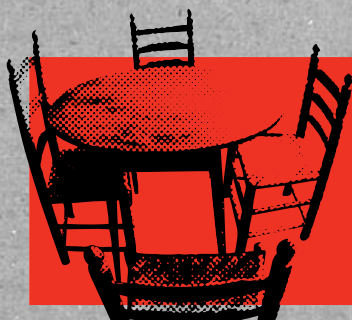


an eight-week guide to incarnational community



**THE  
TANGIBLE  
KINGDOM**  
*primer*

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*The Tangible Kingdom Primer:*

## HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

Have you ever watched someone who “made it look easy?” Someone who does something difficult without seeming to put out any effort? Maybe a talented performer, a great speaker, a gifted cook, or artist. Like seeing Tiger Woods hit a golf ball, Carrie Underwood sing, or Michael Phelps swim the butterfly? They make it look so natural, don’t they? Part of our amazement often comes from the fact that we’ve have tried to do the same thing only to realize how difficult it really is.

Why the difference? Well, there are many reasons. Some people are naturally gifted in certain areas. But one foundational issue stands out: *making it look easy takes a lot of practice.*

So it is with incarnational life and missional community.

Everyone’s talking about community. Everyone seems to want it, most complain if they don’t find it, but it’s harder to pull off than you’d think. People complain of time constraints, busyness, fear, and often have memories of community gone bad. We’ve got children to deal with. Some people struggle to relate well socially. We’re often 30 minutes drive or more away from people we like to hang out with. We’re stressed about money. We overwork, and when we do get some free time, we have a hard time sharing that time with others. Sure, we all know we need this thing called “community” and we even have some inklings that tell us that our friends need it too. Yet, a Grand Canyon-sized gap exists between our hopes and our realities.

So what's the problem? What do we do? And will it be worth it?

Nothing good ever comes easy. For sure, nothing of God's Kingdom comes without resistance from our personal kingdoms or the world's kingdom. Nothing of the Spirit of God comes without a good ol' fashioned bar fight from our flesh.

Galatians 5 reminds us, "So I say live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature. For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature. They are in conflict with each other, so that you do not do what you want."

It sounds pretty basic, but it's true. The reason we struggle to live a missional life is that it pulls against every natural fiber, sin, rhythm, habit, muscle, and thought pattern we're used to.

As we said in *The Tangible Kingdom*, God's ways are natural, but they aren't easy—especially at first. New ways of life must be formed in us through hours, days, and years of intentional practice. The future of your own faith and the incarnational presence of your community is ultimately about letting the Spirit of God re-orient everything about you.

This is why we've called this resource a "primer" (which can be defined as *a book of elementary principles*). While we know a workbook alone won't get the job done, we do think it can provide a good place to start. God's Kingdom doesn't usually unfold in a nice, neat package or linear progression. In fact, he is much more likely to surprise us, to show up in unexpected places and in unique experiences that only he can orchestrate. Our hope for this book is that it will help you to be ready when he does. This includes listening and being willing to be changed. It also includes learning to take personal responsibility for your own calling and dealing with those parts of your flesh that keep you from following Jesus as he leads you out into the world.

With all this in mind, we've written this primer with two specific purposes. First, to be a *spiritual formation tool* to prepare your heart for mission. We definitely want you to grab some friends to go through this with, but you don't have to commit to being an incarnational community yet. You can just be "friends who are going through an eight-week spiritual formation exercise together." You can hold each other accountable, you'll actually get to be missional together, and you'll have a much better experience by processing the struggles together. While some of the specifics of the study may seem premature if you're in a non-committal setting, we suggest that you use the opportunity to get acquainted with the ideas and consider their meaning for your life.

The second purpose for the primer is to be a *field guide for starting mission together*. Some of you are ready to go and have friends that can't wait to begin. If that's you, then dive right in to the spiritual exercises as both heart formation and missional practice.

In either case, at the end of the eight weeks, you'll have the opportunity to decide what you're going to do next. Remember, this is just a primer for building lifelong habits. Some of you will just thank each other and move on; others will decide to formalize your commitment to go on mission together; and the field-guide people can just keep rolling along. There's no failure here, just a chance to engage at the pace that you're ready for.

### *The Tangible Kingdom Primer:* **NOT JUST ABOUT EVANGELISM**

You might have noticed...people don't like to be "evangelized." They don't automatically think our truths are their truths. They won't show up at our church gatherings to hear our ideas and they can't stand it when we push them to accept our concepts. Yet one truth always remains, people will always be drawn to good news when they see it in action. Though they may not understand

everything, Good News...is always Good News when it touches down in real life.

*The Tangible Kingdom Primer* is about learning how to live in the Kingdom and how to create pathways for others to experience it along with you. Yes, we believe that many of your friends will find God along the way and that evangelism will happen, but this process is really about discipleship. Becoming an apprentice of Christ is the goal. So as you begin, focus on your own spiritual formation, and leave the results to God. This is not a guide to “saving souls.” It’s an invitation to enlarge your entire spiritual formation process.

*The Tangible Kingdom Primer:*

## BEFORE YOU BEGIN

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Hopefully, you’ve had a chance to get familiar with the posture and practices of incarnational community by reading *The Tangible Kingdom* book. Although the book gives a broader background of the key concepts, this primer is designed as a stand-alone resource. If you are new to faith in Jesus, it will help move you into mission regardless of whether you know a lot of details, history, or theology. If your group is full of people who have been Christians for a long time, the primer will provide a basis for getting beyond the typical “consumer” church experience. So for all community leaders, and most participants, we still recommend beginning with *The Tangible Kingdom* book. It’s a key resource as you develop your missional community. But don’t let that stop you if you’re ready to get going!

