

# INCARNATION

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## *The Sacred and the Soccer Games*

*The Christian ideal has not been tried and found wanting; it has been found difficult and left untried.*

G. K. Chesterton

If Scripture were a mountain range, the incarnation of Christ—His birth, life, work, the cross, and His resurrection—would be the tallest, most glorious peak.

In the supreme revelation of love, God came to humanity. He became *like us*—taking on flesh and blood. God incarnate. The incarnate Christ felt our infirmities, was tempted in all the ways we are tempted, and yet was found without sin that He might die a substitutionary death on our behalf at Calvary.

To incarnate essentially means to embody. When Christ became flesh, He embodied the very presence, nature, power, character, and glory of God. “The Word became flesh, and dwelt among us,” says John 1. “No one has seen God at any time; the only begotten God who is in the bosom of the Father, He has explained Him.” Jesus Christ explains the love and the person of God to humanity in the context of history.

As we’ve read in John 20:21, the Father sent the Son, and the Son sends us in the same way.

Being on mission then, we incarnate Christ.

In the previous chapter we looked at what it means for us to be sent into the world: what the church is sent to do ... and what the church is *not* sent to do.

So what does it mean that we are sent in the same way Jesus was sent? How are we to understand this? How are we to live it?

The chapters to come will be our playbook for mission, based on the historical life of Jesus that is revealed to the church through the Gospels. We'll begin with the bedrock of our calling—the very model of our mission itself—the incarnation of Jesus.

To live at Godspeed is to do mission based on the person and work of Jesus Christ, God become flesh. To live at Godspeed is to practice incarnational Christianity.

## **COCOON, COMBAT, CONFORM**

The church has been commissioned in the world to love the very people God loves. We are the apostolic, sent people of God, sent to be on mission and in motion in our immediate contexts for His glory.

Unfortunately, this doesn't usually describe the church. More often than not, our proclivity as Christians is to withdraw from the world, take up arms with the world, or become like the world. In a book called *The Culturally Savvy Christian*, Dick Staub identified these three tendencies as cocooning, combating, and conforming.<sup>1</sup> It's a great alliteration and a great revelation for the church. Let's look at all three.

The first errant tendency Christians have is to cocoon. When we discover how harsh and unfriendly the world can be, our immediate response is to retreat among like-minded company. We set up

exclusive Christian clubs and enclaves. Meanwhile, when we see how wonderful Jesus is, we want more than anything to be with Him in heaven. Many Christians talk about this longing all the time, and although the desire is good, Jesus prayed specifically against our feelings of escape. “I do not ask You to take them out of the world,”<sup>2</sup> He said to the Father. God’s will until we die is that we would be on mission in the world, among the people of the world for His glory.

We also withdraw and cocoon because the world is tempting. We sense the warfare for our personal holiness and purity, and our reaction is to hunker down. We fail to lay hold of the victory and new nature we’ve been given through Christ Jesus. For many Christians, personal holiness and purity become the primary goal. But they are not *the* goal—they are *a* goal. Participating in and enjoying the life of Christ is the primary goal of the Christian life.

The second way Christians err is by combating. We are in a battle this side of heaven, there’s no doubt about it. But in the midst of that battle the church has to realize that people are not the enemy; people are the prize.

“Our struggle is not against flesh and blood,” Paul said, “but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness.”<sup>3</sup>

In *UnChristian*, David Kinnaman and Gabe Lyons researched Christianity in America today:

The primary reason outsiders feel hostile toward Christians, and especially conservative Christians, is not because of any specific theological perspective. What they react negatively to is our “swagger,” how

we go about things and the sense of self-importance we project. Outsiders say that Christians possess bark—and bite. Christians may not normally operate in attack mode, but it happens frequently enough that others have learned to watch their step around us.<sup>4</sup>

That is a tragedy. If people are watching their steps around us, how are we ever going to step into their lives?

