CAUGHT UP IN WHAT GOD IS DOING: RECAPTURING A BIBLICAL UNDERSTANDING OF MISSION

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Mission is in my DNA. I was raised in a Nazarene pastor's family, in which we regularly prayed for missionaries and often hosted them in our home. My mother served as NMI president for our district and later for the general church. Fresh out of university, I sensed a calling to cross-cultural ministry through a summer mission experience. I had the privilege of serving as a Nazarene missionary educator in Asia and Europe for 24 years, and I taught classes on mission at two Nazarene universities in the United States. I have also attempted to write on the intersection of the Bible and mission for over 40 years.[1] Consequently, I feel honored and energized by the invitation to write a foundational paper on mission for the upcoming Global Theology Conference—the subject courses through my bloodstream.

I have learned, however, that when we talk about "mission," we don't all mean the same thing—not even in the Church of the Nazarene! This paper, then, grapples with a fundamental question: from a biblical perspective, what *is* mission? To address that issue, I explore five scriptural themes that can help shape what it means for Nazarenes to do mission today:

- Mission begins with God, not the church
- Mission is robust, not skinny
- Mission involves being, doing, and telling
- Mission is inseparable from transformed, holy lives
- Mission is saturated with hope

Let's begin with the basics. What do we mean by "mission" in the first place?

What is Mission?

"Mission" can be a slippery term. Its very popularity risks making it vague. Virtually every organization I know of touts a *mission* statement, from multinational companies to local churches to my neighborhood fast-food restaurant! What is more, the terms "mission" and "missional" are not only popular—they can also be problematic. For some Christians, particularly those bearing the legacy of colonialism, the terms "missions" and "missionary" may not be positive words. They can evoke painful memories of cultural imperialism and dominant groups pressuring less powerful people to adopt their beliefs and practices.

Yet despite the potential ambiguity, offense, and overuse of "missional" language, I believe that, rightly understood, it is still the best terminology we have to speak of God's redeeming purposes in the world.[2] Nevertheless, we cannot assume that everyone understands

[1] This essay draws heavily from those writings. See the references below.

[2] The Society of Biblical Literature's Forum on Missional Hermeneutics has grappled with the appropriateness of "missional" terminology in recent years. See the discussion in Michael Barram and

the significance of mission or what it means to be missional in the same way, including pastors, church leaders, and theological educators. Nazarenes hold as a core value that we are a "missional people." But do we fully agree on what that entails? I suspect we do not.

Trying to define a biblical understanding of mission is complicated by the fact that the term "mission" is not found in the Bible. It derives from the Latin word *missio*, which refers to the act of sending.[3] The notion of sending remains an important aspect of mission, but it does not account for all of it. To explore the meaning of mission in Scripture, we need to compare two common yet distinct approaches to the question.

Mission begins with God, not the Church

Recent interpreters of Scripture and missiologists alike tend to approach a biblical understanding of mission from one of two perspectives.[4] Some perceive mission in a relatively narrow sense. I'll call this *church-focused mission.* Here, mission (or "missions") primarily concerns the church's activities of evangelism, planting churches, and discipling people of all nations.[5] This perspective relies heavily on New Testament texts, especially Acts and the letters of Paul. It sees mission as one dimension of the church's calling, primarily carried out by individuals who are called and sent by God. It spotlights the church's task of outreach to non-Christians, particularly in cross-cultural settings.

This more traditional understanding of mission often encounters the Bible like a prospector, sifting through Scripture for "missions texts," those golden nuggets that can define and support the church's cross-cultural missionary activities.[6] These include the Great Commission of Matthew 28, Jesus' promise to empower the church for global witness in Acts 1:8, and Isaiah's response, "Here I am, send me" (Isa 6:8).[7] This narrower understanding is perhaps the dominant view of mission among Christians in local churches around the globe, including Nazarene congregations. There is much value in this approach. It is the one in which I was nurtured and called to service. The problem is not that it is wrong but that it is too narrow.

John R. Franke, *Liberating Scripture: An Invitation to Missional Hermeneutics* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2024), 13-21.

[3] The closest Greek equivalent is the term *apostellō*, "to send."

[4] See Dean Flemming, "Mission," in *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, 2nd ed., ed. Scot McKnight, Lynn H. Cohick, Nijay K. Gupta (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2023), 703-704.

