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A Good Missionary

Contextualization from Acts 17:16-34

What is a missionary?

(Def:) A missionary is a Christian who is SENT to a specific people group to share the Gospel with them and disciple the ones who become Christians.

How do they do this? Contextualization, which is when a person...

- Studies the culture.
- Learns the language.
- Connects with others through the culture & language. (You live in their world, speak their language, get familiar with their customs and translate the Gospel to it and teach Scripture from it.)
- Share the Gospel in the culture & language.

Now when most people think of a missionary, they think of the missionary that travels overseas to do this in Africa or the Middle East.

HOWEVER, every Christian is a missionary.

Why? Well, first off, remember, that's the example of Jesus.

Jesus was SENT as a missionary to us.

- Incarnation (John 1)

Jesus learned our language, used our culture, became one of us, acted like us, assumed our daily routines by getting a job working as a carpenter, used illustrations through parables with our way of living (farming), government system, family situations, etc. at the time.

- Eating & Drinking with sinners, SENT for the sick not the healthy (Matthew 9)
- Woman in Samaria (John 4)
- High Priestly Prayer (John 17) Jesus uses the word "SENT" seven times in his prayer for Himself & us in the garden.
17 Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth. 18 As you sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. 19 And for their sake I consecrate myself, that they also may be sanctified in truth. ~John 17:17-19
- First appearance after Resurrection (John 20) SENT
- Great Commission before His ascension (Matt. 28) SENT/Go & make disciples

Jesus was sent not only as a Savior but as a missionary of that message of salvation, and now He sends us. That's pretty much the book of Acts. The story of how the SENT church started a revolution that turned the world & lives still today upside down.

"Every Christian is either a missionary or imposter." –C.H. Spurgeon

It is so important for me, for you, for our church and honestly every proclaimed Christian to ditch the excuses and to think, live and share the Gospel as a missionary would. Especially in an increasingly Post-Christian country. This story in Acts is one of the greatest examples of missional thinking, living and preaching. Let's look at what happens BEFORE the apostle Paul contextualizes the Gospel as a good missionary. Before a word comes out of his mouth two things happen.

A good missionary is burdened for the people they are SENT to. (v. 16)

16 Now while Paul was waiting for them at Athens, his spirit was provoked within him as he saw that the city was full of idols.

When Paul first entered Athens, he was burdened by the great need of a people who had unparalleled philosophy, literature, architecture, art and education but did not have what mattered most, Jesus. He was troubled and it says his spirit was provoked as he saw the numerous idols that littered the land. This is similar to Jesus' spirit when Jesus looked over the large crowds that started gathering around him in Matthew 9.

35 And Jesus went throughout all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction. 36 When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. 37 Then he said to his disciples, "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; 38 therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest." -Matthew 9:35-38

Are you burdened for those around you? Do you have compassion for the lost people in your life around you? This is the true start to sharing the Gospel with people around you.

A good missionary contextualizes the Gospel. (v. 17-31)

17 So he reasoned in the synagogue with the Jews and the devout persons, and in the marketplace every

day with those who happened to be there. 18 Some of the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers also conversed with him. And some said, “What does this babbling wish to say?” Others said, “He seems to be a preacher of foreign divinities”—because he was preaching Jesus and the resurrection. 19 And they took him and brought him to the Areopagus, saying, “May we know what this new teaching is that you are presenting? 20 For you bring some strange things to our ears. We wish to know therefore what these things mean.” 21 Now all the Athenians and the foreigners who lived there would spend their time in nothing except telling or hearing something new.

How does the apostle Paul contextualize the Gospel here?

