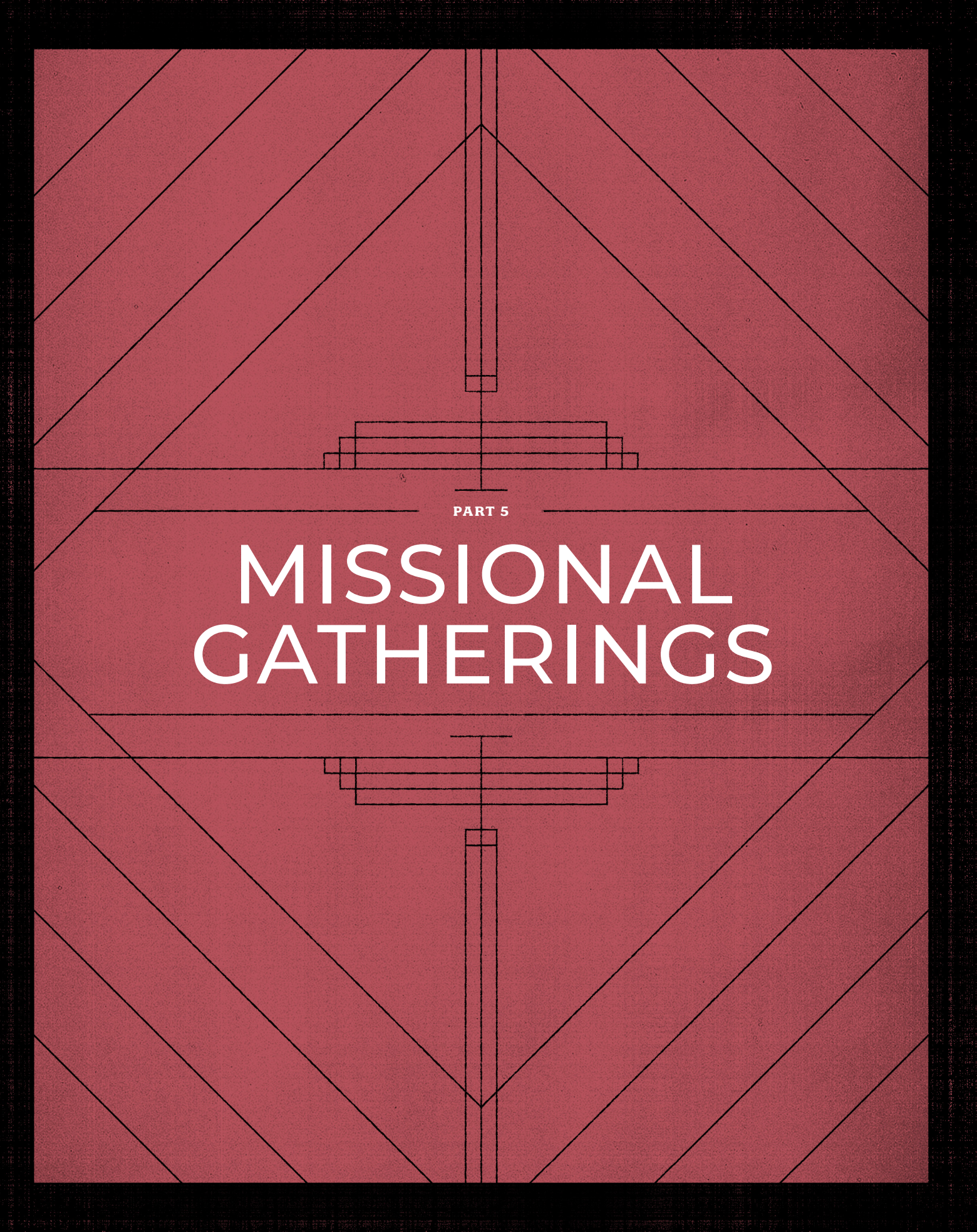
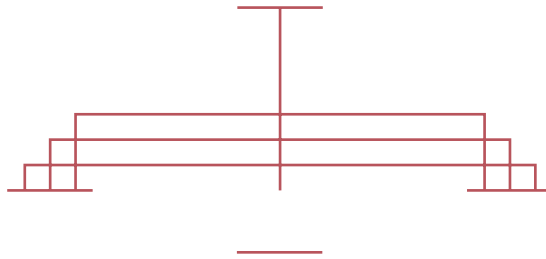