Too often the church has set itself up in a purely antagonistic stance. “We are known for having an us-versus-them mentality,” wrote Kinnaman and Lyons. “Outsiders believe Christians do not like them because of what they do, how they look, or what they believe. They feel minimized—or worse, demonized—by those who love Jesus.”<sup>5</sup>

We’ve taken the prize, the men and women who need Jesus most, and set them up as our enemies. We’ve let the fight define us instead of love for people.

The final error Christians make in the world is to conform. We become like the unbelieving world, when Jesus called us to be salt and light.

Salt is only useful when it’s salty, and light is only meaningful when it’s in contrast to the darkness. Jesus was distinct, and His people should be distinct as well. Romans 12:2 says, “Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.”

While humanity was hostile to Jesus, He went to them. He then sent you and me *into* the world and asked the Father to protect us

from the evil one.<sup>6</sup> When we withdraw from humanity, treat people as the enemy, or conform to the world, we dishonor the teachings of Christ.

### DUAL NATURE

Today Christians in America are known as antihomosexual, judgmental, and hypocritical.<sup>7</sup>

That should hit us like a ton of bricks.

Not a single attribute of Christ—loving, compassionate, generous, kind, merciful, humble, caring, or self-sacrificial—makes the list.

The world thinks we're antihomosexual because we're combative. We fought some of the wrong battles on the wrong fronts for the wrong reasons. They think we're judgmental because we cocoon away from them in our little Christian enclaves. They think we're hypocritical because they watch us eventually conform to culture and end up looking like everyone else.

The incarnation of Christ, Jesus in the flesh, must shape the way we live in the world. The reason we're not to cocoon away from people is because Christ came to people. The reason we're not to combat people is because Christ labored to reconcile people, to God and to one another. The reason we're not to conform to this world is because Christ was otherworldly in His character and holiness.

The incarnation of Christ is the model for mission, the example for the Christian living at Godspeed. When Christ took on humanity, He was fully man and yet fully God. "In Him all the fullness of Deity dwells" Colossians 2:9 says, and yet He took on flesh and blood (Heb. 2:14).

Jesus had a dual nature.

Patterned after Jesus, the church also has a dual nature. In John 17, Jesus said we are not of the world because we've been born again as new creations. Then a few verses later, He sent us into the world as members of humanity.<sup>8</sup> *Dual nature.*

Peter called the church a royal priesthood that offers up spiritual sacrifices (worship) and a holy nation that proclaims the excellencies of God (witness).<sup>9</sup> This is what John Stott labeled the double identity of the church,<sup>10</sup> or incarnational Christianity.

Incarnational Christianity means that we're called out of the world in worship to God while being sent into the world as witnesses of God. The church is a worshipping and witnessing community, and Christians are worshipping and witnessing people.

## LAME BOAT

Jesus was totally committed to humanity without ever ceasing to be holy, which Stott called "total identification without any loss of identity."<sup>11</sup> This concept is important for those of us who are more committed to humanity than we are to holiness.

Think about boats.

I grew up boating off the coast of Santa Barbara and around the Channel Islands and have spent hundreds of hours fishing and surfing from boats. A boat in the water is so much better than a boat in the front yard, in the driveway, or even on the dock.

Here's when a boat is really lame.

A boat is really lame when water gets inside of it. It's the absolute worst. When the boat fills up with water, it becomes useless to the

point that it would have been better to leave the boat in the front yard.

My dad and I used to fish for mako sharks from our boat. Mako sharks are crazy and once on deck they can easily thrash either your body or the boat itself. One time I suggested to my dad that we bring along a shotgun, so we could shoot the shark before we pulled it on board and avoid the thrashing that would result. My dad took one look at me, and I instantly knew what he was thinking ... in the heat of the battle with a mako shark there would be as much chance of us blowing a hole in the boat as there would be of blowing a hole in the shark.

Cooler heads prevailed, and we left the gun at home. The thought of the boat filling up with shark-infested water twenty miles out to sea was not a pleasant one.

