

Week of Prayer 2016: Everyone A Missionary Monday— Transforming Mission

The call to mission

When Jesus called his first disciples, it was a call to mission. “Come, follow me,” Jesus said, “and I will send you out to fish for people.” (Matthew 4:19) In Jesus' mind, teaching people how to become disciples was to teach them to how become missionaries. But how are fishermen transformed into divinely empowered witnesses?

From my earliest memories, I have longed to serve God with all my heart. But as I have prayed earnestly to reflect the character of Christ in the world, God has taken me on an unexpected and often challenging journey. Instead of sensing that I am becoming nicer and kinder, I have become increasingly aware of my many weaknesses and my great capacity for sin.

But why would God take my desire for transformation and witness and permit me to encounter what appears to be the very opposite? As we shall see, when Jesus calls us to join Him in His mission, He leads us into a journey of transformation that begins by causing us to feel our deepest need of Him.

Three steps to transformation

I want to show you a process at the core of all spiritual transformation, which therefore provides the foundation of our response to “go and make disciples of all nations” (Matthew 28:19). This process is illustrated at Jesus' baptism which ushered Him into a ministry that turned the world upside down. Luke records, “When all the people were being baptised, Jesus was baptised too. And as he was praying, heaven was opened and the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form like a dove . . .” (Luke 3:21-22a)

Notice three sequential steps in this verse—death, prayer, and the coming of the Holy Spirit—which we will see results in supernaturally empowered mission. Let's unpack these three steps.

Firstly, death—of the sinful self. Death is always at the beginning of transformation because death creates the necessary space for God to reveal Himself.

Death to the sinful self is illustrated by Jesus' water burial. Jesus later described death as a prerequisite to discipleship when He declared, “Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross *daily* and follow me.” (Luke 9:23) Jesus' call to follow Him with a cross is not a call to carry a heavy object that makes life miserable. A cross has only one purpose. Jesus was going to die on a cross, and each of us is called to say with Paul, “I have been crucified with Christ” (Galatians 2:20). Dietrich Bonhoeffer was right when he famously observed, “When Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die.”¹

To be a disciple is to be a missionary. However, to become a missionary, we first have to learn to follow Jesus to the place of daily death—to be offered as “living sacrifices” (Romans 12:1). But I don't do this naturally or eagerly. Consequently, Jesus may lead me along some unexpected and humanly unpleasant paths that create a deeper sense of weakness and sinfulness, encouraging me to yield everything I have, and am, to Him.

Secondly, prayer—for preparation. Recognising there is nothing naturally good in me, I am driven to my knees with urgent prayers for God reveal Himself through me.

As soon as Jesus was baptised “he went up out of the water” (Matthew 3:16), and “as he was praying, heaven was opened . . .” (Luke 3:21). Jesus prayed on the riverbank, but for what? Jesus was praying for preparation for mission.

The Saviour's glance seems to penetrate heaven as He pours out His soul in prayer. Well He knows how sin has hardened the hearts of men, and how difficult it will be for them to discern His mission, and accept the gift of salvation. He pleads with the Father for power to overcome their unbelief, to break the fetters with which Satan has enthralled them, and in their behalf to conquer the destroyer.²

As a broken human being, how can I possibly overcome the power of Satan and the sin ravaging my life? How is it possible that such a frail person—so imperfectly representing the image of Jesus—can become useful for God's cosmic purposes? Only through the arrival of supernatural power from Heaven that comes in response to earnest prayer. “For the daily baptism of the Spirit every worker should offer his

petition to God.”³ And this is exactly what is illustrated next as Jesus receives the Holy Spirit.

Thirdly, the coming, or baptism, of the Holy Spirit—for mission. Empty of self, and dependent on my knees, the Holy Spirit fills me—revealing the character and power of God to others.

What was the result of the descent of the Holy Spirit on Jesus? Luke presents two clues.

The first clue is the following story of Jesus’ temptation. Luke writes that Jesus, “full of the Holy Spirit, left the Jordan and was led by the Spirit into the wilderness, where for forty days he was tempted by the devil.” (Luke 2:1-2) Jesus overcame Satan because He was “full of the Holy Spirit”.

A second clue is the next story. Luke explain that “Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit . . . He was teaching in their synagogues, and everyone praised him.” (Luke 4:14-15) A couple of verses later Jesus explains His own baptism of the Spirit to the synagogue, “The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favour.” (Luke 4:18-19) The baptism of the Holy Spirit enabled Jesus to overcome Satan and proclaim the gospel with divine power.

This baptism of the Holy Spirit is also for you. Matthew, Mark, and Luke all report John the Baptist proclaiming that Jesus “will baptise you with the Holy Spirit . . .” (Luke 3:16, Matthew 3:11, Mark 1:8) In John’s gospel, John the Baptist testifies that “the man on whom you see the Spirit come down and remain is the one who will baptise with the Holy Spirit.” (John 1:33)

Only by Divine power

As a disciple who is called to be missionary, I am utterly dependent on this baptism of the Holy Spirit. It is a truth God has reinforced throughout my life.

When I was 28, I learned that the electricity that makes my heart pump was getting blocked from circulating around my heart walls. Consequently, my heart rate would randomly drop to 40 (and now 32) beats a minute leaving me tired and weak. So I had a pacemaker with a battery implanted. For 20 years I have literally been dependent on external power.

During tests, the nurse interrupts my pacemaker and I immediately feel dizzy and unwell, for my heart does not have enough power by itself. Unfortunately, even as a pastor, I can find myself doing God’s work with my own power for a considerable time before I feel something is wrong. But what is true for me physically is true for us all spiritually. We cannot become transformed disciples, and therefore we cannot authentically be heralds of God’s character and purposes—without a divine power from outside of ourselves.

But as God takes us on a journey to show us that without him we can do nothing (John 15:5), teaching us to die daily to our own agendas and deepening our desire for Him to equip us for mission, Jesus will baptise us daily with the Holy Spirit. Then we will be able to launch into our neighbourhoods with a power that will confound Satan and result in countless transformed lives.

Application Questions

1. Where else in the Bible do you see the same three sequential steps of sacrifice, prayer, and divine fire, resulting in ministry, and what can you learn from these examples?
2. How do these three steps impact both the missionary, and the one reached by the missionary?
3. How do you think being involved in mission deepens the three steps in our lives?
4. What are the consequence for an individual, a church, and the one being reached, if mission is attempted without the missionary being filled with divine power?
5. Why may we find that little happens, even though we ask God to change us, and open opportunities for mission?

All Bible quotations from the NIV. Italics supplied.

¹ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship* (New York, NY: Macmillan, 1959), 99.

² Ellen White, *Desire of Ages* (Oakland, CA: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1898), 111.

³ Ellen White, *Acts of the Apostles* (Boise, ID: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1911), 50.