



God's Mission

AND OUR PART IN HIS STORY

Including an extract from “Missio Dei”
written by Richard Bradbury.

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The full work is available on our website:
www.groundlevel.org.uk/glx-mission-of-god

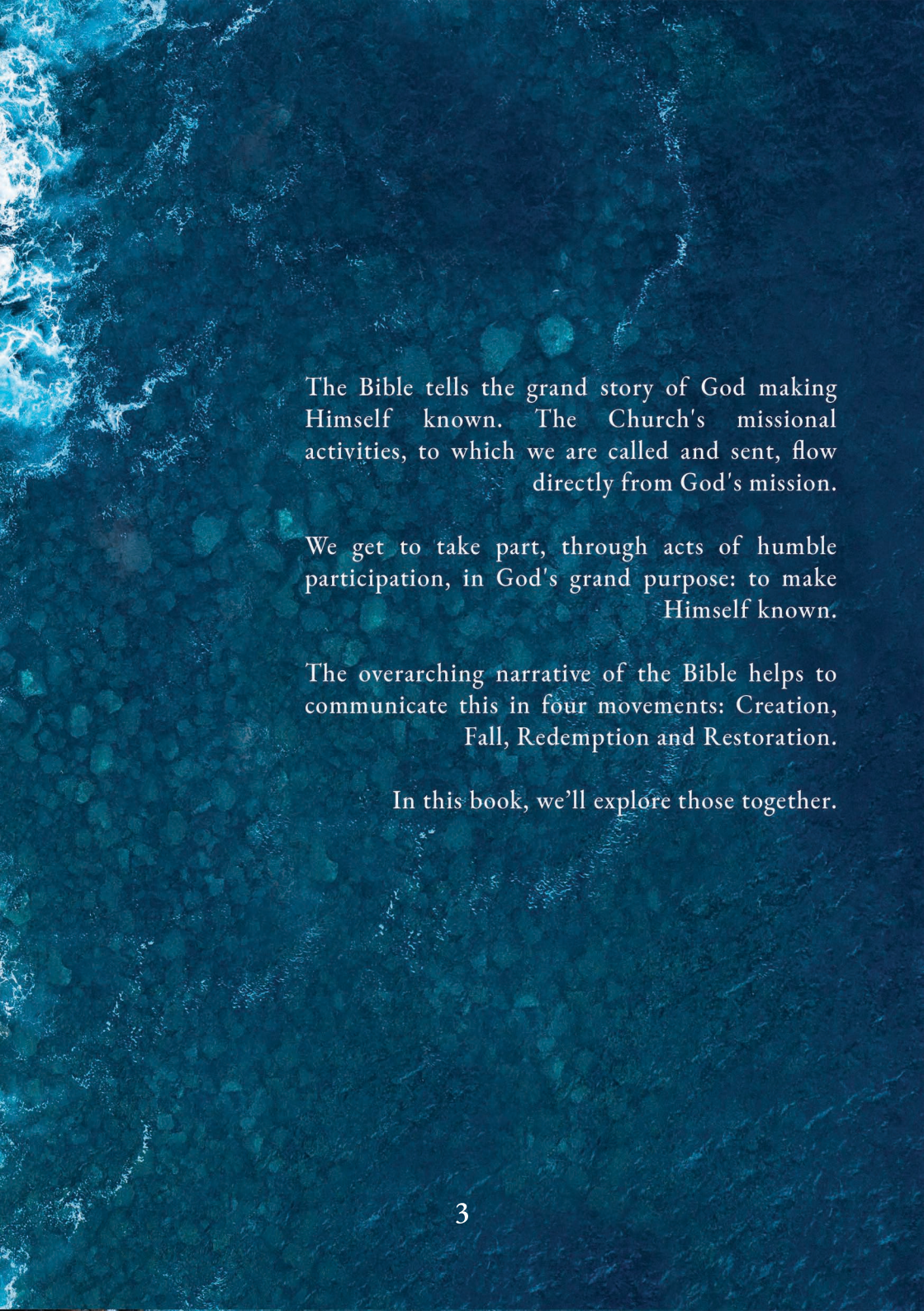
When God created the earth and all that is in it, he had a purpose for it, a mission to accomplish. *Missio Dei* is a Latin term that can be translated as “Mission of God”.

