

A NEW TESTAMENT BIBLICAL PARADIGM FOR THE MISSION OF THE CHURCH (ACTS 8:1–3 AND 11:19–26)

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I. A Vision Is Necessary for Mission Success

Before the task of presenting a New Testament paradigm for the mission of the church, the difference between evangelism and mission needs to be identified. The following quote from Word@work expresses the difference well:

The origins and therefore the meanings of “evangelism” and “mission” are different. Evangelism relates to the evangel: (Latin *evangelium*, from Greek *euangelion* = good news) ... the product. Mission is derived from Latin *missio*, from *missus*, past participle of *mittere*, to send off ... the person. So mission is the authority and command to go (like a missile) because it is sent off, and the gospel is the effective agent which is carried with the person who is sent. So, by analogy, a missile may be sent off into space carrying a payload of a satellite which will remain in orbit doing its work. Thus, mission is the commissioned call of God to go bearing the evangel which will continue to do its work once placed in the right orbit! Likewise, evangelism is the placement of the gospel wherever we are commanded and authorised to take it.²

Hence, evangelism is the attempt to reach anyone, anywhere, within one’s own culture. Mission also focuses on “cultural exchanges,” in which the message of Christ is brought to new languages, cultures, and peoples outside one’s own culture. We really should not be caught up with the exposition of this concept. The idea still stands that evangelism and mission go together. It may be best to speak of home mission and world mission! This offers the possibility of everyone being groomed to function as missionaries in any context!

The discussion above follows more of a philosophical and practical understanding of mission. This takes on added strength when seen through the lens of a biblical apparatus for mission development.

There is significant information to be gleaned from the Word of God regarding the mission of the church. In this article, the writer uses two portions of Scripture to explore the mission of the church. One must note that a paradigm found in the Book of Acts gives very significant insight into the movement of the church. In Acts 8, no one can miss the information that persecution was pervasive for the church! A serious attack on the church, which was

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² Retrieved November 15, 2025, from <http://www.wordatwork.org.uk/answers/what-difference-between-evangelism-and-mission>.

inaugurated by Christ, became increasingly difficult for the church to have the passion to carry out its mission. The Bible says it best in Acts 8:1–3:

¹ On that day a great persecution broke out against the church in Jerusalem, and all except the apostles were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria. ² Godly men buried Stephen and mourned deeply for him. ³ But Saul began to destroy the church. Going from house to house, he dragged off both men and women and put them in prison.³

This is a fact! However, we must resist the temptation to assume that persecution was necessary for the church to fulfill its mission! To hold to this view is to seriously hamper the mobilization of the citizens of the Kingdom of God to fulfill a God-mandate to make disciples of all nations! A lazy approach to missions will be fostered where Christians do not move simply because persecution is nonexistent! At best, we should agree that not even persecution is an excuse for the church's reclusiveness! What happened after the scattering of the church? A vision was developed! Let us explore this concept.

A. The Message of the Church in Mission Is the Proclamation of Christ (Acts 11:19–20)

Look at the following from the book of Acts 11:19–20:

¹⁹ Now those who had been scattered by the persecution that broke out when Stephen was killed traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus and Antioch, spreading the word only among Jews. ²⁰ Some of them, however, men from Cyprus and Cyrene, went to Antioch and began to speak to Greeks also, telling them the good news about the Lord Jesus.

The first noticeable part of the activation of mission is the message! What and who we proclaim is as important as how we proclaim. The church is not a club that decides who it wants to herald! If the message is to be potent, then the One proclaimed is absolutely critical! The church can offer all kinds of feel-good stories that look at the lives of various persons! This is not intrinsically unscrupulous. However, the potency of the church's vision lies in the Person connected to the message we are called to proclaim. The message must be the proclamation of Christ. To do anything less is less than superlative!

B. The Mission of the Church in Mission Is the Prospect of Proselyting the Community

Hollis Green believed that when the building becomes the focus, rather than the force with which to work, the church is in trouble. The basic premise for the advancement of Christianity is the church accepting the responsibility for carrying the message of Christ to the people outside the four walls of the church's building. Church ministries should be planned to take the message beyond the building complex; the church was not born to be a hospital for saints or a social club for sinners.⁴

This is a stinging statement and indictment against the church! To reach the community, the church must go to the community. Green further stated:

³ The New International Version was used for Scripture references.