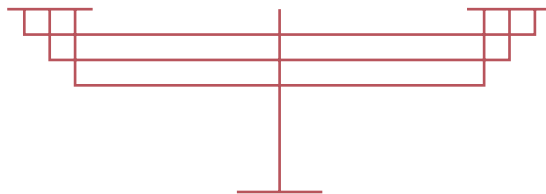
PART 5

MISSIONAL GATHERINGS



If the gospel is to challenge the public life of our society, if Christians are to occupy the “high ground” which they vacated in the noon time of “modernity,” it will not be by forming a Christian political party, or by aggressive propaganda campaigns... It will only be by movements that begin with the local congregation in which the reality of the new creation is present, known, and experienced, and from which men and women will go into every sector of public life to claim it for Christ, to unmask the illusions which have remained hidden and to expose all areas of public life to the illumination of the gospel. But that will only happen as and when local congregations renounce an introverted concern for their own life, and recognize that they exist for the sake of those who are not members, as sign, instrument, and foretaste of God’s redeeming grace for the whole life of society.

LESSLIE NEWBIGIN
The Gospel in a Pluralist Society





MISSIONAL GATHERINGS

*Gathering intentionally for the sake of people far from God
to proclaim the gospel and demonstrate the kingdom*

WHAT IS A MISSIONAL GATHERING?

In addition to our own growth and development, community groups exist so that others might come to know and follow Jesus. Missional gatherings help us push back darkness through both gospel proclamation and kingdom demonstration. Missional gatherings give us the opportunity to build relationships with those who don't follow Jesus and tell them about the one who has rescued us. They also give us the opportunity to care for the spiritual and physical needs of those in darkness around us.

Recalling his time living among and ministering to the believers in Thessalonica, Paul writes in 1 Thessalonians 2:8, "...being affectionately desirous of you, we were ready to share with you not only the gospel of God but also our own selves, because you had become very dear to us." According to this passage, we see a beautifully balanced "both-and" of pushing back darkness through gospel proclamation and kingdom demonstration. It corrects the tendency to only share the gospel abruptly with strangers—answering questions they may not even be asking. But it also corrects the tendency to view evangelism as arrogant and self-righteous.

None of us naturally drift into mission. It takes great intentionality to make time for people outside our community. Obedience means gathering for the sake of people who don't know Jesus. Mission is ultimately about people, not projects. We must think through ways we can integrate people into our communities, and not just serve them at arm's length. At Frontline, we repeatedly proclaim (and rightly so) that we are A Church For the City. The more we serve our city, participate in the life of our city, and proclaim the gospel to our city, the more we will fulfill the promise embedded in that statement.

To engage our city on mission, we must introduce people into the daily life of the church—into Christian community. The gospel message must be adorned with the conduct of gospel community. As onlookers see the power of the gospel with their own eyes, it will often provoke curiosity. Many of us view mission in isolation from community—such that we end up living on mission individually, with little crossover. This puts unbelievable pressure on each one of us to be an expert in mission. Instead, those who don't follow Jesus should be invited to hang out with Christians who are hanging out with other Christians. This has always been Jesus' vision for melting hearts. "By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another" (Jn 13:35). The interpersonal love of the Christian community is, in the words of Francis Schaeffer, "the ultimate apologetic." Missional gatherings make these kinds of encounters possible.

WHY DO WE ENGAGE IN MISSION?

In the Church, it is popular to talk about living on mission and being a "missional" church. But often, we don't explain what we mean by mission, which leads to general confusion. For some Christians, "mission" is synonymous with evangelism. For others, "mission" has more to do with serving the needy in our communities. Still others see "mission" as the Church's work internationally, to bring the gospel to unreached places. While all of these capture an aspect of the Church's mission, none of them fully encapsulate what the Bible teaches about mission.

