

CHAPTER 1 MISSIONAL VS. ATTRACTIVE

“All great missionary movements begin at the fringes of the church, among the poor and the marginalized, and seldom, if ever, at the center.”

- Alan Hirsch, The Forgotten Ways

The seeker model practiced by so many of our churches in the last few decades unintentionally lowered the bar on what it means to make the radical commitment to become a Jesus follower. Some of our superficial theology is the residue of evangelistic methodologies that sold grace at wholesale prices. We cajole people into making decisions for Jesus rather than truthfully challenging people to calculate the cost of following Jesus in a lifestyle of sacrificial service. We invite the uninitiated to become members of a movement they don't even understand without clearly laying out the expectations of the movement's revolutionary leader.

There has been a growing restlessness in the church during the first decade of the 21st century and beyond. The models of the last decades of the 20th century are no longer adequate to address the questions and needs of younger generations. Many of those who are disenchanted with the church, however, have a more positive image of Jesus. Their experience and understanding of the church is counter to Jesus of their expectation. We are perceived as being very unlike Jesus in our priorities, attitudes, politics, and lifestyles. The emergent movement has grown out of this disenchantment by those who are part of the church but feel that the church has neglected Jesus' emphasis on the Kingdom of God and its redemptive influence in the world. The proponents of this movement rightly emphasize the Messiah of Isaiah who will bring God's justice and righteousness to the poor and marginalized. Others in the church refer to the emerging influences as 'missional church', which emphasizes the attempt to reconnect to the apostolic DNA of the original movement. The missional church is actively moving out and engaging the world in the places of greatest need rather than marketing the world into the church. This is what I refer to throughout the book as rediscovering and reclaiming the message and mission of Jesus.

THE KINGDOM ON EARTH

The Jewish people of Jesus' day were expectantly waiting the dawn of the Messianic Kingdom. The prophet Isaiah foretells 'the Year of the Lord's favor.' Jesus reads from this passage in his inaugural message in his hometown of Nazareth. "The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is on me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor ...to comfort all who mourn and provide for those who grieve in Zion." (61:1-3).

This expectant Kingdom was not a disembodied heaven that people would ascend to in the afterlife but a righting or restoration of God's created order on earth. "They will rebuild the ancient ruins and restore the places long devastated; they will renew the ruined cities that have been devastated for generations," Isaiah says. Jesus proclaimed the arrival of this new Kingdom order. His message was clearly focused on the Kingdom of God's present influence in the world—not on going to Heaven when you die.

The church described in the book of Acts (notice that the book is named ACTS and not Doctrines) was continually moving beyond all institutional walls and doctrines to faithfully demonstrate the good news of the kingdom. We read about a visible sacrificial lifestyle that demonstrated a radically different core value. The believers demonstrated a countercultural life that caused those outside of the church to pay serious attention. "All of the believers were together and had everything in common. They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. Everyday they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved" (Acts 2:44-47). They were being a visible demonstration of God's right side up values in an upside down world.

Who we are and why we are here is realized as we live and serve God together in community under the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ. The values of this community are not established by the trends in media, arts, politics, or economics. Those values change with every generation. The values of the kingdom of God are eternal.