Remember that it was the Apostle Paul’s custom or tradition to preach the Gospel first to the Jews and then to the Gentiles, and like we saw last week, Paul began with the Old Testament Scriptures as common ground to reason with them. He’d use common theology, the Jew’s prophets, their language and teaching style to prove that Jesus was the fulfillment of all that their Scriptures had promised and for which they had eagerly waited. But as we see from verse 17, he didn’t just stay in the synagogue but also would go out to the Athens marketplace where he would employ different methods and language to convey the same Gospel. This is important to notice because we must do the same thing. Athens had been home to famous philosophers like Socrates, Plato, Aristotle and Alexander the Great, and it possessed a proud heritage as one of the greatest cultural centers in the history of the world. The Agora marketplace where he first started sharing the Gospel was the place where all of the sub-cultures would meet. Vendors, farmers, healers, magicians, performers, philosophers...they all collected in the open courtyard that served as a gathering place for the city, the easiest place to draw a crowd. The Athenians were intrigued by this Jesus that Paul was talking about and so they brought him before the Areopagus (which is latin for Mars Hill) where there were up to 30 additional “judges” who guarded Athenian philosophy by evaluating any new ideas brought into the city. So the apostle Paul preached the Gospel at the same place Socrates has to defend his own teachings and philosophy 450 years before. Courageously, he began by respectfully establishing common ground with his hearers so he could work from their culture to the Scriptures. The opposite of what he’d do with the Jews since they were already established in their firm beliefs of the Holy Scriptures. For US: What works in the Bible belt won’t work in Boston, MA. This is also why we need to love God with ALL of our heart, soul and mind. Because we must USE ALL of our Heart, Soul AND Mind to do this right.

How do we CONTEXTUALIZE the Gospel as good missionaries?

1. Help Reveal the False Gods & Spiritual Longings of the culture. (v. 22-23, 27)

22 So Paul, standing in the midst of the Areopagus, said: “Men of Athens, I perceive that in every way you are very religious. 23 For as I passed along and observed the objects of your worship, I found also an altar with this inscription: ‘To the unknown god.’ What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you. 27 that they should seek God, and perhaps feel their way toward him and find him. Yet he is actually not far from each one of us,

He noted that the Athenians were a spiritual people as he (v. 22). But he also noted that their spirituality did not include an understanding of who God is. Like culture today, the Athenians were very spiritual yet in their ignorance embraced pluralism and a wide range of false gods. Athens had over 30,000 public statues, in addition to the countless private statues in homes, all dedicated to various gods because 600 years before, Athens was struck with a plague and not knowing which “god” was punishing them, an influential poet named Epimenides allowed sheep to roam the city so that they would lay down next to temples in hope that one of them could find the right temple of that god to be sacrificed. But this plan was foiled, for most of the sheep laid down wherever they wanted, nowhere near many of the temples, and so the Athenians assumed that there were many “unknown gods” they still didn’t have temples for, they created these statues saying that, and then sacrificed the sheep there in hope of appeasing those unknown gods.

We need to figure this out & help reveal such things. All are created to worship. All long for something more. It’s actually not too hard to point out.

Spiritual Longings of People: -Tim Keller (Center Church)

- 1. The appeal to come to God out of fear of judgment and death.**
- 2. The appeal to come to God out of a desire for release from the burdens of guilt and shame.**
- 3. The appeal to come to God out of appreciation for the “attractiveness of truth.”**
- 4. The appeal to come to God to satisfy unfulfilled existential longings.**
- 5. The appeal to come to God for help with a problem.**
- 6. The appeal to come to God simply out of a desire to be loved.**

**To learn more about each of these longings and how to share the Gospel with them, you can ask Pastor Erik about MULTIPLIERS TRAINING.*

2. Proclaim the One, True God. (v.24-27)

24 The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in temples made by man, 25 nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything. 26 And he made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place, 27 that they should seek God, and perhaps feel their way toward him and find him. Yet he is actually not far from each one of us,

Paul shared with the Athenians that God is the creator who is separate from creation (in contrast to Athenians' pantheism) and as the king who rules over all of heaven and earth (in contrast to their belief that certain gods ruled over certain geographic regions) that God does not live in temples built by men and that He is not dependent on people (like their Greek gods). He shared how this One, True God was not distant like their gods but came down to earth to make a way to Him where their thousands of gods who they believed could not be known. He preached hard truth to them. Hard yet necessary truths because they needed to see that there is Truth that can be known and followed, and it comes from the One, True God.