[5] For this general approach, see, e.g., Eckhard Schnabel, *Early Christian Mission*, 2 vols. (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2004); Robert L. Plummer, *Paul's Understanding of the Early Church's Mission? Did the Apostle Expect the Early Christian Communities to Evangelize?* (Milton Keyes, UK: Paternoster, 2006); William J. Larkin Jr. and Joel F. Williams, ed., *Mission in the New Testament: An Evangelical Approach* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1998).

[6] See David J. Bosch, "Reflections on Biblical Models of Mission," in *Toward the Twenty-First Century in Christian Mission: Essays in Honor of Gerald H. Anderson*, ed. James M. Phillips and Robert T. Coote (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 175-76.

[7] Scripture references use the NRSVUE unless stated otherwise.

A second way of understanding the nature of mission has gained traction among Bible interpreters and missiologists in recent decades.[8] We might call this *God-focused mission.* From this perspective, mission begins not with the activities of the church or a group of missionaries, but with the mission of the triune God, the *missio Dei*. Mission, then, has to do with the comprehensive purposes of God in the world and how God's people get caught up in what God is doing, where they live. Instead of sifting through the Bible for "mission texts" to reinforce the church's mission work, we need to see *all* of Scripture as a *mission text*. The Bible as a whole tells the grand story of God's mission in the world. The triune God initiates, acts, and sustains the saving movement that courses through Scripture like blood vessels through the body. God is a missionary God, who sends the Son into the world (Jn 3:16-17; Gal 4:4) and gives the Spirit, enabling the church to bear witness to God's loving purposes (Jn 20:20-23; Acts 1:8; 2:16-21; 4:31).

Although there is considerable overlap between these approaches, I am convinced that the second is more faithful to the overall biblical narrative. Scripture unfolds a sweeping story of God's mission, spanning from creation to new creation. The narrative begins with the Creator pronouncing all creation "very good" (Gen 1:31) and giving humans a calling to bear God's image and represent his rule in the world (Gen 1:26–28). Sin profoundly disfigures this vocation. But God reaches out in redeeming love, starting with the call of one person, Abraham, through whom every nation will be blessed (Gen 12:1–3; 22:17-18). This promise of universal blessing paves the way for a mission that is global in extent yet local in expression, always motivated by God's love for the world.

The Law, the Prophets, and the Writings all bear witness to this missional movement. Israel is called to be a "priestly kingdom and a holy nation" (Ex 19:5–6), a people whose integrity, love, justice, and worship would reveal God's holy character to the world. Yahweh's Servant in Isaiah has a mission to be "a light to the nations" (Isa 42:6; 49:6). And the psalmist invites God's people to declare and sing God's message to all peoples that they may join a global chorus of praise to Yahweh (e.g., Pss 67:3-5; 96:1-5; 97:7-10).

In the New Testament, Jesus fulfills and redefines the missional calling of Israel in his life, teaching, death, and resurrection. Jesus not only proclaims but also embodies the good news, launching a reign that brings freedom, forgiveness, wholeness, and hope (Lk 4:16-21; 7:21-22). In Jesus, the *missio Dei* inhabits human blood and bones. Acts narrates the continuation of Jesus's mission, now through his Spirit-empowered followers, the church. The letters show how the story of Jesus must shape missional communities, which live out the gospel in their world. Finally, God's redeeming purpose reaches its climax and aim in the new heaven and new earth, when God defeats all powers that oppose his saving purposes and restores all creation to what he

[8] See, e.g., Christopher J. H. Wright*, The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible's Grand Narrative* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2005); Michael Gorman, *Becoming the Gospel: Paul, Participation, and Mission* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015); Michael Goheen, *A Light to the Nations: the Missional Church and the Biblical Story* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011); Dean Flemming, *Recovering the Full Mission of God* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2013); *Why Mission?* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2015).

intended it to be. God proclaims the goal of his loving mission from heaven's throne: "See, I am making all things new" (Rev 21:5).[9]

Mission is Robust, not Skinny

The Bible bears witness to a mission that is comprehensive, not skinny. The *missio Dei* represents more than winning souls or growing churches. It involves nothing less than **God's purpose to renew and restore the entire creation, especially people of every nation, as well as what God's people are called to be, do, and say in connection with this divine purpose, within their different cultures and circumstances**. Paul announces in Ephesians that God's purpose is "to bring unity to all things in heaven and on earth under Christ" (Eph 1:10). Likewise, Colossians declares that through Christ, God is reconciling "all things, whether on earth or in heaven," making peace through the cross (Col 1:20). God's mission is cosmic in its reach. It encompasses the healing and uniting of people, societies, and creation itself.