As we begin, we’ll first provide a quick summary of some key concepts that you will need to understand in order to get everyone in your community on the same page. We’d also like to share a few thoughts that will help you move beyond “just another small group experience.” Our intent is to provide a new framework for how you can live both naturally and intentionally to make the

Gospel of God’s Kingdom tangible to you and anyone you love.

We hope that after finishing the eight-week guide, the new habits of incarnational community have become so ingrained in your heart and behavior that the activities become intuitive instead of regimented. Most small group guides assume that by completing the assignments you will accomplish the end goal of establishing a community or small group. Our viewpoint is a little different. We hope that at the end of the eight weeks, you will have successfully begun the journey of fostering the posture and practices of an incarnational community. So, the end is just the beginning! Keep this in mind as you wrestle through each week and adjust your expectations accordingly.

*The Tangible Kingdom Primer:*

## BASIC CONCEPTS

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We’ll define many of these ideas further as we go through the study, but here are some of the concepts that you can expect to run into...

**Gospel:** the good news of Jesus, capable of transforming everything about a person, their community, and their world.

**Missional People:** individuals actively committed to living a “sent” life in the context of community.

**Sojourner:** a spiritually curious God-seeker; a traveler who has intersected the missional community.

**Incarnational Community:** a group of people with the posture, tone, motives, and heart of Jesus; those who physically represent him in a particular location.

**Posture:** the attitude of the body; the way a person or community expresses itself to others, especially in nonverbal ways.

**Apprenticeship:** Moving beyond knowledge-based discipleship to action-oriented followership, with the goal of living like Jesus lived. This comes through regular practice, faith-oriented action, and personal devotion to know the ways of Christ.

**Living Out:** the natural and deliberate process of living among, listening to, and loving people in culture with the the desire to connect them to the Christian community.

**Inviting In:** Integrating sojourners into the community as a result of living out the Gospel with intentional hospitality and compassion.

**The Intuitive Life:** a lifestyle guided by a capacity to sense and respond to God's direction; a habit of living that is prayerful, artful, and intentional.

*The Tangible Kingdom Primer:*

## THE WEEKLY RHYTHM

Incarnational community is the framework of life in which God has called us all to live. It's the best context for our spiritual growth. It will provide the most natural way to enlarge the Gospel picture for your friends who are seeking God right now. But as we said, it doesn't just happen on its own.

So we're going to provide an initial pathway that will help you and your community deal with the inner-life challenges to mission, as well as some intentional activities and reflections that we have found helpful for us. To do this you'll notice that the primer is set up in a daily format for each person to complete individually. We suggest planning to spend about 20 minutes a day on this. As with any spiritual formation practice, we highly recommend you take those 20 minutes seriously. Take time to get in a quiet, undistracted space, breathe, begin with silence, then invite God to speak. Read every word slowly and fight the urge to move too

quickly. Every question has a purpose. Every scripture is the breath of God. If you ask God to direct your thoughts and writing, HE WILL. If you just buzz through it, you'll miss him.

Day 5 of the sequence is designed to be done together with a group of people. After all, one of our main values is community!

Although we're following what appears to be a highly structured process, we all know that life doesn't always work like this. Our hope is that the structure we're creating of seven daily practices and reflections will help you begin to understand and incorporate into life the key components to personal and communal renewal.

### DAY 1: EXPLORATION

The first day of the weekly rhythm will introduce you to the subject of the week and provide thoughts, stories, and definitions to help you begin to get an understanding of the concepts.

We'll also provide questions and journaling space so that you can wrestle with what this stuff means in your own life and in the life of your community. And here's fair warning: we've intentionally written questions that we hope will challenge you. They may even make you uncomfortable sometimes. We look at it this way: we can make these eight weeks easy and somewhat pointless, or we can give room for the Gospel to get in deep where it can make a difference. The good news is that if you let it, it will change your life. And that is what we're after.

### DAY 2: MEDITATION

On Day 2, we'll provide you with a scripture or two to soak in for a little while. Read it a couple times and let it do its work in you. Don't forget the questions on the next page.

### DAY 3: CHANGE

The Change Day is where we start to get serious. What does this idea mean in your life? How would your life be different if you

began to let it be changed by the Gospel? There are questions for journaling on this day as well.

#### DAY 4: ACTION

So by now you've begun to let your heart be changed. Now how about your feet? Action Day is about putting it into practice. As we work our way through these eight weeks, we'll give you ideas each week for taking action.

#### DAY 5: COMMUNITY

Just when you're needing a little encouragement, Community Day comes along. This is the day when you get together with the other members of your community (those other folks who are putting this stuff into practice along with you). In our opinion, this is the most important day of the week. In fact, we'll let you in on a secret: this whole process is going to be really difficult to pull off unless you do it with a few friends. Healthy relationships (with God and with each other) are at the center of all that we're talking about. Besides, the fondue night in Week 8 will be much more fun with friends sharing the food.

#### DAY 6: CALIBRATION

On Day 6, we'll revisit the theme of the week from a different angle and give you some additional things to think about as you allow God to bring transformation to your life.

#### DAY 7: COMMUNION

The last day of the cycle is a rest day or a sabbath. This is a reminder to each of us that taking a break is a very biblical concept. We challenge you to use this day in ways that are *intentionally restful*. In other words, hang out with friends or family. Don't multitask. Don't overschedule.

