LIVING ON MISSION.....LIKE JESUS

THE MISSIONAL CHRISTIAN

Todd Morr

with Seth Emery

This is a sample chapter of the book

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Living on Mission... Like Jesus

Written by

Todd Morr and Seth Emery

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Chapter Seven:

MISSIONAL RELATIONSHIPS

So far, we have explored the inner foundations of a missional life, the shaping of the heart, the help of the Holy Spirit, the identity we carry, the family we belong to, and the need for focus and practical plans. All of these things eventually lead us to where our mission becomes tangible. It is in our relationship with others that God's love is able to be felt, seen and experienced.

Many believers genuinely want to reach others, but they can feel uncertain about what that should look like. They know they should care for and share truth with neighbors, co-workers, relatives and friends, yet they often assume mission must involve dramatic conversations or polished explanations. Because of that, some hesitate altogether, while others spend time with people but wonder why those friendships never seem to move beyond the surface.

As you may have noticed by now, it is not due to a lack of sincerity, but a lack of intentionality.

A relationship becomes missional when our loving actions become full of purpose. We are no longer simply sharing space or filling time with friends. We are paying attention, serving where we can, listening beneath the obvious words, and remaining open to the ways Jesus may want to meet someone through our presence. This kind of relationship never feels forced or unnatural, because it is neither of those. Your friends are exactly that, your friends. They are not projects you need to complete, or stats you measure, but people you know and love.

We need to see and treat people as Jesus modelled. He treats people as valuable image-bearers, people with names and stories.

This does not mean every conversation needs to become spiritual in an obvious sense. However, it means we stop treating relationships casually and start seeing them as

sacred opportunities. God cares deeply about the person in front of you, and He often chooses to express that care through simple acts of attention and kindness.

One of the first changes this intentionality produces is that we begin to carefully observe the people in our lives.

We start to recognise the colleague who always jokes around and has fun, yet is longing to share who they really are. We notice the parent at sports practices who comes across as cheerful but feels exhausted. We become aware of the neighbor who lingers in conversation because home feels empty, or the friend who changes the subject whenever family is mentioned. What once looked like ordinary behaviour often carries a deeper story underneath it.

I once sat with a man who was well-liked by everyone around him. He was quick-witted, always ready with a story, and rarely short of words. Most people assumed he was thriving because he seemed so alive in every room.

However, one afternoon, we caught up for a coffee, and I got to ask what life had been like for him growing up. He smiled at first, then his expression changed. He began speaking about instability, fear and years of trying to become the kind of person nobody would worry about. The humour that made others laugh had become a shield that kept them at a distance. We had known each other for years, yet that day felt like the first time we had truly met.

It was just a small moment over coffee, but I could see that it was a work of the Spirit.

By now you can guess the fruit of small conversations like this. He felt safe enough to be heard, and trust deepened. The friendship changed course because an honest question and space for reflection made room for him to feel seen.

That is often how missional relationships grow. They rarely begin with speeches. It is genuine interest, often in the form of questions and usually over a coffee, in a cafe, around a table or in a relaxed setting like your lounge room.

Most people are surrounded by shallow questions all week long. How was work? Been busy? What have you been up to? Did you watch the game? Those questions have their place, but they usually skim the surface of a life that is longing to be known more deeply.

Better questions open doors.

- What was your family like when you were younger?
- How did you end up here?
- What has shaped you most over the years?
- Has this season been a good one for you?
- What has brought you joy lately?
- What has been weighing on you?

Questions like these do not need to sound formal or rehearsed. They simply arise when we become curious about the person rather than satisfied with the headline version of them. People can usually tell the difference between someone gathering information and someone truly caring.

Knowing good questions is a gift and a skill anyone can learn, but questions are only one side of the coin. Knowing and learning how to listen becomes an even greater gift you can give.

Many people listen only long enough to prepare their next thought. Others interrupt with advice before understanding what has been said. Yet when somebody senses they are being heard without hurry, without judgement, and without being managed, their heart often begins to relax. You have helped to create a safe space for their stories to be heard. Allowing them to share deeper than they expected, because kindness has entered the conversation.

From there, the next question is important.

If someone mentions moving often as a child, ask what that felt like. If they describe work as draining, ask what has made it so heavy. If they mention loss, ask what they miss most. If they talk about success while sounding strangely flat, ask whether it has fulfilled how they hoped it would.

These kinds of questions are signs of attention, and attention is one of the rarest forms of love in the modern world.

Once, my wife was chatting with another mom at our son's first baseball practice. First, they covered several surface-level questions that come up while getting to know someone for the first time. Then she found out that this mother's son was attending the same school our son was considering. Sensing a hint of sadness in her, my wife felt prompted to ask one slightly deeper question about how this boy's school experience had been so far.

Twenty minutes later, this woman had poured out her anguish and anxiety over the bullying her son had endured and the therapy journey he was currently on. It was a precious moment of listening and carrying this woman's burden. Later that evening, my wife shared how thankful she was to have listened to the Spirit's leading in that moment, prompting her to ask that one more question.