This wider vision of redemption challenges narrow readings of Scripture that reduce mission to bringing individuals to faith or that limit it to cross-cultural witness alone. Rather, the Bible tells the story of a God who, in love, seeks to restore all that sin has ruptured in the world. Mission involves the whole gospel for the whole person in the whole world. By "the whole gospel," I mean that biblically, *the gospel* represents more than information or an evangelistic plan. It is God's power for salvation (Rom 1:16), good news that must be told, enacted, and embodied, and good news for all people and all creation (Col 1:23). God desires to bring every dimension of life under his reign. A robust vision of mission that is faithful to Scripture includes:

Evangelism and Discipleship

Proclaiming the gospel to lead people into a flourishing relationship with God in Christ remains essential to a biblical view of mission. When Jesus announced the breaking in of God's kingdom in the world, he challenged people to repent and believe the good news (Mk 1:14-15), to take up their cross and follow him (Mk 8:34), and to get caught up in his mission of fishing for people (Mt 4:18-20). Before returning to the Father, Jesus called the church not merely to win converts, but to follow his lead in making disciples—people who are incorporated into the community of faith and who live in obedience to his will (Mt 28:19-20). Likewise, Paul's theology and mission were drenched with his calling to proclaim the good news of Christ (Rom 1:1-6, 15; 1 Cor 1:17; 9:19-23). Yet for the apostle, evangelism was always married to the formation of mature, multicultural communities, empowered by the Spirit to embody the good news in everyday life (Phil 1:27-28; Col 1:25-28). Evangelism without discipleship in community is as deficient as an airplane with a single wing.

Compassion and Justice

From the Old Testament concern for orphans, widows, and foreigners (Deut 10:17-19) to Jesus's solidarity with the sick and the suffering (Mt 9:35-36; 25:31-46), the God of Scripture

[9] Brad E. Kelle, *Telling the Old Testament Story: God's Mission and God's People* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2017), and Andy Johnson, *Holiness and the* Missio Dei (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2016) are Nazarene authors who offer excellent missional readings of the Old Testament and New Testament, respectively.

reaches out to vulnerable and excluded people. Jesus's personal mission statement in Luke 4 announces his anointing to bring good news to the poor and release to the captives and oppressed (Lk 4:18-19). In Jesus, God became entangled in all the messiness of human life.[10] The Hebrew prophets rumble against injustice (Amos 5; Micah 3), and the first Christians distribute their resources so that "there was not a needy person among them (Acts 4:34; cf. Acts 2:44-45). Paul presses the pause button on his evangelistic plans for Spain to deliver a compassionate ministry offering to a suffering Jerusalem church (Rom 15:23-31; 1 Cor 16:1-4), and James rails against Christians who favor the prosperous over the poor (Jas 2:1-9). Revelation's picture of people from every nation, tribe, and culture, worshiping God around the throne (Rev 7:9) does not simply envision what it will be like "when we all get to heaven" someday. The church in mission is called to become a foretaste of that future now, living as agents of justice and reconciliation among polarized people.

Care for Creation

God's mission is as massive as creation itself. I will give this theme additional attention, not because it is more important than the first two dimensions of the divine mission, but because it is more neglected. God's mission begins with Genesis 1, not Genesis 3. Biblical mission constitutes more than a response to human rebellion, rescuing individuals from their sin and guilt. The story of God's loving purpose for the world starts when God creates all things, pronouncing them "very good" (Gen 1:31). As I recently heard a theologian say, "Creation is God's love made material."[11] God's creation flourishes with abundant life and harmonious relationships between God, humans, and the earth. When God breathes life into humans, he gives them a missional task—to "rule" God's creation (Gen 1:26, 28) in a way that reflects his own gracious, loving reign and to "serve" it (*ʿabad* Gen 2:15) so that creation flourishes in the way God intended.