Set aside time on your sabbath day for listening. We tend to keep so busy that we couldn't hear God if he were shouting at us. And he rarely shouts. Stop for a little while and listen.

### *The Tangible Kingdom Primer:* **PUTTING A GROUP TOGETHER**

We have learned that it helps to give people time to process the tough inner life issues individually and then come together as a community to share and experience a new reality together. Before you begin the process, pick the day your community will meet. Start the workbook four days prior so your meeting coincides with the community option on Day 5. Therefore, if you plan to meet on Fridays as a community, you should start the primer on the Monday before your first meeting.

As we've already mentioned, we suggest you find a group of people who will do this with you. You can present the idea to a group you're already a part of, like a house church or bible study group. Or you can invite some friends to join you in creating a new community. In either case, there doesn't have to be any initial commitment beyond getting together weekly to explore these ideas together.

While there are no limitations on the number of people in your initial community, we have found that somewhere in the 4-12 range is usually preferred. Typically, a group this size can easily fit in most homes, is large enough to accommodate the occasional absentee, and is small enough not to require a coordinator to facilitate meals together. The group can include mature believers, new Christ followers, and sojourners that may not be sure about their beliefs.

Use the space provided on the next page to write down the details for your first community time.

Write the names of people that you want to invite and plan a time to get them together to start the journey. Aim for 4 to 12 participants.

What day will your community meet each week?

Where will you get together for the first meeting?

What day will everyone need to start the primer (-4 days from the first meeting)?



**WEEK 1**

**WHAT IS  
MISSIONAL?**

THE FOUNDATION OF A  
MISSIONAL LIFE  
IS THE DECISION TO  
OFFER TO GOD OUR  
PLANS IN EXCHANGE  
FOR HIS PLANS.

Sent

As we get started, we want to begin with a word that sets the stage for our journey together. The word is *missional*. Like many words, it can mean a lot of things depending on your background. For our work together, we'll remind you that it essentially means "sent."

Most Christians would agree that there is a basic call on every believer's life to live missionally. The Old Testament uses words like "sojourners" or "wanderers" as precursors to New Testament words like "aliens, foreigners, strangers, or ambassadors." All these words represent the reality that a Christian's life is transitory. In simple language, it means that we are passing through this life with a sense of purpose, duty, passion, and responsibility for the "mission of God."

However, for the vast majority of Christians the challenge to discover and faithfully live out a missional call can be confusing and often frustrating.

After coaching hundreds of leaders, we've come to realize that times of despair, doubt, frustration, and personal letdown are as much a part of God's work in our lives as anything else. When challenged by financial distress, health issues, broken relationships, or general emotional melancholy, we tend to get much more serious—even desperate—about hearing from God. During these times, we recognize our human frailty and limited control over our circumstances. When we allow God to work in our lives, our latent missional call begins to come alive.

The foundation of a missional life is the decision to offer to God our plans in exchange for his plans. It requires that we are willing to leave our world so he can send us to extend his Kingdom. Whether we choose to engage the call is up to us.

### A TURNING POINT (MATT)

As a college student, I had very little interest in anything ministry related. In fact, from the age of 12 my dream was to play college baseball, become an engineer, and expand the family contracting business. I was well on my way to realizing this dream; I had made the team at a Division 1 school and was in my junior year of an engineering program.

That's when the dream completely unraveled. I'll spare you the details, but in the midst of a broken engagement, I took a small step toward God for some much needed help.

What happened next was a two-year journey that concluded with a decision to give up a chance at a professional baseball career and, instead, move to Oregon to pursue a biblical education.

For someone that grew up in church, despised youth groups, and swore he'd never be a pastor, this was a dramatic change in plans.

List a few of the difficult times in your life. How did you view God? Did you doubt him? Question his leading? Take matters into your own hands?

Look over the experiences you've listed. What do you think God was doing with you during these times?

What things have you had to give up to follow God?

Right now, is there anything hindering you from making the decision to live a missional life?



In *The Tangible Kingdom*, we walked you through the first biblical story of intentional missionality. Abraham was called by God to leave his homeland, much of his family, and most of the comforts of home in order to go to a pagan country.

**THE LORD HAD SAID TO ABRAHAM, "LEAVE YOUR COUNTRY, YOUR PEOPLE AND YOUR FATHER'S HOUSEHOLD AND GO TO THE LAND I WILL SHOW YOU."**

**"I WILL MAKE YOU INTO A GREAT NATION AND I WILL BLESS YOU. I WILL MAKE YOUR NAME GREAT, AND YOU WILL BE A BLESSING."**

**SO ABRAHAM LEFT, AS THE LORD HAD TOLD HIM AND LOT WENT WITH HIM. ABRAHAM WAS SEVENTY-FIVE YEARS OLD WHEN HE SET OUT FROM HARAN.**

**HE TOOK HIS WIFE SARAI, HIS NEPHEW LOT, ALL THE POSSESSIONS THEY HAD ACCUMULATED AND THE PEOPLE THEY HAD ACQUIRED IN HARAN, AND THEY SET OUT FOR THE LAND OF CANAAN.**

**- FROM GENESIS 12**

Abraham wasn't given many of the specifics. In fact, all he was told was that the blessing God was giving him would extend through him to the whole world.

Throughout the scriptures, we see God calling his followers to live a life of "sentness." Stability, social comfort, relational control, safety, success, respect, or clarity were not expected. People had to go purely out of obedience, a personal sense of calling, in faith, and simply because they loved God. Outcome didn't matter; faithfulness did.

Jesus asked his disciples to leave their nets while still clueless. As they walked and lived with him, they learned that his ways challenged their ways. In fact, his plans would often pull them into the unknown and into situations that forced them to trust the miraculous.