If you've ever boated, you already know the simple logic of this: you want your boat in the water, but you don't want water in the boat. The same is true for Christians: God wants them in the world, but He doesn't want the world in them.

Maybe this is you right now. Perhaps you're far more committed to humanity than you are to holiness.

Or maybe you err in the opposite way: you're far more committed to holiness than you are to humanity. Perhaps you're a boat that's forgotten why it's a boat.

You're not of the world; *you're out of this world*, so much so that you're not in the world at all anymore. You're too heavenly minded to be of any earthly good for mission, because you've made personal holiness and purity your gods. Some people in the New Testament did this. They were called Pharisees.

Whether we're overly committed to holiness or overly committed to humanity, going too far in either direction is an error because our commitment is to Christ. Jesus, our model, struck the perfect balance. He totally committed His life to humanity without ever ceasing to be holy. He spent time with the broken, the addicted, and the deceitful. He didn't cocoon but stepped into their world, without ever conforming to it.

For those who needed Him most, Jesus was Immanuel, God in their midst. The dual nature of the church is patterned after the dual nature of Christ. He called us to be simultaneously set apart in behavior and sent out in relationship.

## **NO STRINGS ATTACHED**

Because you and I were sent into the world, it follows logic that our most meaningful and fruitful Christian experiences should take place outside the church building.

Many Christians think being on mission in the world is synonymous with inviting people to a church service. It's not the same thing.

Think about this for a minute: we all know people who hate church. Why then is our default strategy to invite them to church?

I don't mean to be overly simplistic, but I think if people liked church, they'd already be at church. We can hope that they'll like it later on, but until then we need a more practical strategy. When people are sick, they don't need an invitation to a church service. They need a Christian who is willing to pray for them, care for them, minister to them, step into their brokenness, and meet their physical needs.

To be on mission is to love people in a way that represents Jesus: God-made-flesh going to humanity.

And we are to do this kind of mission with no strings attached.

Jesus didn't make people go to the synagogue before He fed them, nor after He fed them for that matter. Jesus did mission with no strings attached, but He did it in such a profoundly loving way that His love became inescapable strings to those to whom He ministered.

The prophets Jeremiah and Hosea, along with Paul the apostle, said that God draws us with His love and kindness.<sup>12</sup> These cords that draw humanity to God are the same cords attached to the acts of love we do by His Spirit.

## **NOT IN CHURCH**

As Christians, we invite people to church because we want to introduce them to Jesus. Our underlying assumption here is that Jesus is found at church—that a person will meet Him when they enter the building. We believe Jesus shows up when His body is gathered. This is biblical, but it's not the whole story.

The church hasn't cornered the market on Jesus.

Religion, properly defined, is humanity's efforts to reach and to please God. This is what going to church means for many people.

On the other hand, the incarnation is God's continuing effort to reach and to save humanity. Incarnational Christianity ought to be alive and at work in our world through the people of God, through the church. We ought to be scattered on mission, not gathered all the time.

When we try to get people to Jesus, instead of bringing Jesus to people, we are approaching our faith fundamentally backward. We're being more religious than Christian.<sup>13</sup> True Christian mission is bringing Jesus to people wherever people are, outside our church buildings.<sup>14</sup>

Also, it doesn't take a math professor to realize all those people "out there" won't fit inside of our church buildings. The Christian concept that we just have to get the world into our buildings is not only incorrect theologically; it doesn't work practically!

We're trying to get the community into church when what we need is to get Jesus into the community. When the church does incarnational Christianity instead of religion, mission becomes more practical.

## THE SACRED AND THE SOCCER GAMES

From God's perspective, there's no divide between the sacred and the secular.<sup>15</sup> The incarnation makes this abundantly clear, because when Jesus was born, the sacred invaded the secular—not to destroy it, but to save it, restore it, and renew it.