God's good creation, however, suffers grievously under the powers of sin, death, and evil. Singing the same song of lament as God's children, creation groans for liberation (Rom 8:18-25). God's *mission*, then, includes bringing wholeness to the whole creation. The Bible's story ends with a new heaven and a new earth (Rev 21—22). Three times, Revelation pictures New Jerusalem coming *down* from heaven and merging with a renewed earth (Rev 3:12; 21:2, 10). God's purpose is to transform the earth, not destroy it. As Barbara Rossing quips, "God will never leave the world behind!"[12] The gospel offers hope for the world as well as for people.

That biblical perspective shapes our mission as well. Christians worldwide have increasingly recognized that creation care is not peripheral, but essential to how we participate in

[10] See Howard Peskett and Vinoth Ramachandra, *The Message of Mission: The Glory of Christ in All Time and Space* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2003), 86.

[11] Norma Wirzba, "For God So Loved the World," Grider-Winget Lecture, Nazarene Theological Seminary, Oct 15, 2025.

[12] Barbara Rossing, "For the Healing of the World: Reading Revelation Ecologically," in David Rhoads, ed., *From Every People and Nation: The Book of Revelation in Intercultural Perspective* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2005), 172.

the mission of God, and that mission involves the healing of creation. Notably, the Lausanne movement has trumpeted this call:

> Informed and inspired by our study of Scripture . . . we reaffirm that creation care is an issue that must be included in our response to the gospel, proclaiming and acting upon the good news of what God has done and will complete for the salvation of the world. This is not only biblically justified, but an integral part of our mission and an expression of our worship to God for his wonderful plan of redemption through Jesus Christ. Therefore . . . we would care for creation even if it were not in crisis.[13]

These three dimensions of the *missio Dei* and the church's participation in it—evangelism and discipleship, justice and compassion, and care for creation—do not compete with one another. Nor does one distract from another. Rather, they remain seamlessly integrated and mutually dependent. For example, because the poor and the displaced often experience the bitterest effects of pollution and a changing climate, caring for God's creation likely will also help alleviate human suffering and injustice. At the same time, working toward the healing of creation can bear witness to the fullness of the gospel among unbelievers and help point them to the Creator who transforms *all* of life.[14]

The Lausanne movement's Cape Town Commitment offers such an undivided picture of God's mission:

> Integral mission means discerning, proclaiming, and living out, the biblical truth that the gospel is God's good news, through the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ, for individual persons, *and* for society, *and* for creation. All three are broken and suffering because of sin; all three are included in the redeeming love and mission of God; all three must be part of the comprehensive mission of God's people.[15]

A shrunken gospel leads to skinny mission. A robust gospel gives birth to a comprehensive mission.

Mission involves Being, Doing, and Telling

God's mission is not an abstract theological idea. It is a vibrant reality into which God's people are called and energized to participate. What, then, does it mean for the church to engage

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[13] "Creation Care and the Gospel: The Jamaica Call to Action," Lausanne Movement, 2012. https://www.lausanne.org/content/statement/creation-care-call-to-action.

[14] See David Greenlee, "Knowing the Creator and Caring for Creation: Aspects of a Truly Undivided Witness," *Transformation* 42.2 (2025): 115-28.

[15] *The Cape Town Commitment: A Confession of Faith and Call to Action*, Lausanne Movement, 2011, http://www.lausanne.org/en/documents/ctcommitment.html#_ftn82. The Mission Agencies and Creation Care Network, related to the Lausanne/Creation Care Network, represents various mission organizations (e.g., OMF, OM, SIL, InterServe, BMS-World Mission, TEAM, SIM) in their efforts to promote creation care as a missional practice.

in God's sweeping mission? That participation involves three interconnected and overlapping dimensions: **being, doing,** and **telling.**

Being: Embodying the Gospel

Christians often debate whether the church should focus on words or deeds, proclamation or practice, declaring the gospel or demonstrating the gospel. What is often missed, however, is that who God's people *are* lies at the heart of mission. Before the church proclaims the gospel, it must embody the gospel. As Michael Gorman puts it, we must *become* the gospel for our world.[16] Jesus did not tell his Spirit-empowered followers to "go out and witness." He promised that they would *be* his witnesses (Acts 1:8). In John, the condition for "bearing much fruit" is "abiding in the vine" (Jn 15:1-8).