Truth is attractive when it's held up and compared to lies, manipulation, broken promises, deceit and hypocrisy. Absolute Truth needs to be established in a Fake News World. In a world that doubts all types of authority. In a world that questions everything and would rather hear things that they wanted to hear in the first, whether it's good or bad, lies or truthful. Tim Keller once said...

"Contextualization is not – as is often argued – 'giving people what they want to hear.' Rather, it is giving people the Bible's answers, which they may not at all want to hear, to questions about life that people in their particular time and place are asking, in language and forms they can comprehend, and through appeals and arguments with force they can feel even if they reject them." –Tim Keller

And I know people associate TRUTH with BOREDOM these days, especially in the church and that's sad. In fact, a little later in Keller's *Center Church* book, he explains

"A boring sermon is boring because it fails to bring the truth into the listeners' daily life and world. It does not connect Biblical truth to the hopes, narratives, fears and errors of people in that particular time and place. It does not help the listener to even want Christianity to be true. In other words, the sermon fails at contextualizing the biblical truth for the hearers." –Tim Keller

3. Use the Culture to Reach the Culture. (v. 28-31)

28 for "In him we live and move and have our being";

as even some of your own poets have said,

"For we are indeed his offspring."

29 Being then God's offspring, we ought not to think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone, an image formed by the art and imagination of man.

30 The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent, 31 because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead."

Here Paul embraces the aspects of their culture that were helpful to his mission. In v. 28 Paul quotes Epimenides, the poet who came up with the stupid sheep plan, **"In him we live and move and have our being"** talking about Zeus, and then he quotes the famous Greek poet Aratus talking about Zeus over 300 years before, **"For we are indeed his offspring."**

In so doing, Paul affirmed some of their spiritual concepts but showed that they were wrongly applied to Zeus and should instead be applied to Jesus in v. 29-31.

In our day, this would be similar to unearthing partial truths about God from a culture's film, music, comedy, sports, literature, theater, philosophy, economics, medicine, or politics, and working from those truths to the Truth of the Gospel as the ultimate answer to all human questions and cultural problems.

Some people can look at this as just "lifestyle evangelism" something you may have heard at Center Point Church because it's one of our core values.

But we really want to go beyond that. We want you to contextualize the Gospel to the different sub-cultures you're sent to in lifestyle evangelism as great missionaries like St. Patrick, Lesslie Newbigin, Francis Schaeffer, and ERLC President, Russell Moore does today along with countless international missionaries that still do it today. Again,

What is Contextualization?

- Study their culture.
- Learn their language.
- Connect with them through their culture & language. (You live in their world, speak their language, get familiar with their customs and translate the Gospel to it and teach Scripture from it.)
- Share the Gospel in their culture & language

Look at what Paul says in: **1 Corinthians 9:19-23**

19 For though I am free from all, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win more of them

20 To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews. To those under the law I became as one under the law (though not being myself under the law) that I might win those under the law. 21 To those outside the law I became as one outside the law (not being outside the law of God but under the law of Christ) that I might win those outside the law. 22 To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all people, that by all means I might save some. 23 I do it all for the sake of the gospel, that I may share with them in its blessings.

How did the apostle Paul & people he influenced do this here? He said he became like...

Jews– These were God’s people but were very hardened toward Jesus and would not accept Him as their anticipated Messiah, Savior. So Paul would use O.T passages and Messianic prophecies to share the Gospel with them.

People under the law– Timothy was asked to be circumcised at the age of 30 to build a bridge with those “under the law” who would not listen to him or others unless they went through such procedure. Talk about commitment to reach people.

People who don’t have the law– These were the Gentiles, pagans, heathens, philosophers, romans, Greeks, that he would found a way to connect. This is what the apostle Paul is doing in the above account on Mars Hill.

The Weak– These were people that have a hard time understanding the Gospel so he would connect and share in the simplest of terms.

All things to all men– As you can see from the above sub-cultures, Paul was willing to be all things to all men to reach them in their different sub-cultures.

What if we had that type of attitude and mindset as a church?

While serving in student ministry, this is why I would half-jokingly tell teenagers I was a preppy, thuggish, punk rock, former jock, knowledgeable of all things pop culture missionary.