As trust grows, your own story also becomes important. A missional relationship should never feel like one person being examined while the other remains hidden. Real friendship moves both ways. We ask… we listen… and we share honestly from our own lives.

When someone speaks about anxiety, you may mention a season when fear pressed hard on you and how the presence of Christ steadied your heart. When someone talks about family pain, you may share your own journey of forgiveness or healing. When someone wonders whether life has meaning, you may gently speak of how you have struggled similarly, and Jesus reordered your sense of purpose.

Faith is felt and becomes believable when it is embodied in a real story rather than delivered as a detached argument.

A friend of mine in Australia recalls a time when asking for help and accepting help opened up opportunities for authentic faith stories to be shared and heard.

> *"There was a neighbour I knew through several brief conversations. We were friendly, but little more than that. Over time there became some natural ways we were able to invite him more into our world. It was pretty basic, actually. I knew he*

was in the building industry, so I just asked him for some advice with a practical job I was working on, and if he knew a welder. It turned out he could weld, and he offered to come over.

Later, he needed some design work done for his business so he asked me for a hand, and we ended up having a number of little back-and-forth "helping moments". We could have just left it there as work connections. But I felt the Spirit encouraging me to find a natural way we could invite him and his wife over for a very low-key afternoon catch-up, drinks and BBQ.

So my wife and I started to pray for an opportunity. See, it has now become strange to invite people over for dinner in Australia; people freak out when you ask them. So we were praying for a natural, unforced excuse.

One Saturday, he called me up and asked if I needed a hand with a specific project... I didn't need a hand, but didn't tell him, and accepted his offer. He was over for a couple of hours, and as he was leaving, he began speaking about regret, disappointment and the ache of having built a life that looked stronger from the outside than it felt within.

By this time it was late afternoon, and I asked if he wanted to stay for a BBQ. He texted his wife, and she came over too. It wasn't strange in the slightest; it felt right to ask him, and God made a way we could naturally share a meal.

That opportunity hadn't come together because of some great strategy, but because trust had been formed through years of repeated, ordinary acts of welcome."

This is why patience is essential.

Some believers become discouraged when a person has not moved toward faith after a few invitations or several thoughtful conversations. Yet people are not machines that respond on command. They carry years of assumptions, wounds, fears, habits and unanswered questions. Many need time before they are ready to explore spiritual things honestly, and some need even longer before they can trust the people speaking about these spiritual things.

Seeds often work in secret long before anything visible appears. Relationships can be much the same.

Your responsibility is not to force outcomes, but to remain faithful in patient kindness.

It is also worth remembering that missional relationships flourish beautifully in a community setting. Sometimes the most meaningful environment for a person exploring faith is not a formal meeting, but a shared table where several believers and a few curious friends eat together, laugh together and speak naturally. In those settings, people witness how Christians handle one another. They see patience, generosity, humility and warmth. They hear faith spoken from different personalities and different experiences. What might feel threatening in a one-on-one setting can feel inviting in the life of a healthy group.

I have watched guarded people soften simply because they spent enough time among believers who genuinely loved one another.

This is one reason small groups matter so much. They can become a front door into the kingdom, a place where people encounter the atmosphere and heart of Jesus before they fully understand the message of Jesus.

Through all of this, prayer remains essential.

Pray before conversations, asking for discernment and love. Pray during conversations, quietly asking for wisdom, restraint or courage. Pray afterwards, entrusting the person to God, rather than carrying the burden yourself.

Many believers express that they never know what to say. Often the deeper invitation is not to say more, but to love well, listen deeply and trust the Spirit to guide the moments that matter and give us the words we might need.

Missional relationships are built through consistency, hospitality, sincerity and the willingness to keep showing up with a heart that cares.

So look again at the people already around you. Consider the friend whose story you have never really heard, the neighbor you only know in passing, the co-worker whose

smile hides fatigue, or the parent you greet each week without ever slowing down long enough to share a conversation.

You do not need dozens of relationships like this to begin. Start with one or two. Learn names. Remember details. Follow up on what was shared. Invite people in. Make room in your calendar. Ask thoughtful questions. Offer honest friendship.

The kingdom of God often advances through moments the world would overlook: a lingering conversation after dinner, a walk taken slowly, coffee that turns unexpectedly sincere, a question asked at the right time, a table where someone feels safe enough to tell the truth.

Never underestimate those moments. Many people meet Jesus there.

Simple Next Step:

Identify one or two co-workers, parents from school or acquaintances you already know in passing, and intentionally make space this month to learn a little more about their life. Don't rush past them or keep to shallow conversation, but slow down, be present and ask slightly deeper, more meaningful questions (as seen in this chapter).

Notice how many opportunities arise and how the relationship flourishes more over the next few months.

We encourage you to watch this short video [Scan QR] with others and download the FREE accompanying Workbook [Link to PDF] to discuss, pray, and plan.