Even as God intended Israel to display God's holiness before the surrounding nations (Ex 19:3-5; cf. 1 Pet 2:9), so the church is called to live as a holy, contrasting community before a watching world. Paul invites God's people to "live out [their] citizenship" (*politeuesthe*)—their public and communal lives—"in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ" (Phil 1:27). That involves living holy and blameless lives in the midst of a corrupt generation, as beacons of light in the culture (Phil 2:14-16). The church embodies God's mission by its very presence in the world. By living as cross-shaped communities, modeling forgiveness, humility, hospitality, and care for one another, we not only represent a contrast to the patterns of our cultures but offer them a positive alternative. Our life together bears witness to the hope of God's new creation, drawing others to the kingdom like hummingbirds are drawn to nectar (Jn 17:21, 23; Acts 2:47).

Doing: Practicing the Gospel

Second, we participate in the *missio Dei* by living it out in practice. *Doing* involves concrete acts that demonstrate God's restoring, reconciling purposes in the world. Even as Jesus engaged in healing the sick, welcoming outcasts, and confronting the powers of oppression, God's people practice what they proclaim. As the Father sent the Son, Jesus sends the church to continue his own life-bearing mission in the world (Jn 17:18; 20:21).

Mission in a Wesleyan key embraces concrete acts of self-giving love and compassion. We not only embody the gospel; we *demonstrate* it in practical ways. The early church lived out this kind of mission by its radical generosity, its embrace of outsiders, and its willingness to suffer for "doing good" (Acts 2:42-47; 15:1-35; 1 Pet 2:11-12; 3:16-17). Jesus drew a straight line between "being" salt and light and practicing good deeds in the public square. As a result, others will be magnetically attracted to worship the living God (Mt 5:13-16). In particular, Jesus's practices of eating with the *wrong* people—sinners, tax collectors, the poor and disabled (Mt 9:10-12; Lk 14:12-14, 21-24)—and touching the untouchable, such as unclean lepers (Mk 1:41), serve as a model for the church's solidarity with the suffering and marginalized of our world.

Demonstrating the gospel also involves confronting powers of evil and systems of injustice. Both Jesus and the apostles confront the powers that oppose God's purposes (Mt 12:28;

[16] Gorman, *Becoming the Gospel.*

Mk 5:1-20; Acts 8:7, 9-24; 13:6-12; 19:11, 13-20). Such actions concretely broadcast "the good news that in Jesus, God's reign has launched an all-out assault on evil in its many forms, including sin, disease, demonic activity and death."[17] At the same time, mission in the Jesus way confronts not only the power of the evil one but the evil systems of power in our world. When Jesus enters the Jerusalem temple, he symbolically "turns the tables" on the whole system of exploitation by the temple traders. He pronounces judgment on the corrupt religious establishment (Mk 11:15-19). Revelation unleashes a blistering critique of empire, injustice, and economic exploitation, symbolized by Babylon (Rev 17—18). Such texts remind the church that mission involves not only performing acts of compassion but confronting the oppressive structures that collide with God's reign. Yet confronting never means coercing. We embrace the posture of the slaughtered Lamb, the way of humility and self-giving love (Phil 2:4-8; Rev 5:6-10; 14:4).

Furthermore, the church's missional practices include prayer and worship. Paul, for example, intercedes for the salvation of his fellow Jews (Rom 10:1) and repeatedly asks God to bring maturity and fruitfulness to his converts (Phil 1:9-11; Col 1:9-12). At the same time, he invites congregations to bulwark his own missionary activity with intercessory prayer for open doors (Col 4:3-4) and to pray for *everyone*, in light of God's desire that all might be saved (1 Tim 2:1-4).

Worship is also missional. Nowhere is that clearer than in Revelation, which is wallpapered with worship scenes and hymns.[18] Worship in Revelation not only announces God's mission in the world (Rev 5:9-14; 7:9-12; 15:2-4). It also calls people from every tribe and tongue to forsake worship of the beastly powers (Rev 13; 14:9-11) and publicly declare their loyalty to God and the Lamb (Rev 11:13; 14:1-7; 15:4; 22:3). When John pictures a vast multitude from every nation crying out, "Salvation belongs to our God" (Rev 7:9-10), that vision of the future calls us to join in God's purpose to redeem all nations in the present. If we're going to sing the song *then*, we need to learn the tune *now*.