Preppy– I would share stories and illustrations of how much I wanted to be in the “Popular” crowd and how I attained it my Junior and Senior year in High School but in the end saw how much it didn’t matter in the end. How worthless it was.

Thuggish – With certain teens who grew up in rough neighborhoods and with tough family environments, I’d share how I’m from the ninth most dangerous city per capita, Youngstown, Ohio and how I’ve witnessed two drive-by shootings, grew up with an abusive, alcoholic dad and a brother who dealt drugs and even started down that road a bit myself before becoming a Christian.

Punk Rock– I’ve always loved rock music and connected pretty easily with band scene kids and would take them to concerts like Warped Tour, BUT would make them evaluate and analyze worldviews of lyrics between the two types of bands we’d see. What was redemptive in certain songs? How did people respond to the different lyrics while there?

Former Jock– I was the FCA Chaplain for Henry Clay High School and would use previous football stories and experiences to connect with them and the football knowledge I continue to keep up with.

Pop Culture– From the MTV VMAs to the Oscars, Netflix to Billboard charts. I’d keep up with and study the most popular shows, movies, songs, artists, books, etc.

It’s why now I’m a Big Blue Nation, wannabe dad coach, coffee snob, still knowledgeable of all things pop culture missionary.

This is what the above missionaries I mentioned did or are doing with the culture around them.

St. Patrick: St. Patrick used culture around him to reach the Irish barbarians who previously kidnapped him and where others said it was impossible to reach them. St. Patrick used their bar songs and Irish folklore to connect and contextualize, causing an entire pagan culture to become predominantly Christian.

Lesslie Newbigin: Lesslie Newbigin was a missionary to India before coming back to Post-Christian Great Britain and realizing he had to study and use the post-Christian culture he was now surrounded by in the same way he studied Buddhism and Hinduism to reach people in India.

Francis Schaeffer: Francis Schaeffer gave Christian perspectives on existentialism, the movies of Fellini and Bergman, the lyrics of Led Zeppelin, and the art of Jackson Pollock in an era when “Christian college students were not allowed to go to Disney movies” and therefore gained an entire generation of evangelical Christians in the 70’s.

Russell Moore: As the current president of the ERLC (Southern Baptists’ Ethics & Religious Liberties Commission), Russell Moore blogs often about current culture such as shows “This is Us,” “13 reasons why,” *Wonder Woman*, etc.

**To learn more about contextualization and how to share the Gospel in this way, you can ask Pastor Erik about MULTIPLIERS TRAINING.*

Now before trying to do this with the world around you, you must first know what Contextualizing is not.

Contextualization is NOT:

- **Being influenced by Sinful Culture**

Sadly, with good motives, some ministries and churches go way too far with this in efforts of being relevant. I'll never forget when a high school parachurch ministry tried to reach lost kids by having a MTV Jersey Shore party encouraging high schoolers to dress up as their favorite guido or Italian club girl. It was bad. Real bad. No one paid attention to the Gospel because every guy kept looking at the girls who dressed up as Jwoww & Snookie with their boobs hanging out. The ministry admitted afterward, "What were we thinking?"

There still needs to be a certain separation. Consecration is important and certain aspects of truth and holiness will draw people to Christ just as much as knowing and using the culture. We can't "BE" the sinful parts of culture but need to speak into and call those parts into repentance.

- **Loving the World**

Being a missionary in this way can be very hard for the temptation of loving the world that you're trying to reach, especially with your own sinful desires & flesh that you struggle with. Satan uses the world mixed with our desires to tempt us to go back to the sin that God saved and freed us from. I'm often reminded of the Scriptures Proverbs 26:11 and 2 Peter 2:22 where they illustrate a dog who goes back to its vomit. Satan sadly molds that vomit to look attractive again for many Christians in certain aspects of culture that is sinfully tempting to them.

- **Copying the Culture**

In attempts to use or be culture, we've sometimes just cheesily copied the culture and it's why we're often mocked in the world.