Mission isn't first and foremost grounded in Matthew 28, as important as the Great Commission is. Mission is grounded in Genesis 1, and it permeates the whole

Bible. The mission of the Church finds its roots in the very mission that God has been actively working towards through all of history. In the beginning, God created the universe with a mission: to fill all creation with his blessing and presence. To this end, all of creation was designed to reflect the heart of God—his goodness and character and attributes.

As the pinnacle of his creation, God uniquely created man and woman in his image. They were royal representatives of God on earth, charged with a special mission: to rule over creation and fill it with God's blessing. Yet even as his original intention for creation seemed to be unraveling because of our sin, God set to work to fulfill his mission through redemption and restoration. He would redeem humanity from their sin, and he would restore his blessing to his creation. And he was going to accomplish this mission through his people. In short, we engage in mission because we were created for it.

If we only discuss strategies and techniques for reaching people far from God, and skip right over the motivation required to sustain that mission, we will never overcome the inconvenience and sacrifice required to gather for the sake of people far from God. Identity precedes action. If we don't have a settled sense in our hearts that we are adopted sons and daughters of the Father, we will never be able to keep our hand to the gospel plow. We have been called into a spiritual family, and we have been called out on God's mission. Paul says "we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us" (2 Cor 5:20). We have been called and commissioned to "implore" our friends and neighbors "on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God" because of the great good news that "for our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God" (1 Cor 5:20–21)!

WHAT DO MISSIONAL GATHERINGS LOOK LIKE?

First, we gather missionally to host. We gather with the expressed intention of showing gospel hospitality to those outside of Christian community. Hospitality builds trust and encourages conversations to go deeper. Acquaintances might even become friends. Hosting could be as simple as throwing a block party

or engaging some cultural event, such as Halloween or the Super Bowl. Or it could look like inviting one of your neighbors to your next family meal. Whatever it looks like, we hope that through hosting, our presence would begin to be felt in our neighborhood.

Second, we gather missionally to help.

We prioritize serving with our City Partners, which are organizations thoughtfully chosen by each congregation on the basis of their impact. As we serve the poor, marginalized, and needy in our communities, we build relationships with our community. Since many non-Christians also have a desire to do good for their city, we can invite them to serve alongside us as a means of strengthening our friendship. Each congregation can help equip our community groups to engage their unique City Partners.

There are needs all around us, even right next door. We have the opportunity to show the love of Jesus to our neighbors and friends by serving them and caring for them. Maybe we have a neighborhood cookout to further engage those in our community. Or we get permission to help a neighbor rebuild their fence. Or we figure out ways to serve a local school in our area. As we thoughtfully engage where we live, we will notice people and places where we can bring the light of Jesus to the world. We provide Push Back Darkness Grants to our community groups to empower them to meet specific needs in their own community.

Finally, we gather missionally to hang out.

We gather regularly with those who don't follow Jesus in natural, neutral places outside of the church and our homes. This helps us form new friendships and introduce people to Christian community, while we gather with people where they already go. This could be at a coffee shop, a park, a concert, or some other event. It could be centered around a hobby or another recreational activity. Regardless, the point is to look for less-intimidating places where we can build relationships with non-Christians. These gatherings organically fit into the rhythms of others' lives. We should invite our unbelieving friends, family, and neighbors to gather with us as we have fun together and get to know one another. It should feel informal and non-committal for those we invite. The hope is that through these missional gatherings, over

time, we will have organic opportunities to speak about Jesus.

Missional gatherings are a great opportunity to include children. Not only will they be discipled as they serve alongside others in the group, but it will also help them see that they are never too young to contribute to God's mission. Use wisdom and make sure they are engaging in ways that are appropriate for their age and maturity-level.



MISSIONAL GATHERINGS FAQ

HOW DO WE PLAN A MISSIONAL GATHERING?

Often, community groups want to start gathering missionally, but they don't know how to get started. Here are a few ideas.