People who wanted to follow without adjusting their lives were often repelled by his honesty. "The Son of Man has no place to lay his head," he told the teacher of the law.

The night Jesus ate with his disciples, he gave them the clear sense that after he left they'd be wandering the world, despised and on the run, led only by the Holy Spirit. In each of the letters from Paul we observe the early faith communities facing many tensions related to being sent.

There's no way to say it gently: *spreading God's blessing to the world does not come easy.*

Christian people are a people on the move, constantly sent by God to the world. To be missional is the call of every church. It's the call of every Christian. Jesus said to his followers, to us, "As the Father has sent me, I am sending you."

## Abram's Big Choice

Go

Sacrifice  
Blessing  
Risk  
Hope  
Adventure  
Fear  
Change  
Faith

Stay

Safety  
Comfort  
Stability  
Security  
Status Quo  
Boredom  
Control  
Expectations

As you ponder those words above, put yourself in the shoes of Abram's community or in the faith communities just after Jesus died.

What emotions might they have felt when they heard this call to GO?

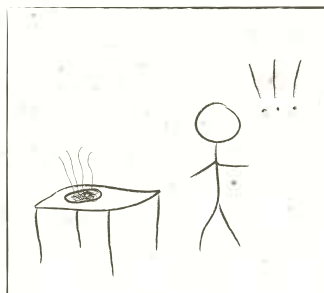
Which words on the lists do you value the most?

As you consider your call to GO, what emotions are you feeling?

What challenges get in the way of you going?

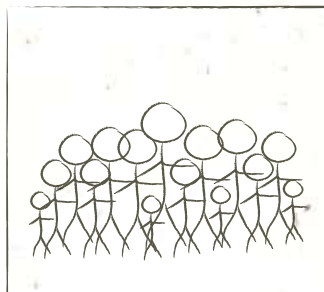
for my  
thoughts  
are not your  
thoughts,

As Abram is sent, as the early Christian communities were sent, we notice Four Immersions they experienced...



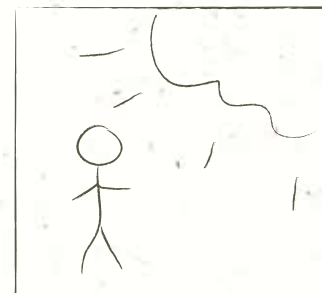
they were immersed  
in a new culture.

Abram headed into a hostile culture that didn't care for his God. Peter and the early Jewish communities were called into Gentile and Greek cultures through the leadership of Paul. The great missionary movements throughout our history have been called to cross ethnic, social, religious, and philosophical barriers to extend God's blessing. They had to live with people that didn't respect their God or eat their food. They didn't have much control over how these cultures might impact their lives and they had to trust God to be with them in these foreign environments.



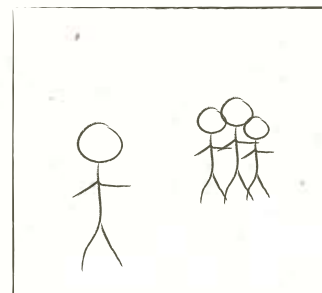
they were immersed  
in community.

You'll notice they never lived out their sentness alone. Abram took a small band with him. Jesus gathered a small band to himself and whenever he sent them out, it was at least two by two. The stories of our early monastic or denominational movements almost always had small communities at their core.



they were immersed  
in god.

God didn't call Abram or the early communities to be evangelistic, share four laws, or hand out tracts. He told them to bless the world with the blessing God gave them. Blessing means "the tangible touch of God." To share a program or a book or a principle doesn't require you to know God. But to give the blessing of God to people you must be immersed in him. Jesus said it this way: "Apart from me you can do nothing."



they were immersed  
in tension.

It should be clear by now that being sent sometimes includes living with some internal and social tension. The early communities had to get used to walking by faith as they sought God's guidance on a daily basis. They didn't have pastors to give them a program to follow. They didn't have books to train them or websites with cool resources. People thought they were nuts. They had little or no financial backing, travel was slow, and the language barriers were widespread. Every day was a new journey.

neither are your  
ways my ways,  
declares the lord.

Think through the Four Immersions -- culture, community, God, tension. Which ones might have been the most difficult for Abram?

Write down examples in your life of each of the Four Immersions.

Which ones do you personally find the most intimidating? Why?

What are your hopes as you apply the Four Immersions?

Imagine if Jesus were to walk into the room you're in right now and say, "Come on, get up, and come with me."

Where do you picture him taking you first? Maybe it's someone's home. If so, whose? Maybe it's someplace you've never been. Where? Why would he take you there?

This week we'd like you to practice "sentness" by crossing three barriers of normal life:

## cross your fence.

Do something to bless or simply converse with one neighbor on your street.

## cross your street.

Do something to connect with someone who is close to your home, but with whom you haven't built a relationship yet.

## cross a social, political, or ethnic barrier.

Take someone with you from your missional community. Consider these ideas: eat at an authentically ethnic restaurant in a part of town that is unfamiliar to you, attend a lecture or event that represents a different part of culture, visit a church or other religious location with different beliefs than your own.



*Meet at a group member's home or some other place where you can share a meal together.*

The New Testament is full of wild stories that encourage us to live differently. One word, however, stands as a clarion call to God's work of transformation in the world. The word is "Go." It may take some adjustment on our part to realize this, but nothing of God's Kingdom happens unless someone is willing to GO.

