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Dynamic Adventure

A Guide to Starting and Shaping Missional Churches



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As you see, the pattern above is defined by three pairs of action. Each pair contains two present tense verbs, and the singular words in CAPITAL letters represent the end purpose that is in view as those actions are carried out. Effective missionaries will inevitably practice these three behaviors as they engage a local context. In doing so, they will achieve three beautiful purposes at an increasing depth:

1. *Immerse and Listen* = ABSORBING
2. *Connect and Befriend* = RELATING
3. *Participate and Enrich* = SERVING

When a missionary team first engages a context, a natural sequence of these behaviors unfolds. But they quickly give way to a repeating, overlapping cycle. When missionaries *embed* in a given setting, they must first immerse and listen, *absorbing* as much as they can about their target area. Observing and the taking in of critical information quickly move into *relating* or connecting with locals and those who are “in-the-know” about the area. Slowly over time, the *relating* leads to the building of a smaller subset of meaningful friendships. At the same time the connecting involves choices to *serve* with local people in worthy causes or activities consistent with enriching the city. In other words, any initial sequence in the outworking of these behaviors soon gives way to a continuous, non-sequential engagement in all the missionary activities. With conscious attention to integrating these behaviors into daily life, they become habits individuals and groups learn to practice, almost unconsciously.

We use the Celtic Knot above to visually capture and teach the ongoing, seamless nature of these behaviors in the lifestyle of missionaries. Take your finger and follow the line through the knot. You’ll see that it’s continuous and overlapping, just as the rhythm of our missionary behaviors ought to be.

By using the Celtic Knot, we are also able to emphasize the importance of ongoing dialogue with God and our spiritual community while practicing each pair of behaviors. In our diagram we designate the center of intersection of the lines as the *center of discernment*, since all our missionary actions are done in ongoing dialogue with God and with our spiritual community. Throughout the course of our missionary behaviors we’re continually passing through the center of discernment asking: What do God and my community have to say about what I am *absorbing*? Who I am *relating* to? and, Where I am *serving*? In the next chapter we’ll talk more about the importance of communal discernment and how teams might exercise it.

The beauty of the Celtic Knot is its simplicity. The image itself and the behaviors it represents are highly reproducible. We encourage you to review with your team the meaning of each of the pairs of missionary behavior below. Then dig into the learning exercises, which are designed to help you apply each of the behaviors to your context.

Immerse and Listen (*Absorbing*) as Missionary Behavior

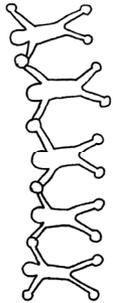
Description: Our team must indwell our context in a deep and enduring way. This requires us to cultivate the discipline of sustained curiosity. We must get below the surface of our context, and then, like a high-capacity sponge, take in as much as we can about our surroundings. *Absorbing* includes learning about the values, norms, and history of local culture, including the languages and symbols people use. To deepen our discovery and get down to details we might otherwise miss, we ask many clarifying questions. We also note the social rhythms of the people, and pay close attention to the stories of those we’re encountering. These stories give us priceless insights

into what's really happening in our context. Over time, by immersing and listening on an increasingly broader and deeper level, we begin to discover the assets, opportunities, gifts, and talents that we as a

team can build on and bless.

The next exercise is designed to help you immerse and listen in your context.

Understanding Absorbing as a Primary Missionary Behavior



Time needed: 45 minutes

Supplies needed: Journal, whiteboard and markers, pens or pencils

1. In the gathering of the larger team the facilitator reviews the above description of *absorbing* and the following examples of contextual questions related to *absorbing*:
 - *What is good news to the people God has placed us among?*
 - *Where is God already at work in our city and our specific area?*
 - *Where have people been impacted by the lament, pain, and the sins of the neighborhood and city? What do they consider to be bad news?*
 - *How do people who don't follow Jesus feel about Christians? The Church? What do you think keeps them away from God?*
2. Take turns sharing meaningful experiences of how you have participated in *absorbing* or how you have observed others practicing it well. What are some of the important contextual questions that these experiences of *absorbing* helped answer? Is there anything about *absorbing* that you don't understand?
3. Each person records in their journal the *absorbing* questions they feel are most relevant to the team. These questions might come from the stories shared, the list in step one, or an important idea not yet mentioned.
4. Each teammate shares with the team their top three *absorbing* questions. Facilitator writes them on the whiteboard.
5. Decide as a team the top three *absorbing* questions you would like to seek answers for in your context. Discuss initial actions you will take to answer those questions. Make a simple plan to implement those actions.