I remember becoming a new Christian in ninth grade and being a little embarrassed of the new world I walked into, as much as I loved my new church family and community. I was taken to a Christian bookstore by a Youth Group leader where I found a big poster that said, "If you used to like Rage Against The Machine & Pantera you'll like Skillet." "If you used to like 2pac & Puff Daddy you will like Cross Movement & KJ-52." They even had one that said, "If you used to like Backstreet Boys & N*Sync then you will like Plus One," and none of those "Christian versions" of those bands sounded anything like their worldly comparisons. I noticed cheesy knockoff t-shirts and saw the "Jesus Junk." The world has Batman, Spiderman & Superman, Christians have Bible Man, Almighty Heroes or E Force (creator of GI Joes) with six pack Moses in a cape and Queen Esther in a tight leotard. However, the creator of such toys never made a Jesus because he said parents want Jesus, kids don't. Yikes. In fact, I'm reminded of a quote by the creator of VeggieTales when reflecting on such cheesiness.

"When you are born again, God gives you a new heart and a new opportunity. He doesn't necessarily give you a new taste." –Phil Vischer

So all of a sudden I realized something. I'm in this alternative, bizzaro world called "the Christian bubble." It's real you guys and thinking, living, and speaking like a missionary really does pop it.

However I will admit, most who live in this world have good intentions and a good heart. In fact, let me encourage you for a moment. I'd rather have a cheesy Christian trying their best to reach people than a "wordly" Christian who goes too far into the world and sin. Also a lot of what is created in this Christian bubble is meant to protect Christians and I'm sorry but I have to at least appreciate that type of heart. You know who is going to hurt you more than anything else in the world? Satan and the things he deceives you with in the world. As a shepherd pastor, I'm going to try to protect you from that as well. God does. Parents do. That's a good thing. Yes, overprotection can be just as dangerous and deceptive. But here's the thing: I understand that the intentions are good.

Lastly, A lot of you are not even in this Christian bubble but you're accused of being sheltered, naïve and ignorant which other people still just call a Christian bubble. In fact, you do many things they do, watch similar things, listen to similar things but when you don't participate in sinful things or things that God has convicted you of... BOOM. Christian bubble. Sheltered.

Please don't get offended. I don't want to take too many potshots at Christians who do this because at least they're doing something. But please trust me, the world notices. Something is not always better than nothing if it becomes an unneeded stumbling block or unnecessary hindrance to the Gospel. Great heart and great motives but in the end, it's a bad missionary.

But still, I've noticed that this really scares other Christians, especially parents. How can we still look holy and value holiness? Be in the world but not of the world like Jesus prayed for us in John 17?

We must know how to approach culture when studying culture: I use this model that I saw many other great missiologists use early in the start of the Acts 29 church planting network. We have 3 options of discernment in approaching culture.

- **Receive**– There are things in culture that are part of God's common grace to all people that a Christian can simply receive. This is why, for example, I typed this on a Macbook computer, I often teach from an iPad and I don't have to look for an expressly Christian computer or communication format.

For example, I can receive instruments in music, I can receive technology if I don't make it my master and I can receive other things in culture as gifts from God in common grace.

- **Reject**– There are things in culture that are always sinful and never beneficial. Some of these things are universal and need to be rejected by every person. Some things need to be rejected for the reason of one's own

spiritual conviction and conscience. You may be too weak and it may be too tempting for you to watch or listen to things in culture. Therefore you must reject them.

One universal example is pornography, which has no redeeming value and must be rejected by every Christian. A guy can't say, "I'm just watching this to see what most guys struggle with so I can tell them how to stop watching porn." NOPE. Sorry. That doesn't work. A personal conviction and conscience thing for me was the TV show "Family Guy" which I would find myself sinfully enjoying because of its witty parodies of American pop culture but uncomfortable by the crude jokes and temptation to enjoy it instead of analyze and use it as a missionary. So I rejected it but often read recaps over episodes since it was at one time the number one TV show for teenagers.

· **Redeem**— God has used this word since He rescued and restored His people when they were enslaved physically to the Egyptians and ultimately to their sin. There are things in culture that are not bad in and of themselves, but can be used in a sinful manner and therefore need to be redeemed by God's people. They were created by God for His good purpose & glory, and sin has turned it into something that deceives people into sin now.

