

Your GPS for Life: a Missional Lifestyle
Acts 9:1-16, August 24, 2014
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We are on the last of a 3-part sermon series on *Your GPS for Life*. I'm using this series as a vehicle for sharing with you what I learned on my sabbatical, and for helping us as a congregation to explore our own discipleship path in the months and years ahead. Three strong impressions that I gained are these: *Pilgrimage, Family and Lifestyle*.

First, discipleship is a pilgrimage which you walk step by step. It's a long haul, and you walk it by faith. Second this pilgrimage is not a solitary exercise, but a journey taken with your family – "family" as re-defined by Jesus. God is your Father; your community of faith is your family. And third, lifestyle. Mission is more than an occasional task. It's a lifestyle built on relationships and driven by God's compassion for his world. *Pilgrimage, Family and Lifestyle*.

As I share these thoughts and impressions with you I am sowing seeds, just giving you some ideas that will take shape as we go along. This is *not yet* a fully fledged map, but only milestones that help us mark our path. We are learning, as we go, what it means to look and act like Jesus' disciples. This series provides a kind of GPS that helps us stay on track as we walk the path of discipleship, aiming for our goal of becoming a Family on Mission. We begin with small changes, trusting that small changes will lead to big changes. What starts as disciplines eventually become habits, which finally become a lifestyle.

So what is a *missional lifestyle* and how does that differ from *doing mission*? Let me illustrate. A young soldier in basic training began to display some rather unusual characteristics. He would wander around the base picking up random pieces of paper, sniffing them, and then tossing them aside as he mumbled to himself, "That's not it." He was given a thorough mental health assessment and finally, a medical discharge. When he was given his discharge papers, true to form, he sniffed them – and then brightening, said, "That's it!" as he walked out the door, a free man.

Now we may have some serious questions about this young man's values and patriotism, but he clearly had a purpose and he devoted all his energies towards fulfilling that purpose. Everything he said and did was directed to that goal until it was achieved. In a more positive sense, you could say the same thing about the Apostle Paul. His goal was to make disciples of Jesus throughout the world, in response to Jesus' Great Commission. *Paul didn't just do missions; he was missional in all he did*. His life was centered on his mission and shaped by that passion. Paul had a missional lifestyle.

Mission begins with God. The heart of God reaches out to his broken world and starts the ball rolling. Check out our first lesson where God heard the cry of his enslaved people, had compassion on them and began a rescue operation. Throughout Scripture you can find evidence of God's heart – to rescue and to heal, to forgive and to save. *God* achieves the rescue by his power and presence, but he calls you and me to participate. In this case he called Moses. After Moses, many more were called and sent. Later, he sent Paul. Mission begins in the heart of God and then extends to us.

You will notice in both our first and second lessons that those whom God calls inevitably require a change of heart. Moses was reluctant. Paul was misguided. Each presented barriers to God's mission – until God stepped in and changed their hearts. He persuaded Moses to go by promising that God would be with him and work signs and miracles through him. And he did. God kept his promises in some spectacular ways as he freed his people from Egypt and then led them to the Promised Land. With Paul, Jesus had to persuade him that he, Jesus, truly was God's son, the promised Messiah. The appearance of the Risen Christ got Paul's attention and changed his heart so that, instead of working to destroy the church, he began to build it up. God calls you and me to participate in his mission. And then he changes our hearts so we can do it.

A missional life is – first of all – a changed life. Changed hearts turn into changed lives. When you are wholeheartedly given over to God, it makes a difference in what you do. We see that in Moses and again in Paul – and in the lives of many, many others. The center of your life becomes Christ and your goal is to follow him and to share his message of salvation. Mission – outreach – becomes more than just an occasional task, or a task given over to the “experts.” Mission becomes the lifestyle of every disciple.

So what does a missional lifestyle look like? I had a chance to see this on sabbatical – not in just one place, but in several places. Not just in big churches, but also in small. It happens at every age level, in every denomination. I'd like to give you some examples, knowing that San Jose is different from Sheffield; that every congregation is unique. I'm not suggesting we do it exactly the way others do it – it doesn't work that way. Rather, let's take a look and see what we can learn. I'll give you some examples and then suggest some first steps.

One thing I saw was how households, families, see themselves as being missional together. It's more than just doing family. They have a specific, common mission and this becomes their propeller. They are missional, and it drives what they do. And it's a lifestyle that begins with prayer. They told me how they deliberately make time to share and pray together. (In one household made up of singles, this is a challenge as everyone works different schedules. But they manage to do it.) As they pray for people they begin to reach out to them. Members of the family see themselves as missionaries, reaching out to friends and associates – and not only adults, but kids as well. It becomes like a family business – everyone is in it together and it starts with prayer.