John Corrie, in the *Dictionary of Mission Theology*, said,

In the Incarnation of the eternal Word all false dualisms between the material and the spiritual, visible and invisible, human and divine, temporal and eternal, this-worldly and other-worldly, finite and infinite, were dissolved in the totally integrated person of Christ.<sup>16</sup>

Jesus was both fully secular and fully sacred, fully man and fully God. This confronts the unbiblical division we make in our lives when we separate the daily from the divine. We know God cares about the “churchy” stuff, and we think He cares about our problems, but that’s where many Christians leave Jesus’ involvement.

The truth is, God cares as much about our kids’ soccer games as He cares about our churches’ Sunday gatherings. Does He not care when the sparrow falls from its nest?<sup>17</sup> And the sparrow never even went to church!

God cares about the details. *Every* detail. And if we truly grasp this fact, it will change the way we live. Life becomes more fun. I’ve lived both ways to varying degrees: including Jesus in normal life and excluding Him from it as most Americans do. I can hereby testify that life is just more fun with Jesus involved!

I’ve been trying to lay hold of this concept in my day-to-day life. Recently I went to the park with my dad and two kids, Isaiah and Daisy. We went to the park to fly a little radio-controlled airplane Isaiah got for his birthday. As I sat in the grass watching my family, I let it sink in that God cared as much about that moment as He cares about my moments teaching from the pulpit.

I’ll tell you, it made my time in the park that much more amazing. I found myself deeply enjoying the moment, glorifying Jesus, and praying blessings over my family.

As we flew the toy airplane, my dad raced it past a stand of trees, and the thing nearly got stuck in one of them—it’s never a good scene when Grandpa loses the birthday present!

Each time the plane launched straight for the treetops, my dad and I called out, “Oh Lord, please no! Jesus, please no!” A little dramatic maybe, but sincere.

And I’m telling you, each time the plane boomeranged around with a *swoosh-plop* moving away from the trees!

Call me crazy, and some surely do, but the Bible shows us that God cares about these little moments. Jesus, *Immanuel*, is with us in each of them.

If we grasp that fact, it will change our lives.

It will change family life, community life, and mission.

## NOT EVERY FLIGHT

Now I’m going to take some of the pressure off.

Realizing God cares about all the little moments in life can be overwhelming if we start to manufacture mission. If we think that every time we go to our kid’s soccer game we need to feed a hungry person on the sidelines or preach to an unrepentant parent in the stands, the idea of mission will feel overwhelming, even debilitating.

You and I are called to imitate and emulate the life of Christ. Part of this, I believe, includes His capacity to enjoy life.<sup>18</sup> Look at what He talked about in the Gospels: the sparrows, the garden, the marketplace, and His interactions with people. Christ was the creator of all things, which God declared good and created for His pleasure. I can’t help but think that Jesus enjoyed incarnational life, and that’s part of what it means for us to be God’s redeemed people.

In the past I put an awful lot of pressure on myself in this area, thinking that every time I got on an airplane I had to share the gospel with the person sitting next to me—or *I’d be a failure*. There is

endless suffering, poverty, and unbelief in the world around us, but every need we see is not an immediate obligation for the Christian. It's the will of Jesus that dictates mission.

One person posted this on our Missio Christi website: "The goal of my daily life is to listen to the Holy Spirit to discover the mission of Christ."

That's right on target.

If Christ says, "Enjoy this time in the park with your kids," then enjoy time in the park with your kids, and may God be glorified in it. If Christ says, "Minister to the needs of this person" or "Proclaim the gospel to that person," then *that* is the thing you should do.

To be sent means to do the will, perform the work, and speak the words of the One who sent us. What we see in the Gospels is that Christ did not heal every leper in Israel. When He ascended, there was still sickness and poverty in the land. Jesus didn't cure every blind man nor heal every lame person.

Ephesians 2:10 reads, "We are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them." The will of Christ dictates mission because all mission is Christ's mission!

Part of the challenge and the adventure of the Christian life is learning how to listen to the Spirit so we can respond to the needs around us. We have to trust that the Holy Spirit is already working in the lives of people around us, and we need to pay attention to see how and then cooperate with it. If you shift your ministry to be merely need focused, you'll be ruined, discouraged, and utterly overwhelmed.