- **Start slowly and be realistic.** Community groups don't become missional overnight. Talk as a group, and pick one place to start. Maybe it is a gathering in a neutral place. Maybe it is a service project with a City Partner. Often it is better to plan a smaller gathering rather than something that everyone does together. Whatever it is, pick one thing and agree to prayerfully and patiently begin walking it out together. It is okay if things don't go as planned, or if only a few people can make it.
- **Find out what everyone is already involved in.** Chances are that people in your group are already gathering somewhere in your city. Some may even be regularly involved in serving with a non-profit. Instead of adding something new, find out what people are already doing, and invite the rest of the group to join them.
- **Ask questions of geography and affinity.** While mission always requires sacrifice, from another perspective, gathering missionally in your community requires asking two simple questions: "Where do the people we want to reach already spend time and naturally go?" and "How can we gather there as a group?" Think through your own passions and interests, where you love to go and what you love to do in your area of the city. Are there specific issues you care about or communities you have a desire to serve? Talk about these together and explore ideas where there is mutual interest and crossover.
- **Leave with action steps.** Sometimes, community groups can get stuck trying to plan a missional gathering. One way to get things moving is to leave the discussion with action steps, deadlines, and point people. Action steps could include sending out communication, contacting a City

Partner, applying for a Push Back Darkness Grant, or scheduling a date. Before wrapping up the discussion, talk about what action steps need to be taken, who will do them, and when they should be done.

- **Invite your "three" and other non-Christians to each missional gathering.** Your group should not gather missionally to the exclusion of others. Instead, we want to show hospitality and deepen our relationship with those far from Jesus. If the missional gathering is in a neutral place, invite your "three" to gather with you. Prepare to be welcoming and conversational with any unbelievers that attend. If the missional gathering is a service opportunity, invite them to serve alongside you, where appropriate.

HOW DO WE GET CONNECTED TO OUR CITY PARTNERS?

Each congregation has their own unique City Partners. These are organizations doing great work throughout our city, thoughtfully chosen by each congregation as a place for missional impact. Reach out to your hub leader or community director to find out your congregation's specific City Partners and how your group can get connected to serve.

WHAT ARE PUSH BACK DARKNESS GRANTS?

Push Back Darkness Grants provide financial assistance to our community groups so they can meet needs and show the love of Jesus to their community. Our hope is that as you and others in your group see specific needs in your neighborhood with your own eyes, you would prayerfully discern how you might meet those needs, and take concrete steps to push back darkness. With Push Back Darkness Grants, groups have repainted the homes of single moms, built wheelchair ramps for the disabled, and renovated teacher lounges for schools

in need. Any community group has the opportunity to apply for a grant. To apply for a Push Back Darkness Grant:

Fill out the online application. Visit frontlinechurch.com/grants and select your congregation. Fill out the application and be prepared to answer the following questions:

- What is the project? How does it focus on serving the poor in our city? How might it initiate or strengthen relational ministry to a family or community? Will a City Partner be involved?
- What is the total cost of the project? How much assistance are you requesting? How is your community group planning to contribute to meeting this need?
- Specify a breakdown of how the grant will be spent if awarded.

Wait for next steps. After you submit the application, someone on staff will contact you with next steps. Be patient! Depending on the details of the grant request, your pastors will probably need to discuss and decide on an action step or two. However, if you haven't heard anything after a week, feel free to reach out to a hub leader and ask for an update.

WHO ARE MY "THREE"?

For many people, the thought of engaging unbelievers can feel overwhelming. We may think, "Do I know enough to convince someone about the good news of Jesus? There are so many people who don't follow Jesus in the world. Where do I even begin?" These thoughts can be paralyzing. But it is important to remember a few things. First, we are limited beings, bound by time and space. We can't be everywhere for everyone. Second, God often uses relationships with Christians to draw an unbeliever's heart to him. Third, we can take small steps to more faithfully engage in mission.

To this end, we recommend our members focus on their "three." These are three people within their sphere of influence who do not follow Jesus or are not connected to a local church. We ask everyone to commit to pray daily for their "three" and engage them in intentional gospel relationships. These people could be children, family, friends, co-workers,

neighbors, or others. As a starting point, work through the following exercise with your group:

1. Identify your "three." Take five minutes to prayerfully and thoughtfully select and write down the names of three people in your life who do not follow Jesus or are not connected to a local church. Whom would you most love to see become a disciple of Jesus? Who is your heart best shaped to reach for Jesus?

