

Surprise The World

Week 1 ~ Introduction - Chapter 2

Introduction

A question you may be asking is, “*Why are we reading and discussing this book, at this time?*” Good question. I encourage you to always ask “*Why...?*” to those who serve as leaders of the congregation. We should always be able to give you a reasonable answer/explanation. You may or may not like the explanation, or agree with us—which is fine—but we always want to be able to give you a thoughtful answer.

So let me tell you why we’re looking at this book during this season of our congregation. First, it fits with what we’ve been talking about all year...our year of Becoming. You may recall that earlier in the year we introduced the idea of:

- Experiencing God like Mystics
- Connecting in community like Monastics
- Engaging the world like Missionaries

Everything we’ve read, discussed, and acted upon this year can be traced back to one or more of these ideas. The hope being that, as we apprentice under Jesus together, we will Become the sort of people who, among other things, surprise the world, like Jesus did, with love, joy, peace, and hope that intrigues them.

Second, the Church is meant to be the public relations department, so to speak, of the Kingdom of God, testifying to the reign of King Jesus. We do this through our proclamation and demonstration of the Gospel; through our worship of Jesus as the world’s rightful King; through our life together as followers of Jesus, offering a glimpse of heaven to the world in our collective life; and by how we interact with the world around us...showing that a different life kind of life is available.

That all sounds well and good...but also rather daunting. As Michael Frost says in the introduction, “*Surely there is a way we can see the church as ‘an army of ordinary people,’ sent out to announce and demonstrate the reign of God through Christ, without expecting ourselves to be something we’re not or something less than we should be.*” This little book, *Surprise The World*, will offer us practical steps, easy-to-follow practices, that will hopefully become ingrained habits that help us establish a deeper relationship with Jesus, and stronger relationships inside and outside the Body of Christ.

- *What ideas/images do you associate with the word “missionary”? What thoughts/feelings do you experience with that term?*

- *What is your reaction to the concept/idea that as a Christian you are, in fact, a missionary? (If that word has too much baggage for you, what term would you prefer instead that stays true to our calling?)*

The terms mission and missionary come from the Latin word “missio” which simply means “sent”. The idea of “sentness” is very important Biblically and theologically. God “sent” Jesus. The Father and the Son “sent” the Spirit. Christ “sends” His followers into the world to share the Gospel/Good News. God is a missionary God thus we are missional people—aka missionaries. While it’s true that some people over the past two millennia have done missionary work in very troublesome ways, it remains that we are sent people with an important message to share and embody.

Note to discussion leaders: there are also discussion questions in the back of the book you may want to explore and utilize as well.

Chapter 1 ~ Living “Questionable” Lives

- *When was the last time someone asked you why you live as you do? Or asked you what made you tick because they were so intrigued, curious, interested by how you live? (Or simply asked why you are a Christian?)*
- *Did you find the distinction the author made between “gifted evangelists” and “evangelistic believers” helpful? Explain.*

Frost shares a bit about how the early Christians in the Roman empire outshined the government in areas like philanthropy and hospitality, and by turning social norms upside-down as they reflected the upside-down Kingdom. The really interesting thing about this is that it doesn’t seem to have been a “program” the early Christians employed, rather it was simply how they lived their lives, how they lived out the values of the Kingdom. The way I like to say it is that the Church should be the government’s biggest competitor when it comes to taking care of people. This will require that we stretch our imaginations a bit and think outside the box, both individually and collectively.

The early Christians were committed to following the way of Jesus (living out the Sermon on the Mount, for example), and committed to ordering their lives together around Jesus (Good Politics). They understood that a new reality (the Kingdom of God) was at play and lived consistently/accordingly to it.

- *When people look at the Church/Christians today, do they see evidence of a different reality or do they see people who are caught up in the same old world system, values, priorities? Explain.*
- *What do you think it would take to pique the interest, intrigue, curiosity of those around us that might cause them to question us as to why we are as we are?*

This might be a good point to pause and offer a point of clarification on the term “evangelical”. This is a term that has acquired a fair amount of negative baggage over the past half century or so, and for understandable reasons. It might be tempting to avoid the use of the word altogether. But, perhaps, with some clarification we don’t need to throw the baby out with the bath water.