We're not need driven. We're call driven.

And we're led by the Spirit of God.

## UNHOLY PRIVATIZATION

Many of us divide “God stuff” and “my stuff” in our lives. We compartmentalize and privatize faith in our communities, in our homes, and in our hearts.

Jesus never made this separation.

Think of where He spent His time. Do the Gospels typically show Jesus in the temples and the synagogues? In other words, was He most likely to be found at church? Of the fifty-two parables Jesus told, forty-five of them took place in the market context. Of the 132 public appearances Jesus made, 122 of them occurred in the marketplace.

In the mission of Christ, the disciples and the early church followed suit. Of the forty miracles recorded in the book of Acts, thirty-nine of them occurred in the marketplace.<sup>19</sup>

We see in the New Testament that Christ did most of His ministry and mission where people spent most of their time—*at work*. This evidence rings in our ears, because the life of the typical, modern American church is flipped. The place Christ worked most often, in the midst of the culture of the day, is the very place that American Christians have most often evacuated.

Theologian Dallas Willard put it this way:

There truly is no division between sacred and secular except what we have created. And that is why the division of the legitimate roles and functions of human life into the sacred and secular does

incalculable damage to our individual lives and to the cause of Christ. Holy people must stop going into “church work” as their natural course of action and take up holy orders in farming, industry, law, education, banking, and journalism with the same zeal previously given to evangelism or to pastoral and missionary work.<sup>20</sup>

Wherever you are now, wherever you spend the majority of your time—that is your mission field. This is what it means to recapture our sense of sent-ness. Wherever you are and whatever you are doing—*you were sent there*.

Sometimes this is hard for American Christians to lay hold of because we’ve terribly misapplied the concept of separation between church and state. The predominant American mind-set claims little allegiance to religion, and most American Christians see Christianity as an add-on to an already good life. That is a monumental failure, and it messes up mission. It forces us to ask the wrong questions.

We say, “What does God want to do in my life, in my story?”

Incarnational Christianity says, “How can I participate in God’s life and greater story?”

The latter question yields a very different result than the former.

Americans claim little allegiance to any religion, and so we easily compartmentalize and privatize our Christian expression. The result is an American church that talks about Jesus only in church.

Many will say that they’re unable to talk about Jesus in their workplaces or schools. “I want to be on mission, but it’s just not allowed or appropriate.”

If this is your reasoning, here's my response: Is that really true? Are you really not allowed to speak about Jesus in your school or at your workplace? Or is this a personal excuse?

If in fact that statement is true—if you are truly not allowed to talk about Jesus at work or school—then my response would be: *awesome*.

What history shows us, and what the world reveals presently, is that the gospel is most fruitful where Jesus is most forbidden. The gospel shines in those places. The less opportunity we have to *talk* about Jesus, the more opportunity we have to *be* like Jesus.

## TOUGH IDEAL

The goal is to look like Jesus. And sooner or later, I think every Christian discovers that looking like Jesus is a lot harder to do than it is to say.

Someone posted about this very struggle on our Missio Christi website:

I understand why it's so much easier for me and for many Christians to just invite people to church rather than to live as a Christian example. I am afraid to try and live as a Christian example. I often fail at it. Non-Christians will put me to shame in how they love and how they treat people in the community. To even match many non-Christians is hard. To surpass them to the point that I'm radiating Christ is an overwhelming prospect. I might be okay twenty-eight days out of the month, but it just

takes your non-Christian business associates seeing you those other two days at your worst for them to see a hypocrite and someone who is judgmental rather than loving.<sup>21</sup>

Can anyone relate? I can fully relate. He is absolutely right.

Someone else posted this quote by G. K. Chesterton in response: “The Christian ideal has not been tried and found wanting, it has been found difficult and left untried.”<sup>22</sup>

That’s where many Christians leave mission. They see it as difficult, and so they leave it untried. When it comes to living out our beliefs, many non-Christians in our communities look a lot more Christian than we do. I know some of them.