It describes the role of the Church in the mission of God as we are invited to participate in His big picture story.

An aerial photograph of a rugged coastline. The left side of the image is dominated by a dark, textured expanse of land, possibly a beach or a rocky shore, with a mottled brown and black appearance. On the right side, the ocean is a vibrant turquoise blue, with white foam from breaking waves crashing against a line of dark, jagged rocks. The rocks are scattered along the shoreline, creating a stark contrast between the dark land and the bright water.

THE CHURCH'S MISSION

God's mission is to redeem for Himself a people who will be a kingdom of priests to the praise of His glory, who will bear witness to His gospel and advance His church, and who will live with Him forever in the restored Heaven and earth. His mission goes through the story of the Bible from the brokenness of the nations in Genesis 11 to the healing of the nations in Revelation 21-22.



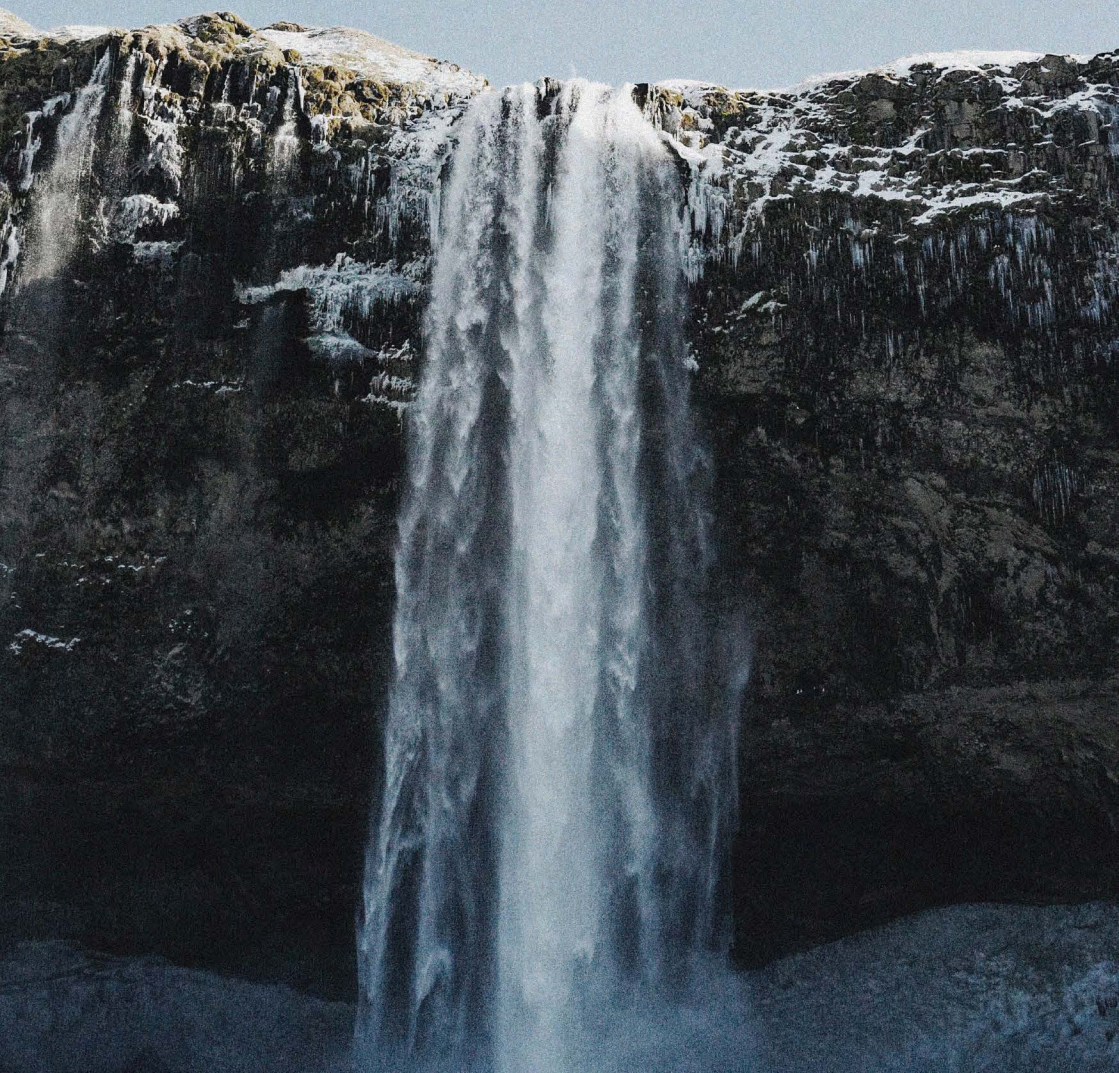
The Bible tells the grand story of God making Himself known. The Church's missional activities, to which we are called and sent, flow directly from God's mission.

