The Missional Quest: Becoming a Church of the Long Run

By Lance Ford & Brad Brisco

Reviewed by Darren Cronshaw

The Missional Quest helps make local church mission principles accessible and practical, especially for helping existing churches transition in more missional directions. The first section “Fostering a Missional Mindset” is one chapter of theological realignment about God (as a missionary God), church (as a body that is sent rather than a place where things happen) and mission (which is incarnational rather than extracultural). This is the “why” of the quest. It is a masterful explanation, including ways to overcome the “either-or” dichotomy of incarnational versus extracultural and experiencing the joy missio Dei participation or doing mission with God.

The second section and bulk of the book is a further eight chapters on missional practices – the practical implications about “so what?” and “what now?” These are the practices of a missional people. The book is at its best in unpacking Ford and Brisco leg-footing in discussing how to nourish inner formation and overcome the addictive disease of being crazily busy; facilitate the missionary formation of everyone in your church and celebrating their stories; pursue hospitality and resettle the home and workplace: engage and defend “third places” for our relationally impoverished neighbourhoods; transform our small groups into groups of missionaries cheering each other on, and walk away from professional clergy expectations and relentlessly pursue followership, servanthood and “be with me” discipleship. These steps, they suggest, are very simple, if not always easy.

My first favourite part of the book was the practicalities of making neighbourhood connections. Not everyone in our church can be a church planter, the authors admit, but everyone has the potential to be a good neighbour. Ultimately, the first most important part of being missional is not visiting a neighbourhood but moving in and being present. The book outlines good exercises for getting to know the neighbours around us and seeking the welfare of our city. It challenged me to meet more of the neighbours in my street and to get to know them at deeper levels, and to go out of my way to meet the neighbouring shopkeepers and neighbours of our church building and neighbouring universities. I want to look for the “hidden treasures” in my parish block, freshly explore what is going on in my context, and adapt and champion our local shopping trip.

“The tendency for most people is to view our neighbourhood and city as little more than the place they live in. It’s a utilitarian place to serve them as they pursue their dreams. . . . . Life takes on new meaning when we make conscious and committed decisions – on a daily basis – to seek the best for our neighbourhoods and cities. We don’t look just to take from our communities. We aim to make our communities” (p.93).

If only take one line from the book, it would be that one. “We don’t look just to take from . . . . We aim to make our community”.

My second favourite part of the book is its practical congregational frameworks for missional living and mobilization. For example, I love their acronym that they use for both accountability and liturgy, encouraging individuals every week, and church gatherings when they occur to include lots of LIGHT. Listen to the Holy Spirit. Invite others to share a meal, Give a blessing. Hear from the gospels, and Take inventory of the day. That’s worth the price of the book on its own.

The Missional Quest offers guidelines for moving church beyond being about songs and a talk. It paints an imaginative-grabbing vision and outlines practical steps to becoming a committed group of aspiring missionaries who bring light to their communities. It invites us to account to one another with our calendar, chequebook and co-missioning. It concludes with a call to make disciple-making and community influence the most important scorecard.

“It is possible for church leaders to develop impressive statistics in relation to buildings, crowds, budgets and the like. All while they’re losing the game when it comes to affecting their communities and cities and advancing the kingdom of God” (169).

Lance Ford is a pastor and church planter, and co-author (with Alan Hirsch) of Right Here, Right Now: Everyday Mission for Everyday People. Brad Brisco is Church Planting Strategist for a network of churches in Kansas City and did doctoral research on transitioning existing congregations in missional directions. Ford and Brisco are co-founders of KC Central and the Centralized Conference, serve on the national leadership team of Force Mission Training Network, and together also wrote Missional Essentials: A Guide for Experiencing God’s Mission in Your Life (Kansas City: House Studio, 2012). They are both committed to coaching and resource church planters and missional leaders, and The Missional Quest is a valuable resource for churches and followers of Jesus everywhere.