Sometimes GOING will require a 30-second email to encourage a friend, a five-minute walk across the street to help a neighbor, or the willingness to give up a quiet evening with your spouse in exchange for inviting some friends over who don't know Christ. Other times, GOING may require a week-long commitment, a large chunk of money, or even a lifelong commitment to leave your city or country to serve God.

Whatever the case, the word GO will cost you something. It will require that you creatively look for the opportunities that God provides you to leave what's natural and self-serving in order to extend his love to others.

### SAYING 'YES'

Our family has committed to do our best never to turn down an invite to spend time with either our community, neighbors, or sojourning friends.

We've found this makes a dramatic difference in the way people perceive our commitment to being in relationship with them. It only takes a few times of saying "no" before people will stop inviting you because they think you're not interested.

### TITHING YOUR TIME

In a normal week, we eat around 21 meals, give or take a few. One of the ways we've challenged our own community to be missional is to ask them to commit to sharing one of those meals with sojourners.

Or another way to think about it is to do a quick analysis of how much time we spend watching TV, surfing the internet, or reading. Can we give 10% of that time to be with or help another person?

Think of the family members, friends, neighbors, and co-workers among whom God might be sending you to incarnate the Gospel. As you think of them, consider the following...

What do you think it would take for them to connect with your community in the future?

How much time per week are you willing to give to building deeper relationships with them?

What tangible needs do they have that could be opportunities for you to be good news to them?

What activities or hobbies do you love to do that you could invite them to share with you?



HE IS WOONG YOU FROM THE JAWS OF  
DISTRESS TO A SPACIOUS PLACE FREE  
FROM RESTRICTION, TO THE COMFORT OF  
YOUR TABLE LADEN WITH CHOICE FOOD.

JOB 36 16

YOU PREPARE A TABLE BEFORE ME IN  
THE PRESENCE OF MY ENEMIES. YOU  
ANOINT MY HEAD WITH OIL; MY CUP  
OVERFLOWS.

SURELY GOODNESS AND LOVE WILL  
FOLLOW ME ALL THE DAYS OF MY  
LIFE, AND I WILL DWELL IN THE  
HOUSE OF THE LORD FOREVER.

PSALM 23 5 - 6

FOR WHO IS GREATER, THE ONE WHO  
IS AT THE TABLE OR THE ONE WHO  
SERVES? IS IT NOT THE ONE WHO IS AT  
THE TABLE? BUT I AM AMONG YOU AS  
ONE WHO SERVES.

LUKE 22 27

THEN JESUS SAID TO HIS HOST, "WHEN YOU GIVE A  
LUNCHEON OR DINNER, DO NOT INVITE YOUR FRIENDS,  
YOUR BROTHERS OR RELATIVES, OR YOUR RICH  
NEIGHBORS: IF YOU DO, THEY MAY INVITE YOU BACK  
AND SO YOU WILL BE REPAID. BUT WHEN YOU GIVE A  
BANQUET, INVITE THE POOR, THE CRIPPLED, THE LAME,  
THE BLIND, AND YOU WILL BE BLESSED. ALTHOUGH  
THEY CANNOT REPAY YOU, YOU WILL BE REPAID AT  
THE RESURRECTION OF THE RIGHTEOUS."

WHEN ONE OF THOSE AT THE TABLE WITH HIM HEARD  
THIS, HE SAID TO JESUS, "BLESSED IS THE MAN WHO  
WILL EAT AT THE FEAST IN THE KINGDOM OF GOD."

JESUS REPLIED: "A CERTAIN MAN WAS PREPARING  
A GREAT BANQUET AND INVITED MANY GUESTS. AT  
THE TIME OF THE BANQUET HE SENT HIS SERVANT  
TO TELL THOSE WHO HAD BEEN INVITED, 'COME, FOR  
EVERYTHING IS NOW READY.' BUT THEY ALL ALIKE  
BEGAN TO MAKE EXCUSES.

THE FIRST SAID, 'I HAVE JUST BOUGHT A FIELD, AND  
I MUST GO AND SEE IT. PLEASE EXCUSE ME.' ANOTHER  
SAID, 'I HAVE JUST BOUGHT FIVE YOKE OF OXEN, AND  
I'M ON MY WAY TO TRY THEM OUT. PLEASE EXCUSE  
ME.' STILL ANOTHER SAID, 'I JUST GOT MARRIED, SO I  
CAN'T COME.'

THE SERVANT CAME BACK AND REPORTED THIS TO HIS  
MASTER. THEN THE OWNER OF THE HOUSE BECAME  
ANGRY AND ORDERED HIS SERVANT, 'GO OUT QUICKLY  
INTO THE STREETS AND ALLEYS OF THE TOWN AND  
BRING IN THE POOR, THE CRIPPLED, THE BLIND AND  
THE LAME.' 'SIR,' THE SERVANT SAID, 'WHAT YOU  
ORDERED HAS BEEN DONE, BUT THERE IS STILL ROOM.'