⁴ Hollis L. Green, *Why Churches Die: A Guide to Basic Evangelism and Church Growth* (Minneapolis: Bethany Fellowship, 1972), 42–46.

The church building may be a place for revival and a place where believers come to be nourished up in the faith, taught the doctrines of the word, and strengthened as believers. But soul winning, for the most part, is done outside the church sanctuary. We have some excellent help from Acts 11:21. “The Lord’s hand was with them, and a great number of people believed and turned to the Lord.”⁵

Walter Elwell wrote:

The Gentile mission continues to be Luke’s focus as he explains how the church in Syrian Antioch came into existence. The story goes back to the persecution in connection with Stephen (v. 19; see 8:1–4) during which the disciples traveled as far north as Phoenicia, along the coast, the island of Cyprus, and eventually all the way into Syrian Antioch.⁶

This is community engagement! This is action where we go. This is more than simply asking people to come. It is a “go” strategy to reach people where they are! It is evident that the great number of people who “turned to the Lord” were not in the building! Where did they find them? In the community! The church must have a vision that includes a community focus. Failure to do this leads to community apathy, improper community assessment, and loss of community vitality! Green supports my conviction when he wrote, “Quantitative growth is dependent on the evangelistic outreach of the church and the mobilization of the church constituency to affect not only the maturing and equipping of the saints, but also the ministry of the church.”⁶

The four walls of the church building were really only the inception of the idea of the church! This confusion has been a pitfall for the engagement of the mission of the church. Yes, we need a vision that moves the church beyond the walls of the building! The sheep are bleating outside the structural architectural magnificence of brilliant cathedrals! The mission of the church, with a proper vision, is to be a going and a sending church!

C. The Means of the Church in Mission Is Purposeful Christians (11:22–24)

If we do not embrace a vision for mission, then mission, as human engagement with God, becomes obsolete! The early church clearly understood this:

²² News of this reached the church in Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas to Antioch. ²³ When he arrived and saw what the grace of God had done, he was glad and encouraged them all to remain true to the Lord with all their hearts. ²⁴ He was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and faith, and a great number of people were brought to the Lord. (Acts 11:22–24)

The people factor is essential to the church’s mission. This is critical for the harvest!

D. The Method of the Church in Mission Is the Power of Compassion (11:25–30)

⁵ Green, *Why Churches Die*, 45.

⁶ Green, *Why Churches Die*, 66.

There is a fourth part necessary for a vision for mission. In this instance, there is a clear approach by the church in Acts 11:25–30:

²⁵ Then Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Saul, ²⁶ and when he found him, he brought him to Antioch. So for a whole year Barnabas and Saul met with the church and taught great numbers of people. The disciples were called Christians first at Antioch. ²⁷ During this time some prophets came down from Jerusalem to Antioch. ²⁸ One of them, named Agabus, stood up and through the Spirit predicted that a severe famine would spread over the entire Roman world. (This happened during the reign of Claudius.) ²⁹ The disciples, as each one was able, decided to provide help for the brothers and sisters living in Judea. ³⁰ This they did, sending their gift to the elders by Barnabas and Saul.

Something was at work here. The church was displaying compassion. It is not too far-fetched to believe that news spread about the generosity of the church. D. Guthrie, J. A. Motyer, A. M. Stibbs, and D. J. Wiseman wrote:

It is not clear how long before the famine Agabus's prediction was made. Probably the Antiochene Christians set aside money systematically until the time of need actually came, and then sent Barnabas and Saul as their delegates to take the accumulated sum to the Christians in Jerusalem.⁸

How could a vision for mission not seriously consider a methodology that includes compassion? The intensity of the inner group, where compassion reaches out in salvation, goods and services, and any other method that legitimately displays the compassionate spirit of the church, must also find expression outside “the household of faith”! The words of Christ in Matthew 25:42–46 still ring true:

⁴² For I was hungry, and you didn't feed me. I was thirsty, and you didn't give me a drink.

⁴³ I was a stranger, and you didn't invite me into your home. I was naked, and you didn't give me clothing. I was sick and in prison, and you didn't visit me.

Green, in his short but potent book, had much to say about methodology and the church. He indicated that methods are considered a means to reach people. However, a theology of coercion breeds an artificial motivation. When this occurs, the power of personal experience is nullified. The church must create an atmosphere that is conducive to individual participation in the work of the kingdom. So, while programming is essential, it must be structured within a New Testament framework and must be based on the Word of God. Additionally, personal experience is critical to communicating the gospel of Christ. Consequently, human efforts and effective methods are sure to fail without the element of personal experience to validate the invitation.⁹

So, what have we devised as a workable vision for the mission of the church? The vision of the church is its message of the *proclamation of Christ*. The mission of the church is to *proselytize the community*. The means of the church in mission is *purposeful Christians*. Finally, the method of the church in mission is the *power of compassion*.