Family then spills over into community. I heard stories and strategies. In Sheffield, the whole congregation stages “LoveSheffield” days four times a year, in which everyone wears “LoveSheffield” t-shirts and picks up trash, or (maybe on Valentine's Day) hands out candy. If asked, they also give out a card that had the church's contact info. Kids love these activities. The community does too, and I'm told that over time, the community has begun to anticipate these days and people join in. LoveSheffield days begin to identify the church (everyone know St Thomas?) and it also shapes the community as businesses and other churches join in.

Small communities within the church begin to emerge. These communities are made up of maybe 25 people who share a common passion to serve a certain segment of their community. Maybe it's a neighborhood, or a soccer team. Maybe it's the workplace. Maybe it's a marginalized segment of the population. In one Portland church it was an institution near the

church called “Shepherd’s Door,” a ministry to young mothers in crisis, very similar to City Team’s Heritage Home.

A One small community in the church make this their missional outreach. Once a month they meet at Shepherd’s Door with the sole aim of developing relationships. It tends not to be task-related, such as making a dinner for them, but rather relational, like an activity with the mothers and their children. Their goal is to get to know these women, build trust, meet whatever needs are appropriate. Over time these women begin to join the small group meeting in homes as they come to faith. Their lives – and the lives of their children – begin to turn around.

This group has a monthly rhythm so that their mission is sustainable. After all, they are all people like you, working every day and coming home to families of their own. So this is what it looks like: Sundays they gather for regular worship at church. As a small community they meet weekly, say, on a Monday. On the first and third Mondays they gather in someone’s home to care for and disciple each other. They arrive as families to eat and enjoy time together. Then, as children go down to the basement for their own activities, older teens and adults share in twos or threes and pray for each other. As a whole group they study the Word. The second and fourth Mondays are different. The second Monday is for outreach, when they go to Shepherd’s Door. And the 4th Monday they call “connect.” They don’t meet together, but connect in other ways – maybe they just reconnect as a family; or maybe have a BBQ and invite a friend, along with a couple from their group. This friend might later be invited to an outreach activity – where they would once again run into the folks they met at the BBQ. It’s a simple way of getting neighbors or co-workers connected with one’s faith community. Oh, and what about when there is a fifth Monday in the month? They have a party! This rhythm – discipleship, service, connect and party – makes their missional lifestyle sustainable – and enjoyable.

When you begin to care about people like this, it becomes part of your lifestyle. What you do makes a difference; it’s very rewarding. In fact, it gets addicting and soon you can’t imagine any other kind of life.

Over time, what you think about is more and more relational – who can I reach out to? Whom can I serve? Who will come with me? And over time, your life becomes missional in character.

Do you see what I’m aiming at? A missional lifestyle means that following Jesus becomes a driving force in your life. As you pray and learn and serve one another, it satisfies something within you unlike anything else. Your heart is changed – and this is God’s doing. Your family is changed as your children grow to be a people of prayer and service. Like Moses, you are no longer reluctant but resolved. Like Paul, your life is no longer misguided but Christ-guided.

I want you to hear this: a missional lifestyle is not as hard or time-consuming as you might think. The people I met were normal folks like you – with homes, families and demanding work schedules. And yet they told me, “This is simple! I love it! This is what I was meant to do.” Essentially, you take what you are already doing and invite others in.

So let me suggest to you some first steps towards a missional lifestyle:

1. Begin with prayer. (Remember, this is God’s doing.) Open up the lines of communication with God. Make your prayer time not only the chance opportunity here and there (which is not

bad); but also an intentional time that you spend with God (which is even better). At the beginning of the summer Pastor Dan called us to do just that. It's one of those things that requires your attention until the discipline becomes a habit and the habit becomes a lifestyle. Move intentionally towards a lifestyle of prayer. Without the power of God you can do nothing!

2. Pray around God's Word and listen for his voice. Let your reading morph into prayer. The Psalms are a great starting place. For example from Psalm 127 you read: *Unless the LORD builds the house, the builders labor in vain.* Reading that, you might pray something like this:

Oh Lord, be the builder of my house, my life. Help me not waste my efforts on things that don't last. Help me to build on the foundation of your ways and your love.

God's Word is a great primer for prayer. Use it, not only to learn *about* God, but to talk *to* God – and to *listen* as he speaks to you.

3. Make space for relationships in your life. If you aren't already doing so, attend a Bible study. Reading God's Word together not only helps you learn more, it also gives you a venue for developing relationships. Make time for this; allow yourself to be mentored. Perhaps you might find yourself mentoring someone else. A huddle might be the venue for this, especially if you see yourself as a leader in any way. If not, a missional community might be in your future.

My friends, we are becoming a Family on Mission. That's the "finish" on our discipleship GPS. That's where we are headed. The missional lifestyle starts in your household and grows into the church and wider community. Jesus himself set the template: serving his disciples, washing their feet. And the message we share is all about what he did on the cross, serving us, saving us in his rescue mission for the world. Amen.