THEN THE MASTER TOLD HIS SERVANT, 'GO OUT TO  
THE ROADS AND COUNTRY LANES AND MAKE THEM  
COME IN, SO THAT MY HOUSE WILL BE FULL. I TELL  
YOU, NOT ONE OF THOSE MEN WHO WERE INVITED  
WILL GET A TASTE OF MY BANQUET.' [LUKE 12]

*As we saw on Day 2 of this week, being missional has two components. On one hand, we receive blessing from God. On the other, we pass it on to others. We receive in abundance from the table of God's provision and grace not for us to hoard away, but rather to carry into the world. Therefore, the table of Christ is integral to our mission.*

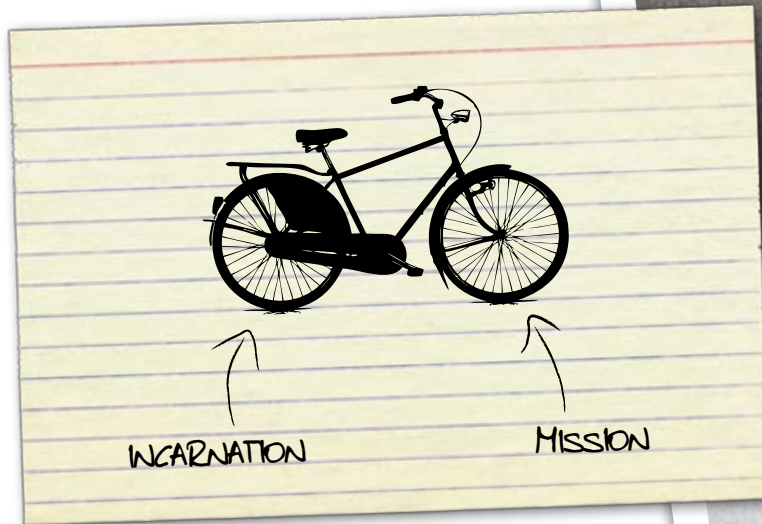
WEEK 2



# WHAT IS INCARNATIONAL?



## 2.1 [EXPLORATION]



So far we've learned that mission is the "sending" impulse and call for every Christian. Amazingly, however, that impulse can send people off into really goofy or offensive behavior in the world. For the sake of "mission" some people threaten abortion clinics or preach fire and brimstone with a megaphone on a street corner, trying to start spiritual conversations with people with whom they have no relationship.

Paul described his ministry this way: "We loved you so much that we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God but our lives as well, because you had become so dear to us. Surely you remember, brothers, our toil and hardship, we worked night and day in order not to be a burden to anyone while we preached the gospel of God to you." [1 Thessalonians 2:8-9]

Like harsh words spoken without tact, or a fire burning outside a fireplace, missional by itself can hurt the cause of Christ more than it helps. This is why *missional* has an inseparable twin. The word is *incarnational*. It means "to take on flesh." If missional means "to go," incarnation is about *how* you go and what people see as you go. It encompasses your posture, your tone, your motives, and your heart. Incarnation is critical because it will eventually determine whether or not people will want to know you or your God.

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LIKE SON, GENEROUS  
INSIDE AND OUT, TRUE  
FROM START TO FINISH.  
[JOHN 1:14, THE MESSAGE]



What do think about these slogans? What kind of posture do they represent?

What do you think about Jesus being viewed as a friend of sinners?

What does that tell us about his posture?

What do you think Jesus was like for the first 30 years before his ministry?



In Acts 3:1-7, there is a great story of Peter and John heading to the temple to pray. On their way, they ran into a lame man who was begging for money. Peter and John ministered to this man out on the street and it resulted in a great spiritual awakening with many would-be Christ-followers.

Have you ever taken the time to recognize how many times God shows up “on the way”? That is, as an interruption to our normal schedules? Peter and John were following a ritual of heading to the church to pray, meet with God, and be with other devout Jews. As an interruption to their expected walk, they ran into a setup by God.

It's interesting how so many people have come to expect God to show up during our “spiritual times.” You know, during the sermon, the prayer time, the Bible study, or the worship service. That's where he heals us, teaches us, speaks to us, comforts us, or guides us...at least that's what we think.

Yet, the scriptures give us a very different picture. People got healed out on the streets. Non-Christians saw the power of the early communities and encountered Christ around tables, while sitting on a hill listening to him teach, walking with him on a road, standing on a shore, or while getting some water at a well. Many of the most powerful stories happened “along the way.” In most cases, Jesus and the people that followed him met others in the context of their normal lives. God showed up in the middle of real life.

Incarnation speaks to our posture, our timing, and how much of our time we give people before we ever share biblical truths with them. But incarnation also speaks to where the most important times of ministry will take place. To be incarnational, therefore, means that we must begin where Jesus began with us: OUT THERE! WITH PEOPLE! ALONG THE WAY!

one day peter and john were going up to the temple at the time of prayer at three in the afternoon. now a man crippled from birth was being carried to the temple gate called beautiful, where he was put every day to beg from those going into the temple courts. when he saw peter and john about to enter, he asked them for money. peter looked straight at him, as did john. then peter said, look at us! so the man gave them his attention, expecting to get something from them. then peter said, silver or gold i do not have, but what i have i give you. in the name of jesus christ of nazareth, walk. taking him by the right hand, he helped him up, and instantly the man's feet and ankles became strong.

(acts 3:1-7)



Below is a list of scripture references from the Gospels of Luke and John. Read through them and write down the environment for some of Jesus' "along the way" moments.

<u>Reference</u>	<u>Event</u>	<u>Where it happened</u>
John 2.1-10	Turned water into wine	
John 3.1-4	Talked after hours with Nicodemus	
John 4.4-10	Met Samaritan social outcast	
Luke 4.38-44	Healed mother-in-law	
Luke 5.1-8	Called the disciples	
Luke 5.17-26	Healed the paralytic	
Luke 7.11-19	Raised man from dead	
Luke 9.10-17	Fed the 5000	
Luke 17.11-19	Healed the lepers	

What is significant about the context (place, environment, type of people) in each of these biblical events?



