangelized people groups in the world. Chose a group and pray for them. Do you know that there are 29 unreached groups in Sri Lanka?



Do you know any missionaries? Contact Global Impact to see about Sri Lankan missionaries working in other countries. You can get the number from the author. Ask your pastor for contacts of Missionaries you can pray for regularly as a family. Missionaries need prayer support. You could also correspond with them through emails.

Or pray for some of our outstation pastors and evangelists working in unreached areas like Rakwana and Matara. They would love to know you are praying for them.

5. Bless Your Neighbors

Choose a neighbor to bless in some way. Maybe he is elderly and needs help with yard work, or maybe someone has a new baby, and a meal will bless them.

Most of your neighbors are probably not believers in Jesus. Start praying for them and their salvation. Ask them when you meet them on the road if there is anything specific you can pray about for

them. Although someone is from another religion, very few will turn down a chance to have you pray for some issue they have. When prayers are answered they are more open to what we believe.

So, what about your family? Do you have a mission?

Biblically, families have a God-given purpose: They fill and subdue the earth, rehearse God's covenant promises, and pass on the gospel of Jesus in word and deed. A strong family isn't an end in itself; godly families do something together for the good of the world and the glory of God.²

¹www.lifeway.com/en/articles/new-year-celebrations-for-families

²www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/strong-families-share-mission/

Marsha Navamanie and her husband Ron work with the Christian Reformed Church in Sri Lanka. If you desire help in parenting, please contact them. m.navamanie@yahoo.com

“

The work of salvation can only happen when God touches a person's heart and brings about life transformation through the saving power of the Gospel. Conversion is in the hands of God, but sharing of our faith is our responsibility.

”

Dr. David Wong

Our Currently Polarized World

By Daniel Harrell

Editor's note: This article is the first in our newest series, "Seeking Shalom in the Midst of Polarization." The series, in collaboration with The Colossian Forum, aims to examine the state of polarization in the U.S. and Canada and explore Christian strategies to overcome it. To read more articles in the series right now, visit TheBanner.org.

Human divisiveness began in the beginning. With the forbidden deed done, Adam blamed his wife and said to the Lord, "The woman you put here with me—she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it" (Gen. 3:12). From Adam to Abel to Babel to Bethlehem, a biblical thread of social and relational discord entangles. Jesus arrived to a chorus of earthly peace (Luke 2:14), but soon acknowledged the enmity endemic to the human condition. He says, "Do you think that I have come to bring peace to the earth? No, I tell you, but division. From now on there will be five in one family divided against each other, three against two and two against three" (Luke 12:51-52), and "Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace to the earth, but a sword" (Matt. 10:34).

In Corinth, Paul appealed to the Holy Spirit to be power for the post-Pentecost church to cease its divisiveness and "be perfectly united in mind and thought" (1 Cor. 1:10). But church history records Christians in Corinth and elsewhere resisting unity and ferociously fighting over matters from the nature of God to the nature of nature itself. Churches split and denominations divide about the Trinity, Jesus' identity, baptism and communion, human origins and gender, slavery and race, polity and politics, speaking in tongues, food and drink, drinking and dancing, and

whether worship is better with an organ or a guitar.

In a church I led years ago, conflict over worship intensified to just shy of fisticuffs as an organist shook an angry mitt in my face, declaring that "a damn band will never play in my sanctuary!" Nonplussed about the passion that music preferences incited, I inquired of a wise elder why he thought our congregation couldn't forge some sort of compromise for unity's sake. The elder explained that we don't resolve our differences because of the sordid delight our anger ignites. "Part of the problem with being wrong is that it rarely feels like we're wrong," he said. "More often, being wrong feels like being right. And we love being right."

Despite Jesus' own prayers to the contrary (John 17:11) and the bonding power of the Spirit (Eph. 4:3), Christians descend into the same discordant morass witnessed in American culture at large. Many have sought to make sense of the extreme polarities that seem to dominate our cultural and political lives. In one such attempt, journalist George Packer delineates four narratives that currently compete for America's moral identity in his article "How America Fractured Into Four Parts" (*The Atlantic*, July/August 2021). Drawing and adapting from Packer's analysis of a "Free America," a "Smart America," a "Real America," and a "Just America," I similarly see four kinds of Christianities or churches in America (and to some degree in Canada too) that might shed some light on our own internal divisions.

"Free America" describes a libertarian impulse that places a high premium on personal freedom and small government. "Free Christianity" might best be seen in theologically conservative, independent churches devoid of denominational ties and

led by celebrity-like pastors adept at quick theological adjustments depending on the needs of the moment. Free Christianity churches in growth mode tend to be consumer-oriented, focused on family and personal betterment, and advocating a spirituality of self-improvement more than sacrificial service. Metrics and methodology matter more than doctrinal precision.