We get to take part, through acts of humble participation, in God's grand purpose: to make Himself known.

The overarching narrative of the Bible helps to communicate this in four movements: Creation, Fall, Redemption and Restoration.

In this book, we'll explore those together.

CREATION



Man's role in God's Mission doesn't begin with the great commission to "go and make disciples" (Matthew 28:16-20) but long before, in the Garden of Eden, when he told us to go be fruitful and multiply, to replenish the earth and subdue it (Genesis 1:28). Though He rested, He was not finished. He instructed humanity to fill the earth and thus carry out His mission.

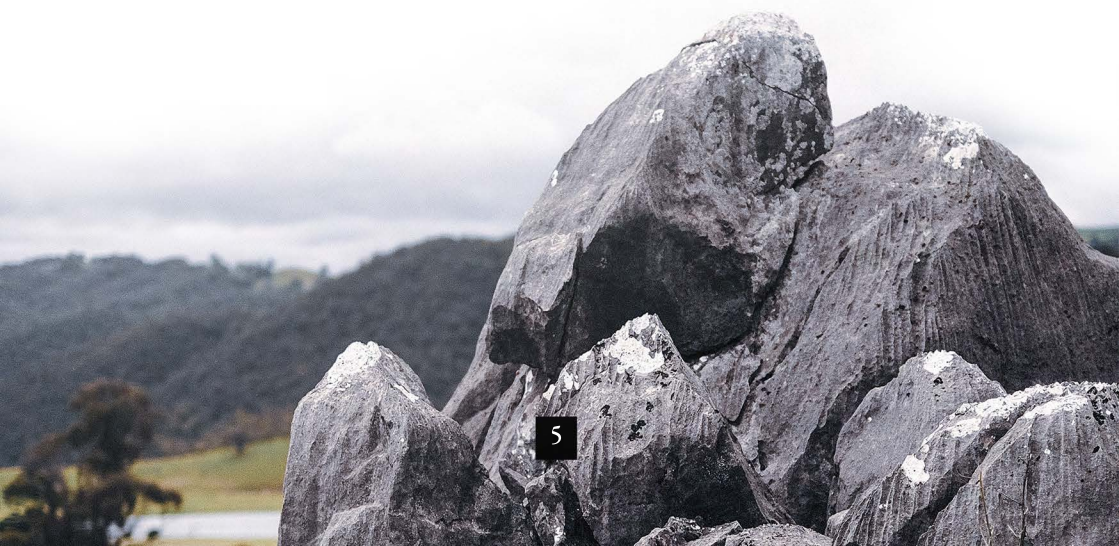
The first two chapters of Genesis show us how important humanity is to Him – we are made to export His image and glory into all the earth. So, though Creation is God's handiwork and only He can bring His Mission to completion, in His sovereignty He has chosen to use humans to bring creation into its full potential. He has created us with purpose – not only in our relationship to Him but also to fulfil our God-given role in the world around us. At the heart of this Mission, therefore, is love.

A love for God - If God created us, it makes sense that our purpose in life is intimately connected to Him. Our highest call is to love the Lord our God (Deut. 6:5, Matt .22:37, Mark 12:30, Luke 10:27).

A love for each other – It is not good for people to be alone. We see that God's handiwork is made to flourish in relationships, which is a reflection of his own relational being as he is three in one: Father, Son and Spirit.