In many instances, the church knows its mission and has an expressed vision, but the execution of that vision reveals an expired life on the shelves of good intentions! How do we go

from the philosophical formulation of the vision of the church to people and community engagement? This is the final task to complete this paper!

II. Sustaining the Vision Is Paramount for the Success of the Mission

This writer's assessment is simple. We all tend to forget the mission. To counteract this, I propose: we all tend to forget God's mission, but God engages us in His mission as He establishes His authority, exposes our astonishment, and emphasizes an adjustment. A good biblical paradigm is found in Luke 5:1–11.

A. The Established Authority of Christ Is Substantial (vv. 4–5)

Jesus is the supreme authority! Why would we not follow Him in our mission efforts? Verse 4 provides critical information for sustaining the church's mission. It essentially reminds us that we cannot continue to do the same thing and expect different results! There is a simple equation that I have formulated to explain what Jesus was doing: *Shallow fishing + shallow thinking = no catch!* We must think and act in the deep where the fish are! Having the right tool but not using it wisely will lead to little or no yield!

Verse 5 contributes valuable information for sustaining the vision. The mission of the church may seem to be hard work with little yield. If what you have been trying isn't working, isn't it better to try something else that is being suggested? Wrong focus only leads to disillusionment and feelings of failure. God's plan for mission is the only plan that works, so seek Him!

B. The Exposed Astonishment of the Disciples Is Solemn (vv. 6–9)

These verses offer more help for sustaining the vision. Simply comply as instructed by God! It is awesome when Jesus produces a "surprise"! Could it be that we tirelessly toil with all the right intentions, but we either never did hear the command of God, or we are still doing our own thing? If the previous statement is true, then frustration, fruitlessness, fatigue, and failure are the only outcomes for purely human effort that is not guided by God! There is a difference when the agenda of God is followed! When we follow the program of God, fruitfulness is inevitable!

Now we have come to the critical turning point in the story. To understand our work, sustain the work, and be effective, verse 8 is critical! The recognition of our own corruption is the necessary starting point of God's miraculous work in us and through us! God calls us to engage in mission through our own deep cleansing! Sinfulness is the one disposition that can hinder the work of God in our lives and prevent us from being the kind of followers God desires! Willingness to submit to the One who commands waves, calls the fish, and carves out the way for success, is the only way for the mission to yield a harvest!

C. The Emphasized Adjustment by Christ Is Single-Mindedness (vv. 10–11)

This section provides several potent lessons for sustaining the mission. There is a definitive focus on a new kind of fishing! The idea is that we can use the tools we have, but fish in a new way! Refocus! There is no need to fear! Remember, it is Christ who said: "I will build my church, and the gates of hell will never prevail against it"!

The emphasized adjustment made by Christ is a single-mindedness that keeps the main thing the main thing. Mission is about people, not programs. The programs are only meant to facilitate reaching people and disciplining them! In the words of Stephen Covey, in his book *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*, “Put First Things First.”¹⁰

The disciples left everything, so leaving everything is necessary! In John 21, the disciples went back fishing after they thought Jesus was dead! You cannot forget the mission and vision and expect to meet a quota of any amount! If we revert to catching fish, which is the human agenda, we cannot catch people, which is the Kingdom agenda.

This writer’s thinking is corroborated by the following quote from Matthew Henry:

The occasion which Christ took from this [act of Peter asking Christ to depart from him] to intimate to Peter (v. 10), and soon after to James and John (Matt. IV. 21), [was] his purpose to make them apostles, and instruments of planting his religion in the world. . . . When by Peter’s preaching three thousand souls were, in one day, added to the church, then the type of this great draught of fishes was abundantly answered. . . . It is observable they left all to follow Christ.¹¹

Bill Hybels (1994) offers a clear plan and explanation of the plan for sustaining the mission. This plan is expressed in a formula:

$$HP+CP+CC=MI:$$

High Potency + Close Proximity + Clear Communication = Maximum Impact

(a) *High Potency*: This has to do with being salt and light. Unless salt gets poured out of the shaker, it is a table ornament. There is no magic wand, and there are no shortcuts to developing and maintaining high potency. Our savor factor will be roughly proportionate to the extent to which we engage in the age-old spiritual disciplines. High potency is developed through reading the Word of God and feeding on its truths, prayer, and engaging with other Christians, where we take off the masks. This is potent in small groups, personal accountability partners, serving in a biblical functioning church, sharing our faith and experience, and maintaining our saltiness! In other words, it is the manner in which you live your life that will create thirst, add spice, and serve as a moral preservative for those around you.