Example of CONTEXTUALIZATION: Family & Children

A great example of this would be the world's view of children. The world often views children as nuisances, hindrances, frustrating, stressful, etc. BUT at heart they are what is used the most to draw an emotional response from people in the stories of culture and media. I was thinking about this re watching the 2007 academy award winner *There Will Be Blood*. The grief & regret of sending his son away because of his greed/selfishness. The scene where he yells out "I've abandoned my son." You don't walk away from this movie idolizing and encouraged by this character. Instead you walk away either feeling guilty for showing similar patterns of behavior or righteous anger/ maybe even compassion because of the consequences. It reminded me of the time I led a dad to Christ through another 2007 academy award winning movie *Gone Baby Gone*. I watched it with a 24 year-old guy who visited our church and felt that type of similar shame for not having a relationship with his daughter and living the same selfish, sinful lifestyle as the mom. You have this entire movie that communicates the grey area of morality in protecting children and family. Tough ethical issues, but one thing that he couldn't deny was how there was an element of fighting for the lives and flourishing of the innocent and great power of influence parents have. **Give ex. I asked probing questions of what he related with in a scene where he broke down. Repented, accepted Christ and became a good dad. I said even if you got her back would you do the same things?

It's why the number one TV show from a few years ago, NBC's "This is Us," was beloved.

The show goes back and forth showing the influence of past certain family circumstances or decisions that were made as children to the now and how it even then effects for the good and bad of their families now. Our childhoods aren't just "back there" but they intrude on our lives now, sometimes picking at old scars and sometimes reminding us of God's grace, mercy and protection but no matter what showing its impact and influence. And there are so many other movies that use children or the role/responsibility of parenthood to draw deep emotional responses.

Why? Well the truths of Scripture answer that:

False Gods & Spiritual Longings: Often idols we place not only before God but before our more important roles and responsibilities in this life come up. These are roles and responsibilities that we spiritually long to fulfill.

One, True God: God uses kids and the role of parenthood to show that we have deep, deep existential purpose and influence in this area as we are reminded of family legacies.

Gospel contextualization: God is our Perfect, Heavenly Father and we are adopted as His Children where Heaven is our home and church is our forever family on this earth.

And when you share the Gospel in this way, you can anticipate one of two things. People either rejecting or receiving the Gospel. (v. 32-34) You will still have either Persecution or Fruit.

32 Now when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked. But others said, "We will hear you again about this." 33 So Paul went out from their midst. 34 But some men joined him and believed, among whom also were Dionysius the Areopagite and a woman named Damaris and others with them.

As you can see, some of those who were listening to Paul mocked him. He did this at other places and they did more than mocking, they tried to kill him. You're still sharing the Gospel that confronts people's sin, even if it's done in away that feels more fluid, freeing and less robotic. In fact, what might happen is that you'll be persecuted more because you'll be sharing more. That's what happened to me. People still reject it but there is still fruit.

Before talking about others, let me share personal fruit from my own life. Do you know how much more I love and trust in God because I don't view life as sacred/secular but instead in a more redemptive worldview?

God used Paul's faithfulness to bring the Gospel from Paul's Jewish culture to the Greek culture of Athens and also to move between cultures within the Greek culture, as illustrated by both Dionysius and Damaris being given new hearts that trusted in Jesus as Savior. Dionysius was a philosopher and member of the Mars Hill court who ended up using his education, power and affluence to become the pastor of the first Christian church in Athens and he ended up dying a martyr's death. Damaris was looked upon as just a "common, poor" woman but her name is now forever mentioned thousands of years later because what the world looked upon as common, God looked upon as valuable as He redeemed and saved her, and now that's her forever identity being honored to this very day.

People hear and see a God who is pursuing them through the world around them. Through these spiritual longings AND smashed idols. They find the answer they may have been unknowingly looking for but ultimately needing. As good missionaries we can help share the Gospel through such things and it's my prayer and hope that over 2019 we will not only learn how to do this better but start thinking, living and sharing the Gospel as missionaries.