I remember launching an alternative service at a traditional church I served in the 1990s. Using the best of current market research, we surveyed the neighborhood, studied demographics, determined our customer base, adjusted our liturgy, and massaged our theology to assure a certain attractiveness that succeeded in filling the sanctuary every Sunday night for years. That so many young people poured into our building to worship demonstrated our savviness and bore witness to our blessedness. Often large, production-heavy, program-driven, and results-oriented Free Christianity relies on what works numerically to determine what's right.

"Smart America" represents people who are left-leaning, meritocratic, college-educated, technologically adept, health-conscious, privileged, posh, and particular. Cosmopolitan and multicultural, "Smart Christianity" likewise values education, merit, and technological swag and is evident mostly in upper-crust congregations and socially conscious urban churches striving for inclusive identities that downplay discomfiting biblical assertions such as judgment or hell or Christological exclusivity. Preachers go to great lengths to square a plain reading of Scripture with evolution and genetics as well as with postmodern thought and literary critique.

As a pastor in university-saturated Boston for many years, I served an extensively educated congregation

loaded with doctorates sensitive to critiques of Christianity's unreasonableness. Sermons flew over the heads of many, but it seemed better to obfuscate and come off as too academic than sound foolish. Equipped with my own doctorate, I likewise strove to cohere doctrinal truth with scientific discovery only to have the chair of Harvard's physics department lambaste an illustration I once deployed as "sermon science." He told me to stick to Bible stories and leave research interpretations to the professionals. It took me days to craft the right words of response—I didn't want him to think a theologian didn't understand physics! (You can imagine how well this worked.)

"Real America" represents common folk left out by Free America's trickle-down economics, which mostly favors wealthy corporations and individuals. Rural, nativist, populist, and local, "Real Christianity" is hostile to government intervention, modern ideas, and intellectual authority. Real Christianity churches are strong proponents of religious liberty and eager to help out a familiar friend but remain wary of outsiders. Susceptible to conspiracy theories, these folks trust their own research over experts and are averse to any outside opinions.

Working to earn money for seminary, I spent a summer pouring concrete with career laborers who spent their entire lives up to their knees in cement. One faithful man, listening to me go on about issues of biblical interpretation I looked forward to studying, dismissively shook his head over what he called "highfalutin' mumbo-jumbo." "All I need to know is Christ and him crucified," he'd say. When I'd ask what that meant, he'd bark back that it meant what it said.

Lastly, "Just America" encompasses those promised a better life by having



gone to (the right) school and working hard but who instead find themselves burdened with debt, underemployment, racial and economic disparity, and climate catastrophe. For these, white (male) supremacy is the greatest evil.

For years I served as pastor of Colonial Church near Minneapolis, named for its ties to New England Congregationalism. After the murder of George Floyd in 2020, a movement arose to change Colonial's name due to its implied racist and violent ties to European Colonialism. Even years before, during a sabbatical in immensely multicultural Los Angeles, when I introduced myself as a minister at Colonial Church, internationals and racial or ethnic "others" would stare at me with wide-eyed puzzlement and sometimes disdain. I'd insist that we were surely postcolonial, and that our name derived from colonial New England Congregationalists passionate for religious freedom and the gospel. One millennial replied, "Oh, you mean the Congregational colonists who decimated the Wampanoag Indian tribe in Massachusetts and Rhode Island and sold their women and children into slavery?" "No, no, we're in Minnesota!" I'd insist.

Just Christianity self-critiques through the historic grid of white, male dominance of theology and church

structure, calling attention to all the ways Christianity has instigated injustice against women and people of color. But given the perceived perversity of the sin, any resulting repentance proves impermeable to grace. Outrage and intolerance are regarded as prophetic virtues. To have trespassed against the rights and identities of the historically oppressed cancels out any goodness or opportunity to attain forgiveness or make amends. As with Real America's resentment, Just American judgment is an all-or-nothing, take-no-prisoners proposition.

Packer acknowledges that all four narrative slices respond to real problems, but the inability and unwillingness of each to engage with the other presents enormous challenges to ever resolving the problems. Ironically, Packer says, each narrative promotes important values that could contribute to a greater whole: "Free America celebrates the energy of the unencumbered individual. Smart America respects intelligence and welcomes change. Real America commits itself to a place and has a sense of limits. Just America demands a confrontation with what the others want to avoid."

Inasmuch as these four narratives apply to the American church, similar positive contributions likewise emerge from each: Free Christianity stresses the importance of personal salvation and champions spiritual growth and depth. Smart Christianity embraces deep theology and the rich trove of thought that faith has inspired and applies it to real life for the sake of human and cultural transformation. Real Christianity embeds itself in local churches and communities and excels in building family and mutual care and concern. Just Christianity does deeds of social justice and critiques injustice prophetically to promote shalom for the world.