Telling: Bearing Witness to the Gospel

A third dimension of Christian mission involves *telling* the gospel of Jesus Christ—bearing verbal witness to the story of God's redeeming love. The gospel, after all, is good *news*. Throughout the New Testament, proclamation remains crucial to the church's participation in the *missio Dei*. Jesus bursts on the scene "proclaiming the good news of God" and announcing the inbreaking of God's kingdom (Mk 1:14-15). He then sends his disciples to share in his own ministry of proclamation (Mt 10:7, 26-27; Mk 3:14; Lk 9:2, 60). Likewise, at the heart of Paul's apostolic identity lies his commission to announce the gospel of Christ to the Gentiles (1 Cor 1:17-25; Gal 1:15-16).

But telling the good news is not confined to formal preaching or to God-called missionaries. Local congregations "sound forth" the word of the Lord (1 Thes 1:8), and "speak the word with . . . boldness" (Phil 1:14). All Christians must be ready to give a reason for the

[17] Flemming, *Recovering the Full Mission of God*, 76.

[18] See Dean Flemming, *Foretaste of the Future: Reading Revelation in Light of God's Mission* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2022), 141-61.

hope within them (1 Pet 3:15) and, in the course of everyday conversations, graciously answer everyone (Col 3:6). The credibility of our telling hinges on the quality of our conduct. A genuine gospel witness never pressures or manipulates others. It is clothed with gentleness and respect (1 Pet 3:16). As Paul puts it, God's people "hold out the word of life" (Phil 2:16; author's translation), not simply as a verbal message but as a visible, lifestyle testimony. We cannot authentically *tell* the good news unless we *live* the good news.

The New Testament also models a contextualized, flexible witness. Jesus tailors his language and approach to particular people and occasions. To a Jewish religious leader he offers new birth from above (Jn 3:1-10); to a marginalized woman at a well he promises living water (Jn 4:10-15); and in the presence of a man born blind he reveals himself as "the light of the world" (Jn 9:5). Paul's evangelistic ministry models an approach to witness that is anchored in the story of Jesus but dynamically adapted to the cultural, religious, and social setting of his audience. Whether retelling the story of Israel in a synagogue setting (Acts 13:16-41), pointing uneducated polytheists to the one creator God in Lystra (Acts 14:8-18), or quoting pagan poets in Athens (Acts 17:22-33), Paul contextualizes the good news of Christ with sensitivity and respect. His purpose is not to water down the gospel but to translate its message and power in ways that make sense to different audiences. The New Testament documents themselves serve as instruments of mission, singing the one story of Christ in multiple keys. The various New Testament writings target people where they are and at their point of need. Such a pattern provides a compelling model for the church today in a diverse and pluralistic world.

Integrating Being, Doing, and Telling

These three dimensions of mission—presence, practice, and proclamation—are not distinct callings. They act like three strands entwined into one string. A unified, biblical mission embraces all three. A church that only emphasizes "being" may remain pious, but missionally irrelevant. A congregation that is fixated on "doing" could be confused for a social service if it does not narrate the story of Christ. A community that simply "proclaims" risks sounding phony if its actions don't match its message.

What, then, is the priority? Does Scripture allow us to rank these facets of Christian mission in order of importance? Trying to establish the priority is like asking which leg of a three-legged stool is most important! Calling one aspect the "priority" implies that it is the most *urgent* thing we can do, and therefore, where our mission must begin.[19] But people have different needs, and our priority in a given context may depend on their particular life circumstances, whether a caring presence for the grieving, advocacy for the exploited, or a friendship that leads to a timely explanation of the gospel. We might compare the relationship between being, doing, and telling to a jazz trio. All three instruments, say, a saxophone, piano, and bass, are vital to the performance. At times, however, the sax will play a solo with the others supporting. Later, the piano will take the lead, and then the bass will have its turn. But a good jazz concert requires the whole trio to play together.[20]

[19] See Wright, *Mission of God*, 317-19; Flemming, *Recovering the Full Mission of God*, 265-69.

[20] Flemming, *Recovering the Full Mission of God*, 256-75. Hopefully, readers will recognize analogies to this kind of interplay in some of their own musical traditions across the global church.