If you are having difficulty identifying three people, it could be an invitation to more thoughtfully engage friendships with those who don't follow Jesus. Spending meaningful time in places other than your workplace, home, and church can help you form new friendships. Or perhaps you might need to approach places you frequent with greater gospel intentionality. Maybe you regularly interact with non-Christians at coffee shops and sporting events. A hobby might bring you shoulder-to-shoulder with those far from God. How might you intentionally move towards those people and deepen your friendship with them?

Once you've identified three people (or as many people as you can), for each person in turn, answer the following questions posed by missiologist Alan Hirsch:

- Am I in close proximity with this person to whom I feel called?
- Am I spending regular time with this person? If not, why not?
- Am I too busy to develop a meaningful relationship with this person? If so, how could I create margin for mission?

2. Share with your community group. Go around and briefly share at least one of the people you selected, and why you chose them. If any of you are struggling to identify someone in your life, invite the group to process with you who you might identify.

3. Pray for your "three." Conclude your time by praying out loud for the people you have named—especially for your relationships to grow and deepen with them, for God to give you all creativity in how to spend regular time with them, and for God to give your community group opportunities to collectively love them, serve them, and share the gospel with them.

4. Revisit your “three.” Write down the names of your “three” with a marker on some physical object that will not be easily lost, and that can be pulled back out for future gatherings. Be creative! A leftover piece of floor tile, a thrift store painting, or a commemorative plate, can serve as a humorous and memorable way to capture and keep your focus on praying for and pursuing your “three.”

WHAT ARE COMMON BARRIERS TO LIVING ON MISSION?

I don’t have any non-Christian friends. If we are not careful, we can end up spending all our time in “Christian” circles. As a result, it can be difficult for followers of Jesus to form meaningful relationships with people far from God. But in order to be a church for the city, we have to get to know the people around us, and learn how to be good friends to our neighbors. Where do you currently interact with those far from God? Where do you live, work, and play? How can you make a step towards deepening your relationship with those already around you?

We tend to *underestimate* how lonely most people are, and we tend to *overestimate* how much they will resist our overtures of friendship. If we thought more in terms of making friends with people far from God, and we thought less transactionally about evangelism, we would realize that we know far more about being ambassadors for Christ than our fears and insecurities would lead us to believe.

If you can be a friend, you can be on mission.

Non-Christians don’t come to the things I invite them to. In an increasingly post-Christian West, “Come and see” is not enough—we must also “Go and tell.” It takes a lot of courage for non-Christians to step out of their comfort zone and attend a “church” function. Yet for many of us, this tends to be our primary method of evangelism. And while some people will be open to these invitations, most will be hesitant until they first know and trust us. We shouldn’t require them to do something we aren’t willing to do ourselves. We often require people to come to us, attend our events, and initiate relationship. Instead, we should be the ones going out to them. We should be willing to step out of our

comfort zone as we invite them to do the same. We deepen our relationships with non-Christians as we serve in our city and participate in what is already happening. Service and participation are humble acts that increasingly lead us out of our comfort and out of ourselves.

I’m scared to share the gospel. Sharing the gospel can be intimidating. We worry we won’t have all the answers. We worry we won’t say the right thing. But it is important to remember that God is the one who saves people, not us, and not merely our words. Many of us came to faith when someone imperfectly shared the gospel with us. We don’t have to have all the answers. We can share our hope in Jesus, and trust him to work in this person’s heart.

We also must remember the importance of community for mission. The experience of Christian community is often a catalyst for reception of the gospel. Hearing about the gospel is one thing. Seeing it in the lives of Christians, who are being transformed by the love of Christ, is another.

I don’t have time for mission. Mission always begins with making room for God to come in. If we are operating with little to no margin in our lives, we might hear the call to live on mission as added homework. However, living on mission is often less about doing more, and more about doing it differently, with different people, or in a different place.

How might God be calling you to simplify your life in order to create margin? Before we can be boldly strategic in our pursuit of the lost, we will first need to fight to live simpler lives. God is already on mission where we live, work, and play. But we are often in too much of a hurry, and too focused on ourselves, to notice his repeated invitation to join him in pursuing people with whom we interact every day, every week, every month.