Rather than a Christianity divided, the four at their best could represent a diversity of gifts not unlike what Paul promotes in Corinth to counter the division there. Against the church split into factions based on their relative understandings of identity, loyalty, calling, and gifts, Paul appealed to anatomy as a cure. Paul writes,

There are many parts, but one body. The eye cannot say to the hand, "I don't need you!" And the head cannot say to the feet, "I don't need you!" On the contrary, those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and the parts that we think are less honorable we treat with special honor. And the parts that are unpresentable are treated with special modesty, while our presentable parts need no special treatment. But God has put the body together, giving greater honor to the parts that lacked it, so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other (1 Cor. 12:20-25).

Paul goes on to name the one body "the body of Christ," establishing the heart and head around which each different set of gifts, passions, and perspectives unite. In Christ, the free needs the real needs the smart needs the just. All come together for good in the person of Christ.

Still, Christians diverge even over the person of Christ. Free Christianity paints him as a traditionalist, comfortable with authority and having a CEO leadership style. He's pro-family even though he was never married or had children and seemed antagonistic even to his own blood relations at times (Matt. 12:47-48). Smart Christianity portrays Jesus as progressive, the ultimate intellectual, a clever teacher and storyteller for whom wit and intelligence always win the

debate. Real Christianity stresses Jesus' working-class roots and his love for children and homeland, while Just Christianity cites his minority status and brown skin and relishes his turning over the moneychangers' tables and railing at the religious authorities. If you're asked to describe Jesus in your own words, he'll likely come off sounding a lot like yourself, with your same priorities and values.

This is why my concrete-shoveling companion insisted that any faith in Christ must be in Christ crucified. That Jesus was forced to carry his own cross and hang on it was public shame and condemnation of the worst kind. The cross denounces every attempt to remake Jesus into an idol of our self-interests. Churches affix big crosses to our walls primarily as symbols of victory and sacrifice, but the cross first indicts and destroys our old ways and sin.

Paul's entire religious worldview and goodness as a Pharisee upended on that road to Damascus in Acts 9. In Acts 10, Peter's whole understanding of righteousness came apart as unrighteous after a vision and a Gentile knock at his door. For both, preaching a crucified Christ proved invariably offensive. Jesus deliberately and willfully saves only through suffering and death, somehow turning a horrible thing into a holy thing—holy in that awful and terrifying way that God's grace completely overwhelms and overrules. As the self-assured Saul-turned-Paul would finally and mercifully realize, "I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me" (Gal. 2:20). Extended to the church, "Christ living in us" is the essence of what Paul means by "the body of Christ."

Christ crucified places Christians at constant odds with our culture. Crucifixion is what makes Christians

opposed to violence and vengeance. Crucifixion defies aspirations of worldly wealth and power. Though the wisdom of God, it is considered foolish and weak (1 Cor. 1:23-24). Hardly provincial, Christ died to reconcile the whole world to himself (Col. 1:20). Undiscriminating, crucifixion makes way for the reconciliation of all things and the healing of division (2 Cor. 5:18).

The cross persists as the supreme emblem of God's love for the world. Its insistence on suffering and sacrificial love for others remains the hallmark of Christian faithfulness. "If you love me, you will keep my commandments," Jesus said (John 14:15, NRSV). And his chief commandment is to love one another as he has loved us (John 13:34). Paul famously asserts love as the only antidote to our factiousness (1 Cor. 13). Love bears and endures the worst while hoping and believing the best about everyone. Love never fails. **B**



Daniel Harrell is a hospice chaplain, author, teacher, longtime Congregational minister, and former editor-in-chief at *Christianity Today*. He holds a doctorate in psychology (Boston College) and lives in Minneapolis with his daughter.

(Reprinted from "The Banner," Publication of the Christian Reformed Church of North America, February 2022).

+++ CHURCH NEWS+++



❖ **Public Profession of Faith –**

The following Publicly Professed their Faith on Good Friday, the 15th of April, at the DRC Wolvendhal - From the Kohuwela congregation, Chanuli Mowinka de la Zilwa, Elsha Niroli Wijeratne, whilst the Sacrament of Adult Baptism was administered to Ratnayake Mudiyanalage Wasanthi Kumari Ratnayake; from the Dehiwela congregation, Caroline Rochelle Christoffelsz, Larissa Renate Lowe, Ethan Jarred de Zilva, Dhiresh Lanel Peiris, Ethan Timothy Nicholas.

❖ **Mothers Day / Fathers Day –**

Worship services with a specific focus on Mothers were held in many of the local Churches on Sunday the 8th of May, 2022, whilst similar services were held on Sunday the 19th of June, 2022, to commemorate Father's Day.

❖ **Community Outreach continues...**

The Community Outreach program of the CRC Dehiwela continues its ministry reaching out to the poor and needy in the Dehiwela Community. On the 5th of May, 2022, dry rations were distributed to 66 families with the active co-operation of FARMS Lanka. The programme is supported mainly by the Dehiwela Diaconate, members of the congregation and friends. Shalini Ferreira gives the necessary leadership.