A love for ourselves - We are to love ourselves by seeing ourselves the way God sees us and by becoming the person God wants us to become.

A love for God's creation – in the story of creation, God is asking us to change, and even enhance, the good creation God has given. The narrative tells us that God gives humanity stewardship over the whole of creation.



FALL



God's ultimate goal in creation was to magnify His glory throughout the earth by means of His faithful image-bearers inhabiting the world in obedience to the divine mandate.

Gregory K. Beale, *The Temple and the Church's Mission*, (Nottingham: IVP, 2004) p.82

Everything God created was good. All of humanity's relationships at this time were in the correct order. Humanity was thriving in flourishing relationships with God, with others, with himself and with the world. Through the fall, almost everything changed, and the results are evident. Guilt, shame and fear entered the world and humanity is now faced with sin and death. Although the image of God in man was not destroyed, his basic orientation towards God, others, himself and the world has altered. However, through God's grace, people become vital, both as the object of His mission and as the agent to accomplish it.

When we chose to rebel against God, we rejected God and sought to make ourselves independent, to seize power for ourselves. This resulted not only in the fall of humanity but also in the fall of the created order. Humanity would suffer in relationships with God, with others, with ourselves and with the world.

A broken relationship with God -Humanity's sin resulted in a broken relationship with God. We sought goodness and happiness on our own, apart from God, and became naked. We couldn't clothe ourselves physically, spiritually, morally, intellectually or emotionally.

A broken relationship with others - Our relationship with others would be marked by strife. The consequences of this are not just limited to ourselves alone. As a result, humanity must now deal with evil in relationships and society.

A broken relationship with ourselves - We began to love ourselves, rather than God, resulting in worshipping the creature, not the creator. Because of sin, man is less than fully human. The image of God is marred. This brokenness is seen as humanity becomes a slave to its own Sin:

Rationally – difficulty knowing the truth, goodness and beauty

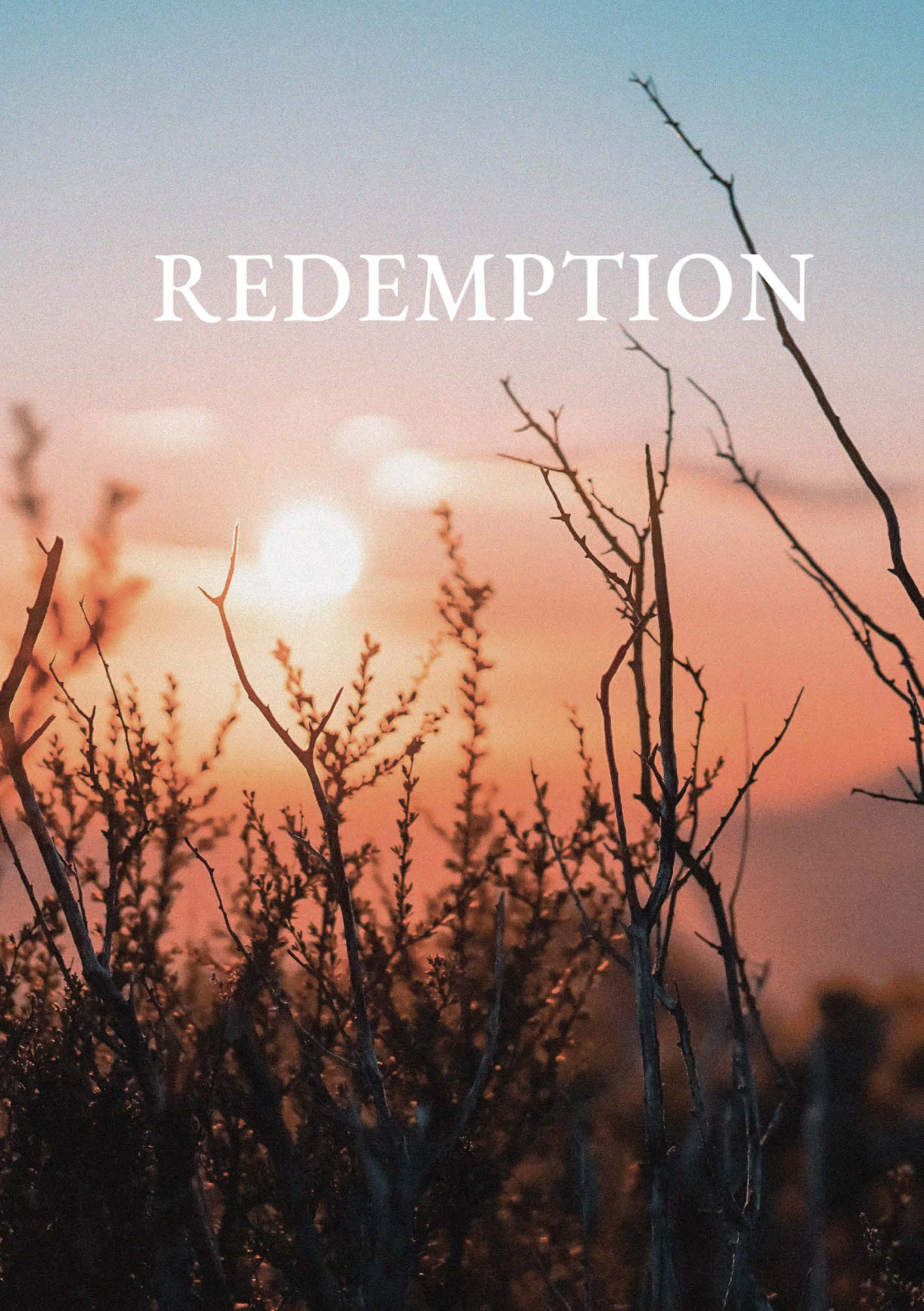
Morally – difficulty discerning good and evil