**"NEITHER DO I  
CONDEMN YOU,"  
JESUS DECLARED. "GO NOW AND  
LEAVE YOUR LIFE  
OF SIN."**

In John 8, we find a powerful story of a woman who was caught in adultery. The religious guys were using her sin to try to test Jesus' commitment to judge sinners. According to Old Testament law, Jesus was expected to condone her death by stoning. But Jesus didn't. Instead he became her advocate, protected her, and turned the question of judgment back to the religious people.

This small but revolutionary act set Jesus apart not only from the expectations of the people of his time but also from what you and I would generally expect. Judgment still exists inside the church toward people who sin. Sinners expect Christians to judge their behavior. All too often, we do.

The definition of an advocate is one who looks past the outward behavior, vices, sin, frailty, brokenness, and confusion of a person. Instead an advocate focuses on winning a person's trust, friendship, and loyalty. When those things are established, the heart and desire to obey God come naturally.

This is why we must change our POSTURE. Our posture is what wins a person's respect and heart and helps them be open to God's ways. While poor posture communicates judgment, Christ-like posture displays love.

Why do you think Jesus chose to get involved in the woman's story?

Why is it hard to advocate for people that struggle with obvious sin?

How is an advocate different than a friend?

Who have you been an advocate for?

What does it require of us to become advocates?

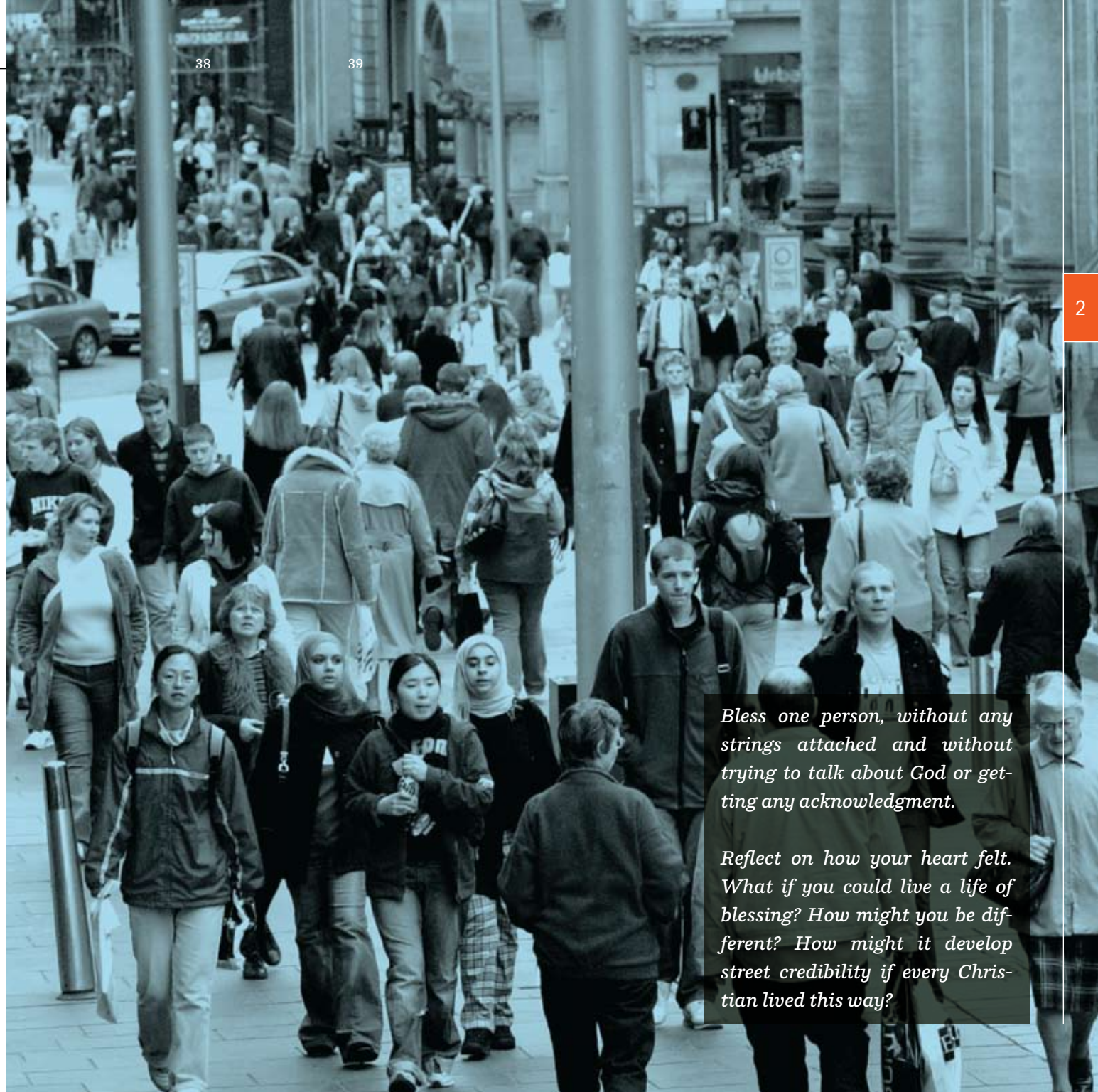
What is the risk for us in advocating for sinners?

Who in your life needs you to be an advocate for them now?



Spend some time today in a shopping mall, a downtown café, or a coffee shop that overlooks a busy crosswalk, a popular park, or a college campus area.

Simply sit still and look at the faces that go past you. Imagine some of the things that might make up their life stories: sadness, abuse, abandonment, broken relationships, sexual mistakes, unemployment fears, lack of purpose, broken marriages, deep debt, bankruptcy, loneliness, despair, pressure to measure up, desire for community, searching for God, parents who haven't understood or cared for their children well. Pray for them.