Christopher Wright's suggestion that we talk about *ultimacy* rather than *priority* may help us here.[21] Wherever we start, whether in Christian presence, promoting justice, or compassionate care for creation, *ultimately,* we desire for all people to experience the transforming power of the gospel. Mission may not *begin* with declaring the gospel, but mission that doesn't *ultimately include* telling the story of Jesus and calling people into an obedient life in Christ remains incomplete. It is a form of "skinny mission."

Mission is Inseparable from Transformed, Holy Lives

Christians sometimes treat mission and holiness as separate spheres, one involving the church's outward expansion, the other the church's inward formation. But in the biblical story, they remain inseparable. Trying to do mission without holiness is like cooking rice without water. The church's involvement in God's mission is branded by a call to be holy as God is holy (1 Pet 1:15-16; 2:9-12). Holiness is neither a retreat into individual piety, nor isolation from a scary world, nor a battle against a wicked culture. "Biblical holiness, in contrast, is magnetic, contagious, and invitational."[22]

The stream of contagious holiness flows throughout Scripture. Israel bears witness to a watching world by displaying a God-shaped character and practice (Ex 19:3-6; Deut 4:6-8). Jesus promises that the world will know that we follow him by our cruciform love for one another (Jn 13:34-35). Acts pictures a church whose everyday loving practices—hospitality, fellowship, worship, sharing of resources, unity that bridges ethnic and social boundaries—attract those outside to Christ. Paul weaves a seamless connection between the way Christians act toward each other and their witness to unbelievers (Rom 12:9-21; Phil 4:2-5; 1 Thes 3:10). In Revelation, the church appears as a holy, contrast community, wearing white robes that symbolize their purity (Rev 3:5; 7:9, 14; 19:8), bearing the name of God on their foreheads, the most visible place possible (Rev 14:1: 22:3; cf. Rev 7:3), and following the Lamb "wherever he goes"—even to the cross (Rev 14:4). Only a church that is blameless and without deceit (Rev 14:5) can authentically bear witness to God's truth in the public square. Holiness is missional to its very core.

As a church in the Wesleyan tradition, this merger between mission and holiness, witness and self-giving love, stands as a distinctive contribution we can make to Christian missiology. But that will only happen if *we become our theology*.

Mission is Saturated with Hope

Finally, we live in an age of anxiety and hopelessness. From the cost of living to the future of AI, from a deluge of displaced peoples to a global rise in authoritarianism, from social media algorithms to a climate in crisis, we have no shortage of issues to spike our collective blood pressure. Can a twenty-first-century mission extend hope to such a world?

Some evangelical eschatologies offer a skinny hope. This world is doomed, prophecy is playing out before us, and hope lies in Jesus, enabling us to escape a dying world through a

[21] Wright, *Mission of God*, 319.

[22] Flemming, *Recovering the Mission of God*, 269.

secret "rapture" or a personal ascent to heaven. But mission is more than a rescue operation. The biblical story of God's mission rustles with an expansive hope for God's people *and* for the world. Our mission is not driven by fear or human effort. Rather, it is propelled by the assurance that God's promised future—the utter defeat of evil, the reconciliation of everything in Christ, and the renewal of creation—is already breaking into the present. Our posture is not one of passive waiting but active participation in what God is already up to in the world. Amid anxiety, suffering, injustice, and a creation in distress, mission remains an act of relentless hope. The Spirit, Paul assures us, both guarantees the future and empowers us to embody God's future now (Rom 8:23-25; 2 Cor 5:5; Eph 1:13-14).

We are *a people of hope*. God's future, the new heaven and new earth (Rev 21—22), spells salvation and renewal for persons, communities, and creation. God's healing is *personal*—God himself will dwell with his people, wiping every tear from their eyes (Rev 21:3); it is *social*—the leaves of the tree of life that thrives in the city are "for the healing of the nations" (Rev 22:2); and it is *cosmic*—Revelation pictures a transformed, flourishing earth, in which God makes everything new (Rev 21:5). And here lies the crucial point. We, a people called Nazarenes, are sent to live as a foretaste, a "sneak preview" of that new creation now. We serve as a living proclamation that God's kingdom will come on earth as it is in heaven. Mission is more than simply our *task*. It is our *testimony* to the hope God has promised, a hope that endures in utterly desperate situations, a hope that energizes the church to get caught up in God's transforming purpose for every arena of life.