Socially – exploits others and loves self inordinately

Creatively – leads to idolatry rather than worship of God

A broken relationship with the created order - Humanity's work would now be marred by strife. The result was a broken relationship with the rest of the created order. Rather than unbroken harmony, there would be brokenness and pain. We would exploit the world for our own gain, rather than nurture the world God had given us to steward and care for.

REDEMPTION



From Genesis to Revelation, at every major turning point, God uses humanity in His mission to glorify Himself through redemption.

As the Church is empowered by the Holy Spirit, the kingdom of God grows on the Earth. Although He sometimes moves directly, He mostly uses us as His hands and feet to accomplish His purposes. Therefore, although humanity was the reason for the fall, we are also the way the kingdom is being built on Earth.

In Genesis, Adam heard a promise of death but also of life. From the woman's children, a Redeemer would come. Though the serpent would bruise the heel, the offspring would crush the serpent's head (Genesis 3).

Redemption of humans and creation - At the centre of God's mission is the salvation of humanity, the creature made in the image and likeness of God. He does not simply save an individual. He rescues a people (1 Peter 2:9).

God unleashes His gospel upon the world through this redeemed community, its message (Matt 28:18-20) and spiritual ministries (Acts 2:42-47). Jesus Christ is the rescuer, and the gospel is the good news that Jesus is the saviour of the world.

Redemption isn't just for humans. In the end, God will redeem the world he has made. The good end of God's redemptive purpose is a renewed heaven and earth.

Reconciled to God

Humanity without Christ is without hope (Eph. 2:12). When we accept Jesus, repent and accept the Father's forgiveness, we are restored to a relationship with God so that we can step into everlasting hope.

By our rebellion, humanity became the enemy of God. Christ, by His death and resurrection, has brought us peace with God. Reconciled to God in Christ we now bring reconciliation to the Earth (2 Corinthians 5:16-21).

Redemption in our relationship with God and with others

Alongside healing our relationship with God, Jesus redefines our relationships with others (2 Corinthians 5:16). In the natural course of things, we see others in terms of our fallen nature - as competitors, as those beneath us, or as enemies. The cross flips this on its head, redefining the way we must see and interact with each other in God's love (Romans 13:8).

Redemption in our relationship with ourselves - The cross makes us into a new creation (2 Corinthians 5:17). We are no longer corrupt sinners. The image of God in us is being restored to the original intention until we become like Christ – the perfect God-man or woman who reflects the goodness and glory of God.

