

How is a Missional Community different from a Bible Study? by JR Woodward

Everybody lives by a script. Everybody is shaped by story. As the people of God living in the world, we are called to inhabit God's story in such a way that we are a blessing to our neighbors. We must immerse ourselves in the scriptures to the point that God's word fills us and shapes us to have the capacity to inhabit His story in the neighborhood for the sake of the neighborhood.

A missional community is a group of people who are enacting God's story in concrete and local ways. They recognize that the scriptures were written to not only help us to believe the right things (orthodoxy) but that we might live in the right way (orthopraxy). They recognize that if we are going to live faithfully in the story of God, we need to develop communal rhythms that develop a discipleship ethos and enable us to live differently. For it is practice that transforms us, not simply knowledge. We live in the information age, where we have more information than we know what to do with. The need of the hour is having communities of people who live more like Christ. To be communities of living epistles, we need to engage in practices, which help us live out our calling, walk with God, incarnate the Good news, pursue wholeness in community and inhabit the scripture.

The primary question that a bible study asks is: What does this mean for us today? There is a rigorous path people take to get to that point, but that is the primary question. The primary question that a missional community asks is: If God's reign were to be fully realized in my neighborhood, what would be different? As they discern the answer to that question, and consider their gifts, talents, passions and resources, their mission is to join God in bringing renewal in a specific way to their neighborhood or a particular people group. To rephrase a well-worn Fredrick Buechner quote, "Calling is where the deep hunger of the missional community meets the deep needs of the neighborhood."

Missional Communities are not satisfied with just studying the scriptures; they seek to bring the story of God to life in a specific neighborhood, to be living letters from Christ to the neighborhood.