

What If You Were a Missionary?

Imagine if you were a missionary who had just arrived in your area from overseas. How would you go about reaching out into the community in which you live now? How would you do church?

The culture where I live has changed a lot in the last 30 years. But most churches haven't. Sometimes I wonder if that is why they seem to be getting smaller and smaller, and more and more filled with older people.

I imagine that a newly arrived missionary would start by examining the local culture. There are some great missionary stories which came about when the missionary came up with a way to present the gospel in a way which was culturally relevant and easily understood by the people he was trying to reach. "Peace Child" by Don Richardson, the Hudson Taylor story, ... I even heard of one tribe which was reached powerfully by Matthew 1, (the genealogy of Yeshua). In that tribe status was earned by being able to cite your ancestry back many generations. When they realised that Yeshua could trace his right back to the beginning of time, they all gave him great status and the whole tribe became Christian.

What aspect of your culture, or more specifically the culture of the society around you, can be exploited to present the gospel in such a relevant and meaningful way? So often we approach things from our own cultural perspective, but we should be trying to understand our audience, not ourselves. There is nothing cultural about the gospel, so we should be willing to make any part of our own culture expendable, and look for ways to exploit the culture of those we are trying to reach.

So, you've thought about how to present the message. How are you going to present "church"? Obviously we know that church is the people, and the relationships between them. And that transcends culture as we love one another with true, genuine love, and we live together as a community. Sharing. Caring. In fact, proving that we are Yeshua's disciples by the way we love one another. (John 13:35-36). But somewhere along the line we're going to have to meet together. How are you going to do that in a culturally fitting way? Keeping as much of the host culture as you can, (to make them comfortable, and in fact to give it the flavour it should have), but rejecting whatever parts of the culture run against the teachings of the Bible. As the newly arrived, but now culturally aware missionary... how is doing church going to look?

So, now... how does this compare with how you do church now?

I know for some people, they are already doing church the way they imagine missionaries would. But if they're not the same... is it time to change something? And if God has led you to realise that they aren't the same, and something needs to change. Do you think he might have sent you here to bring that change about? Even if you're just the catalyst to get it all started.

Fact is... you ARE a missionary. And God HAS sent you to where you are. He specifically chose you to make a difference where he has sent you. "As you go, make disciples." (Matthew 28)...

What if you were a missionary, and you were making a difference, and your church was making the most of the culture where God has established it. How great would that be.