Redemption in our relationship to the created order - Making disciples of the nations is our first role in the Mission of God, bringing people to Christ and restoring humanity to God. As His image-bearers, we are also called to reflect him into whatever situation God places us into, glorifying Him in our relationships, work and rest. Being a part of God's mission also means fulfilling the role of stewarding the earth's precious resources, as God commanded us to in the beginning. It means redeeming society from sin which allows for exploitation of people and resources throughout creation. This is where social action and social justice become part of the Church's role in God's Mission.

RESTORATION



God's glory is displayed as he restores all things. He alone can fully accomplish the final restoration of Heaven and Earth. Yet, in the present moment, His Kingdom is in our midst and the process has begun (Luke 17: 20-21).

Our part in the restoration of all things extends beyond personal salvation, encompassing all of life and all elements of human culture – relationships, family life, education, arts, sciences, entertainment etc.

If the Church is intended to be a display of the kingdom in the present age, that display should reveal itself both in the Church and in the world, in our relationship with the body of Christ and with the broader culture in which we live.

Regardless of calling, God assigns us a responsibility in the *Missio Dei*. Whether in our vocation, family, or other spheres of influence, God calls us to honour Him by reclaiming everything for His glory.

The question is not whether God will accomplish His mission – that will happen. The question is whether we will know the joy of being a part of it. Not everyone is called to move overseas, learn another language or plant a church, but every member of the body of Christ plays a part.

The church's mission is framed by God's mission, seen upon the backdrop of God's mission, and understood in the light of God's mission. The Church takes its cues from God and therefore is committed to His mission, seeking to increase His renown, proclaim His good news, advance His kingdom, and bear witness to the truth of His word.

God's work of redemption will reach its goal in the end, as God saves for Himself a people and restores His good creation. In scripture, this goal is not simply tacked onto the end as a final chapter. It is instead the vision toward which all of scripture is pointing. It is the vision that grounds the hope of the gathered church and the individual believer.

So, what constitutes humanity's role in the Mission of God? If sin is the root cause, the gospel is the cure. The salvation of man is central.

“Mission may not always begin with evangelism. But mission that does not ultimately include the declaring of the Word and the name of Christ, the call to repentance, and faith and obedience has not completed its task.”

Christopher J.H Wright, *The Mission of God* (Nottingham: IVP, 2006) p.319

Both the Old and the New Testaments contain promises of renewed heaven and earth. This is the full circle of creation. The God who gave us the good creation recorded in Genesis will be the God who will give us a renewed heaven and earth. We will live in an unbroken relationship with God, with others, with ourselves, and with the new creation.

Now, we live between the times of the first and second comings of the King and find ourselves called to be ambassadors for God who created us and purchased us and with the blood of His Son.

Our role is to find out where God is at work in His world to redeem and restore all things and work with Him towards completing that task when He returns.



TRANSFORMATION

As we talk about bringing renewal to our communities, it's helpful to consider some tools we can use to move and grow together. The transformational triangle helps to give us clarity on the important aspects that bring about change in our lives, and how important it is for us to stay connected to the whole story of God's Mission.

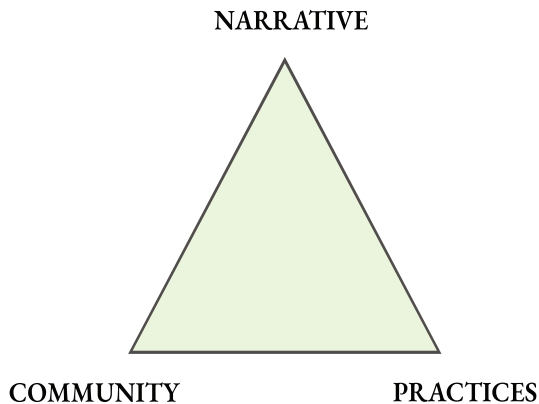


Transformation requires three things:

Narrative - The story we tell ourselves determines where we go and what we do

Community - We need people around us to make effective and lasting change

Practices - The actions we take structure and form our lives



This triangle is used successfully by many organisations. Weight Watchers is a great example to explore so that we can see how it works.

Narrative - Each individual attending is invited into a powerful success story of a new life and opportunities.