(b) *Close Proximity*: Unconventional approaches that strategically mix the spiritual haves with the have-nots are not merely acceptable; they are essential to God’s redemptive efforts. Get close to people who do not know God. The way to win people is to get to know them.

(c) *Clear communication*: This has to do with light. Christians have become lulled into thinking that if they simply live out their faith openly and consistently, the people around them will gravitate toward Jesus. It is critical that we have a high savor factor and a readiness to articulate the message of Christ.

(d) The effect of all three parts working together can be significant. It leads to *maximum impact!*⁷

Obviously, the only way to fulfill God's mission is to be infectious. To be infectious, we must "rub shoulders" with people! We are mandated to share the good news with all! To experience maximum impact, close-range relationships must occur. Once the opportunity to present Christ is available, the opportunities must be grasped! While it is difficult to say what the numbers associated with high impact are, the idea is that seeds sown will fall on every possible ground! This is more than philosophical! It is directly connected to the church-going!

Mission is sustainable through implementing and working on the vision! To accomplish this, a continuous assessment of efforts is needed. There will be a need to strengthen parts of the vision and to continue the mission's work. Obviously, the concern for sustainability does not come about because of the resources of God! Sustainability is connected to the single-mindedness of the community of faith. It is a consistent, coherent, unified, and passionate effort to be involved in the mission of God, through study, application, life, and readiness to engage with people!

Green offers valuable help in this regard. As long as there is vitality, there will be growth. Church growth fits best the pattern of multicellular organisms; this is growth by unit enlargement and unit division. The pattern is identical to the S-curve in plant and animal life. The S-curve has three phases:

(1) The lag phase, in which preparation is being made for growth; (2) the exponential or logarithmic phase, in which there is rapid growth, maximum efficiency, and usually gives way to health development through constructive coordination of differing facets of the population into a uniform whole; and (3) the stationary phase, in which there is the effort of the organism to survive. When this crisis is not met, there is a leveling that leads to cessation of growth, and stabilization that is equilibrium.¹³

Green further stated that it is at the beginning of the stationary phase that the organization loses flexibility and operation settles down to routine and reactionary activities. Leaders concentrate on programs, projects, and reports that simulate progress and reflect their personality. The status quo then becomes the norm of operation, and when this occurs, mediocrity prevails. Remember, the essential nature of the church is the possession and proclamation of the gospel.¹⁴

Now for the "aha" moment! It has been said: "*It is not the church of God that has a mission in the world, but the God of mission who has a church in the world.*"

It is stated in an online article that the statement above is often attributed to the former Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams. It is a core principle of mission. The church exists to participate in God's ongoing mission in the world. Not the other way around. Focus is shifted from a church with a mission to the understanding that God's mission is the source from which the church originates and finds its purpose. This means the church is formed by God's mission.

¹² Bill Hybels and Mark Mittelberg, *Becoming a Contagious Christian* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 43–164.

This re-framing helps the church prioritize its institutional functions, programs, and structures in service of God's larger purposes.⁸

This is it! Busyness about our agenda only leads to incompletes! We do not own God! He owns us! We do not use God! He wants to use us! We do not have a mission! God has a mission. And he has a church to fulfill the mission! Wow! So, the God of mission has a church that he wants to use! This changes everything. If this is true, and we have our own agenda, then perhaps we do not either understand the mission of God, or we are not intentionally engaged in mission with God!

Conclusion

It is evident that the way to do a mission is not so much the continuous assessment of this mission. The Bible is very clear about our mission. Where the church falters is in its vision. Vision fosters methodology and advocates a plan for fulfilling the mission. Vision brings focus to the mission. Calculated activity to sustain the catching of people and continuous efforts to catch people are paramount to the growth of the church. A profound statement was made by one student in my Evangelism and Mission class. She said: *Could it be that the church is doing fish farming only, instead of simultaneously fishing?* Hmm! Only where there is no vision, the people perish (Proverbs 29:18)!

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