❖ **CRC Women's Federation "Fasting and Prayer -**

Two mornings of "fasting and prayer" were held by the CRCSL Womens Federation at Dehiwela and Wolvendhal on Saturday the 1st of May, 2022. A number of ladies from the local congregations participated.

❖ **Last Tuesday Extended Time –**

has been conducted hybrid, due to the prevailing situation in the Country, especially with the shortage of fuel. Pas Lakmal Wijeratne led the April session on the 26th, on the "Five Pillars

of a growing Church". On the 31st of May, the session was led by Mr Andi Schubert on the theme, "The Christian



Response in the context of the Country today." In June – the 28th, Pas Clement Yogarajah and Bro. Shane Dirckze are scheduled to lead on the theme "Evangelism in the current context – Urban and Village."

❖ **Reaching out to people in the Queues...**

The Dehiwela Diaconate together with the Youth involved themselves in distributing



some refreshment by way of a snack to those lined up in queues either for Gas or Kerosene oil, with a view to

demonstrating the care of the church and the love of God for those struggling to get the essentials to sustain life. These queues that comprised mainly of the poorer segment of Society spending hours on end to get these essentials, were treated to a fish bun and a bottle of water. Depending on how things continue to fan out, it is planned to sustain this endeavour.



❖ **Colombo Theological Seminary Council Office-bearers for 2022/2023. –**

The following were elected at the AGM held on Saturday the 28th of May, 2022: - President: Revd: Charles Jansz, Vice-President: Rt Revd Dhiloraj Canagasabey, Secretary: Revd: Niroshan Perera, Treasurer: Mr. Prashan de Mel, Committee members: Dr. Ivor Poobalan, Dr. Prashan de Visser, Mr. Roshan H Mendis, Ms Ruth Surenthiraraj, Dr Roshan Perera, Revd: Romesh Bulathsinhala. Revd: Jansz would also serve on the Academic Affairs Standing Committee and as Chairperson of the Publishing Standing Committee.

Church Register

❖ Baptism *"Let the children come..."*

Shawn, son of Lakshika and Krishan Silva on Sunday 27th March, 2002 at CRC Regent-Street.

❖ Wedding. *"What God has joined together..."*

Desiree Keyt to Isuru Senanayake on Friday 6th May, 2022, at the CRC Dehiwella.

❖ Death *"I am the Resurrection and the Life..."*

Donald Peiris, on Thursday 2nd June, 2022, of the CRC Regent-Street

(The "News" in these pages is usually gathered from the Bulletins published by the respective local churches and available in the Church office. Any other news of events or involving the membership could be sent directly to the Editor of "The Herald," for publication according to the established criteria. – Ed.).

Let's Hear It Again

One big event (mass evangelism) will not compensate for a lack of regular witnessing by the church. Neither will it transform a local church that has not given priority to evangelism any more than a week's exercise can restore to full health a body which has ignored physical exercise for years.



By Revd Canon J John
"Is the age of mass evangelism over?" Diocesan Digest, May 2018

TAIL LIGHTS

by C.N.J



Protestants !



I am almost sure that those of the Christian tradition on seeing the caption, would have immediately thought of the group of Christians who are non Roman Catholic! And maybe you are one of them! That has been the simple traditional Christian understanding, going back to the time when Martin Luther posted his 95 sentences of "protest" on a Church door in Wittenberg. Never short of humour even when it comes to such important stuff, someone suggested that his wife posted hers on the refrigerator!

And talking of humour I came across the story about a tourist being held up in Ireland, where Catholic and Protestant rivalry has been part of life. The gunman asked the question, are you Catholic or Protestant, to which the tourist stuttered that he was an atheist. Back came the retort, "Protestant" or "Catholic"? !! Maybe humorous but how many today are "practical atheists?" Claiming belief in God but living as if there is no God!

The circumstances of today in Sri Lanka have added another grouping of "protestants." Not so much the churchy kind, but part of a national movement driven to change the political system and culture. It is a movement transcending race, religion, status and the usual barriers that divide.

As I reflected on this group I thought that they have much to teach us – Churchy protestants. Especially when it comes to rallying against oppression, corruption, injustice and all such woes that have devastated this beautiful Country. The Scriptures are full of calls for the Church to be in the forefront of such evils and live as a peaceful community in reconciliation and transformative change.

Just consider one such call. Remember what the Prophet Micah said, "He has showed you O man what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly, love mercy and walk humbly with your God." (Micah 6:8). And for these actions it does not matter whether you are Catholic or Protestant – what matters is that we see ourselves as agents of transformative change in the church and outside! In that sense every one must be a "protestant" irrespective of our labels !

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