But we need to remember two things.

When it comes to God’s kingdom and His gospel going forth, we first need to believe that God is bigger than our blunders. Nowhere do we see this more potently than in the history of the church. If you’ve ever studied church history, you know the church is probably the messiest thing ever to happen to the world. The fact that it still exists and that people are still a part of this worldwide community is concrete proof that God is bigger than our human blunders.

We have to grasp this truth in our daily lives, because the fact is, we are going to blow it. As people, we’re deeply flawed; yet throughout history God has chosen to work *through* people rather than *independent of* people.

When we fail, we have an opportunity to model forgiveness and show what the redeeming power of Christ looks like. We can reveal how sweet it is to find our identity in Christ and His work on our

behalf because of God's love for us, rather than basing our sense of self-worth on our own performance.

The second thing we have to lay hold of is the power of the gospel. The Christian's good deeds, so to speak, are not merely good deeds. They are purposeful and powerful partnership with God.

That's what it means to be sent: to do the will and the work and to speak the words of the Sender. When we think about speaking and living out the gospel, we're not to see it as a competing ideology or a philosophy in the world. It's the power of God unto salvation,<sup>23</sup> and it works in men and women for transformation.

When we engage in the work of Christ in the world around us—as messy as it is and as bad as we are at it—it yields a different effect in the spiritual realm. If we truly hear what the Spirit is saying and engage in it, there is an impact on the spirits of men and women. The power of God is behind it.

You and I are call driven, not need driven, because Jesus calls us into the work He's already begun—the work that He is faithful to bring to completion. It's *Missio Christi*.

Whatever Christ does through mission has the power of Christ behind it. The church must rekindle a confidence that the power of the gospel can be communicated through ordinary means: service, sacrifice, kindness, love, and good deeds.<sup>24</sup> Not apart from proclamation but in partnership with it.

The purpose of Ephesians 2:10, the “good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them,” is to explain our God to the world. And the fact that God already prepared good works for us frees us from having to come up with good ideas and, rather, to seek His ideas.

## GOOD POSTMODERN NEWS

The incarnation denotes culture and context. Christ came as a Jew into Jewish culture and participated in Jewish customs with other Jews. If we're going to do incarnational mission and ministry, we've got to understand some culture and context.

The twenty-first-century American church lives in a postmodern culture.<sup>25</sup> This can be a daunting term, so I want to say a few things about what it means for us.

First, where the modern mind-set was much more concerned with concrete evidence, the postmodern mind-set has shifted. The postmodern mind-set is less concerned with “prove it to me” and much more concerned with “be it to me.”

Second, from a postmodern perspective, truth claims are often interpreted as political strategies promoting self-interest.<sup>26</sup> The church must be aware of this distinction, because we make (and need to make) truth claims all the time. Today people have a general suspicion of political maneuvering by those who claim to have the truth, and 75 percent of young, not-yet Christians (ages 16 to 29) see Christians as too political.<sup>27</sup>

Third, postmodernism brings with it a kind of pluralism, the general acknowledgment of diversity. In a rejection of modernism, our pluralistic culture is one where the diversity of racial, religious, ethnic, and cultural groups is not only tolerated but also celebrated. Have you seen the bumper sticker that uses the religious symbols from several different world religions to write the word *coexist*? That's a postmodern, pluralistic perspective. Subsequently four out of five young, not-yet Christians believe Christianity teaches the same basic ideas as the other world religions.<sup>28</sup>

The postmodern mind-set is less concerned with proof and more concerned with fruit; it is suspicious of truth claims as maneuvers for self-interest; it values diversity in all areas of life, including religion. It rejects exclusiveness and embraces inclusiveness. This mind-set is a rejection of absolute truth, and 76 percent of not-yet Christians in America do not believe absolute truth exists.<sup>29</sup>

This is very bad news for a church that wants to do Christianity as usual. If we're going to be known just for what we are against instead of what we are for, postmodernism is a scary thing.