The more Biblical, theological, and historical roots of the term “evangelical” are really quite good and positive. The sheer fact that you and I have heard and responded to the Gospel and are following Jesus two thousand years after His physical, earthly ministry is thanks to the evangelical impulse inherent in the Christian faith. At its heart is the sharing/proclaiming the Good News of Jesus (literally, Gospel means Good News, which comes from the Greek word “euangelion”). So in its most positive sense “evangelical” refers to being informed by and motivated by the Gospel, with a desire for others to have the opportunity to hear it and respond to it.

The contemporary, cultural, socio-political use of the term “evangelical” is more problematic. The problem primarily being the attempt to use governmental/political power to advance the Gospel, which generally tends to be a very selective subset of the Gospel (perhaps even a bastardized gospel), that betrays the way of Jesus, thus tarnishing the beautiful message we have to share with the world...which actually ends up hurting the overall effort of sharing the Gospel. It is completely understandable why we would want to distance ourselves from this.

So if “evangelical” is a problem for you, perhaps “missional” would be easier to embrace. As the author points out, “missional” is anything we say or do that alerts people to the reign of God.

Here’s a few links to videos you might find helpful and informative on this topic:

<https://www.holypost.com/post/what-is-an-evangelical-holy-post-video>

<https://bibleproject.com/explore/video/gospel-kingdom/>

<https://bibleproject.com/explore/video/euangelion-gospel/>

Chapter 2 ~ A New Set of Habits

We are not looking to create new programs or initiatives as much as we’re looking to establish rhythms and habits that shape us into the way and likeness of Jesus. Our habits shape our lives more powerfully than anything else. What we truly “believe” is best seen by/in our habits.

- *How do your habits, individually, and our habits, collectively, testify to the reign of King Jesus?*

Frost says, *“The trick is to develop habits that unite us together as believers, while also propelling us into the lives of others. We also need habitual practices that don’t deplete our energy and burn us out, but rather reenergize us, replenishing our reserves and connecting us*

more deeply to Jesus.” The habits outlined in this book are designed to help us Become more generous, more hospitable, more Spirit-led, more Christ-like, more sent/missional.

- *At just a cursory glance of the habits (see page 22), which one excites you the most to develop, and which causes you hesitation?*
- *How are you different because you are a Christian? How has the reality of Jesus and His Kingdom affected your values, priorities, attitudes, behaviors, and the direction/trajectory of your life?*
- *Describe a good habit of yours...one that’s really benefiting you, and maybe others. Share about a bad habit you’d like to change...how is it negatively affecting you, and maybe others?*

You may recall that we started the year discussing “*Sacred Rhythms*”. As we head into the final quarter of this year, we are sort of coming full circle. Ruth Haley Barton helped us explore more internally focused habits, and now Michael Frost is going to help us explore more externally focused habits. Our habits are crucial in our journey of Becoming...we Become what we habitually do.

Soul Training Exercise ~ Examining our Habits

We all have practices, rhythms, habits that give form and shape to our lives. Some of them are likely very positive and healthy...others, maybe not so much. This week’s invitation is to spend some time inventorying our habits.

First, take note of everything we do regularly. Which habits are unconscious, you just do them without much thought...almost like you’re on autopilot? Which habits are conscious and intentional...you do them regularly, but you are mindful/purposeful about them?

Second, evaluate how your habits are affecting you. Are they helping you or hurting you? Are they having a positive or negative affect on you? Also consider how they may be affecting others around you.

Third, what would you like to change? Either a bad habit you want to stop, or a new area you want to develop that will require some new practices/habits?

Lastly, and this is key, share with someone what you’re thinking, feeling, discovering through this examination process. Life is sweeter when shared with others.