Community - Weekly weigh-ins allow people to build relationships with the organiser and people attending, celebrating and encouraging one another on the journey.

Practices - Weight Watchers guides people to take actions to achieve their desired goal. An app informs you of what you can and should eat. Each person is taught about food and nutrition and given the opportunity to expand their knowledge of cooking. The person's life becomes centred on these practices as a new way of living and eating.

Together these three elements lead to success and powerful stories of transformation, so much so that Weight Watchers is worth around £1.2 billion.

So how does the Transformational Triangle relate to the Church?

The Missio Dei is the belief that there is a bigger story to tell: a fuller narrative of the arc of scripture that gives us a full understanding of our lives here on earth and how to partner with God. But we often only tell half the story. It's vital for us to direct our lives under the full narrative of God's Mission because otherwise the Church does not thrive to her full potential.


When we tell the narrative of God's activity as FALL and REDEMPTION then the community and practices we develop look like this:

Narrative: We live in a fallen and broken world. We are separated from God by sin and everyone needs the Saviour, Jesus to rescue them and save them. We have been saved by grace, through faith in Jesus and this leads to us having eternal life in Him.

Community: We love each other and seek to help each other stay on track and to love God and each other. We are waiting for God to come and to take us home. Community is functional and based on our desire to be somewhere else - Heaven. The community may hold views on the rules and what is right and wrong - for example, regarding the consumption of alcohol.

Practices: Our discipleship is based on avoiding sin and doing the right things. We practise spiritual disciplines as a way to secure our beliefs and avoid problems. Discipleship, however, is shallow as it's about avoidance of problems rather than celebration of who we are in Christ.

This all outworks from the narrative we hold on to. This is why it is so important that we get hold of the whole story. Our communities and practices will be changed by what we believe and the story we place ourselves within.



If we take the fuller view of the biblical story and start in Genesis 1 and end in Revelation 21 then we get this picture:

Creation | Fall | Redemption | Renewal

Narrative: We are broken and fallen and we need Christ. Christ is redeeming us and bringing us back to our original intention - the cultivation of life on earth for the glory of God. We get to join God in the renewal of all things and this permeates through literally everything. It shapes the way we live, work, relate, rest, give and receive.

Community: We love each other and cheer each other on in purpose, gifts, talents and expressions of God's goodness that each of us bring. We all have a contribution to make to the renewal of all things. Discovering this and encouraging one another is a big part of our community. We gather and celebrate God and His work in and through our lives. The community is the equipping space for learning to live and love well.

Practices: Our practices are based around our belief that we are called with purpose to be loved by God, to love Him in return and to love the world around us through meaningful participation. Knowing ourselves and our purpose informs our spiritual practices as it leads us to the Father in delight and intention. Our practices are formed around the belief that God is good and He has good things for us as His children. We get to partner with God in the renewal of all things, this happens when we know Him and allow Him to love us.

If we develop a clear view of the narrative and story we are in, then the communities we develop and the practices we engage in will change. Transformation of towns, cities and nations is possible as each person lives out of this narrative and together as communities we live deeply and intentionally for God.

Discussion Questions

As you consider your daily life, who you come into contact with and where you find yourself, think and pray about these questions.

1. Where do you see the consequences of The Fall in your life and surroundings? Where do you see broken relationships with God, ourselves, others and the created order?
2. Imagine what your daily life would look like if all of the relationships we've talked about were restored.
3. In what ways can you, in your family, work and day-to-day life, work to bring restoration to the earth?

Prayer

Father, thank You for Your beautiful story, which brings all things together again through the death and resurrection of your Son, Jesus. I repent of the ways I have lived in brokenness and I look with delight to see what You are doing in the world around me. Thank You for the hope You give us, that this broken world will one day be healed. Help me to move alongside You in Your Mission as You restore the Earth. Teach me how to thrive as the person You have made me to be. Allow me to live with my eyes and heart open to hear Your voice and participate in the building of Your Kingdom.

Notes

Further Resources

On the Mission of God website, you can find more resources created to help communities and small groups earth the theology and tools outlined in this book. These include:

An introductory video
A Sermon Outline
Small Group Notes
“Missio Dei” written by Richard Bradbury

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