*Bless one person, without any strings attached and without trying to talk about God or getting any acknowledgment.*

*Reflect on how your heart felt. What if you could live a life of blessing? How might you be different? How might it develop street credibility if every Christian lived this way?*

Meet at a group member's home or some other place where you can share a meal together.

As we consider being an incarnational community, we now have to grapple with some pretty sensitive issues.

Many small groups do well studying scripture and providing a safe place for other Christians but struggle to see mission occur. The most common reason we hear goes something like this: "I'm afraid to bring a non-Christian friend to my small group."

Why is this? Well, it's simple. The group hasn't become incarnational yet. People may be consistent, good-hearted, faithful, and may even want to be missional, but it can still be hard to trust the community to have the right posture together.

Posture is the "attitude of the body." Normally this refers to physical posture, but think of it in terms of your community. In other words, what is the attitude that people pick up from your entire group?

Posture problems can show up when a guest uses language that some consider inappropriate, has a different way of parenting, or expresses an unorthodox belief system. Issues can come up related to basic life values, appropriate activities, or whose perspectives rub off on who. While there aren't always easy answers to these problems, it's easier to talk about the tension before situations occur. Your group's ability to express incarnational community depends on it.

*"People may be consistent, good-hearted, faithful, and may even want to be missional, but it can still be hard to trust the community to have the right posture together."*

#### Questions for group discussion:

Be as honest as you can be...

Do you feel that you could bring *anyone* to this community? Why or why not?

What are you afraid would happen if your friends were to meet each other? Hang out together? Or discuss spiritual things together?

What issues could come up that you might possibly disagree on? Make a list and begin the dialogue.

What are ways your group can navigate the balance of "whimsical holiness," that is, holding to the values of following Christ while fostering an atmosphere of non-judgment and acceptance?

#### NEXT WEEK...

Meet at a group member's home. Plan to share a meal and remember Christ's death and resurrection.





So now we've spent some time thinking about how incarnation happens. In the beginning of *The Tangible Kingdom* book, Hugh shared a personal story of how God got a hold of his heart. He was at a New York pub having dinner with some friends and watching a Yankees play-off game. In this case, the need for food led to spontaneous conversation, which led to deeper discussion. This led to enough emotional attachment for him to want to go back to say goodbye before he flew home.

The key point of the story was that while Hugh was "on his way," God set up an appointment that would forever change his future, and that of many others.

As we've worked through this week, you may have begun to see how to intentionalize incarnational activity. We've discovered that most God-moments are unexpected and occur along the way to someplace else. They will seem like interruptions, but if you begin to look for God's fingerprints in your day and in every relationship, in every coffee shop, in every conversation you have with your neighbor, there's a good chance you will begin to see God's incarnational presence.

Write down some of the people you met and events that happened along the way in your spiritual pilgrimage.

What was it about these people that drew you to them?

Identify where God is most likely to show up on the way to your weekly rhythms.

Think of times when you've had "bad posture" with someone. If you have the ability to communicate with any of these people, consider sending a card, an email, or even better, make an appointment to have coffee with them simply to apologize for not representing God's unconditional acceptance and love for them.

**My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from saving me, so far from the words of my groaning? O my God, I cry out by day, but you do not answer, by night, and am not silent.**

Yet you are enthroned as the Holy One; you are the praise of Israel. In you our fathers put their trust; they trusted and you delivered them. They cried to you and were saved; in you they trusted and were not disappointed. But I am a worm and not a man, scorned by men and despised by the people. All who see me mock me; they hurl insults, shaking their heads: "He trusts in the LORD; let the LORD rescue him. Let him deliver him, since he delights in him." Yet you brought me out of the womb; you made me trust in you even at my mother's breast. From birth I was cast upon you; from my mother's womb you have been my God. Do not be far from me, for trouble is near and there is no one to help. Many bulls surround me; strong bulls of Bashan encircle me. Roaring lions tearing their prey open their mouths wide against me. **I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint. My heart has turned to wax; it has melted away within me.** My strength is dried up like a potsherd, and my tongue sticks to the roof of my mouth; you lay me in the dust of death. Dogs have surrounded me; a band of evil men has encircled me, they have pierced my hands and my feet. I can count all my bones; people stare

and gloat over me. They divide my garments among them and cast lots for my clothing. But you, O LORD, be not far off; O my Strength, come quickly to help me. Deliver my life from the sword, my precious life from the power of the dogs. Rescue me from the mouth of the lions; save me from the horns of the wild oxen. I will declare your name to my brothers; in the congregation I will praise you. You who fear the LORD, praise him! All you descendants of Jacob, honor him! Revere him, all you descendants of Israel! **For he has not despised or disdained the suffering of the afflicted one; he has not hidden his face from him but has listened to his cry for help.** From you comes the theme of my praise in the great assembly; before those who fear you will I fulfill my vows. The poor will eat and be satisfied; they who seek the LORD will praise him—may your hearts live forever! All the ends of the earth will remember and turn to the LORD, and all the families of the nations will bow down before him, for dominion belongs to the LORD and he rules over the nations. All the rich of the earth will feast and worship; all who go down to the dust will kneel before him—those who cannot keep themselves alive. Posterity will serve him; future generations will be told about the Lord. **They will proclaim his righteousness to a people yet unborn—for he has done it.** (Psalm 22)

*These ancient words were written long before Jesus came and yet they describe in clear, and sometimes uncomfortably graphic, terms some of the struggles inherent in living an incarnational life.*