But I think it's good news.

I think Christ is raising up and calling us to *be* the church, an expression of Christianity that shines His light before people in such a way that they may see our good deeds and glorify our Father who is in heaven.<sup>30</sup> Christ calls us to be a church that speaks the truth in love in order to reach people.<sup>31</sup>

We need to see culture as the opportunity, not the enemy.

We fail if culture is always the enemy.

If you look at the first-century Greco-Roman world, you see it was a pluralistic culture not so different from our own. And what did Christianity do in the first-century world? It spread like wildfire! History tells us that biblical, incarnational mission does very well in a context of pluralism and opposition.

Where modernism was a rejection of God, postmodernism is open to spirituality. And that is a good thing. We live in a culture where more people talk about God and have spiritual conversations. In fact, 82 percent of Americans say they are spiritual seekers, and 52 percent say they've talked about spiritual things in the last twenty-four hours.<sup>32</sup> That's remarkable! Eight out of ten people you'll go to

work with tomorrow consider themselves spiritual seekers, and more than half of them are going to have a spiritual conversation during the day.

These conversations are happening all around us.

Are we a part of them?

### **IMMINENT, EVIDENCED, INTIMATE**

Our goal is to get the church into the community in a purposeful, incarnational, meaningful expression, rightly representing Christ through the love that we show people.

We need to go where people need love *and love them*. Our love shouldn't be preconditioned on whether they're ever going to come to church or hear a gospel spiel at that moment. The world has seen enough of this contrived effort and faux befriending. We need to love people authentically, with God's unconditional love. As simple as that sounds, it's really hard to do without being continually tapped into the power of the Holy Spirit.

If Jesus is real in your life and you are real around other people—allowing them to see your failures, successes, struggles, heartaches, heartbreaks, good moments, and worst moments—it won't be long before people see Jesus in you.

We believe in a God who created all things, sustains all things, and participates in all things through personal relationships with those whom He created. We need to gain a greater confidence of Christ's imminence and presence in our lives.

Christ is on mission in the world right now to people all around us. Correct theology liberates us from the old religious thinking that says "I've got to go do things for Jesus" and frees us for incarnational,

relational Christianity, which says “I’m going to do things with Jesus.”

When we realize that Jesus is doing things in the people all around us, and we get to join with Him in that process, the whole gig changes. “Mission is not first of all an action of ours,” Lesslie Newbigin wrote, “it’s an action of God, the Triune God, who is unceasingly at work in all creation and in the hearts and minds of all human beings, whether they acknowledge Him or not.”<sup>33</sup>

We put flesh on Christ’s present mission.

In order to do this mission with Jesus, we first have to be committed to a loving, meaningful, intimate relationship with Him.

Here’s why.

If we go to the world before we go to God, we find ourselves going into the world to *get* love instead of to *give* love.

Too many Christians do ministry from a place of their own needs. They do good deeds because it’s a part of the identity they want: *I’m that guy who does those things for people. I’m the girl who is always there. I’m the one who saves the day.* Similarly others cultivate relationships because they have love-needs that are yet to be met in their lives—needs designed to be met by Christ alone.

We must become satisfied with and saturated in the love of Jesus. Only then can we go into the world to give love instead of receive love. Only when we do it this way is it the mission of Christ, because the Bible tells us that God is self-sufficient and needs nothing. He did not create us out of need but out of His nature. He did not create us to *get* love from us but to *give* love to us.

Our goal is the same. We must be so satisfied in the love of Christ that we’re free to go and give love to others. That doesn’t mean

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that we don't need love. We do. It simply means that we won't be doing mission out of a need to get love from people. Rather, we'll do mission from an overflow of our identity in Christ and the fact that we are the beloved of God. With all of our failures, all of our fissures, all of our brokenness, all of our battles, and all of our drama—we're accepted, adopted, and adored by God.

If we get that identity right in our hearts, then we'll get incarnational Christianity right in the world.