



THE LIVING SENT PODCAST: SHOW NOTES

EPISODE: **004**

TITLE: **3 Paradigm Shifts for Your Church**

1. **The Missionary Nature of the Church:**

- a. Discussion question(s): How would the missionary nature of the church change the way you see God, the local church, yourself? Which of the following do you think best describes your local church: Church is *only* a Sunday gathering, Church is a place where certain things happen, Church is a vendor of religious goods and services? How could those perceptions begin to change?¹

2. **Incarnational Mission:**

- a. Discussion question(s): How have you thought about the incarnation of Christ? In your local church, is the incarnation more than a story we talk about during the Christmas season? How should the incarnation change the way we interact with our immediate context?²

3. **Living S.E.N.T.**

- a. Discussion question(s): In the interview, Brad identifies a number of ways the church can begin living in their local contexts. He is essentially describing the idea of "Living SENT" Which of his suggestions can you or your church begin implementing this week? How do you think the distinction between "counting" and "measuring" could help your church/organization being living SENT?

I'd love to hear your thoughts regarding this interview. Reach out to me at justinwester.com/connect. Remember, you don't *have* to Live SENT, you get to. See you next episode.

Justin

¹ For more on the missionary nature of the church, check out Brad's book, *Missional Quest: Becoming a Church of the Long Run*, 2013.

² For some practical ideas check out Brad's book, *Next Door As It IS In Heaven: Living Out God's Kingdom in Your Neighborhood*. 2016.

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INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT

Justin: **What aspects of identity do you believe are central and foundational to the nature of the church?**

Brad: Yeah, for me, and it has to do with the missionary nature of the church. I mean, I just think that lays the foundation for everything else. I mean all the other paradigm shift, all the other changes, all the different ways we think of church in the west, I just think all of it flows from a missionary identity. I think we belong to the missionary nature and the missionary character of the church.

Justin: **So how does that, in your opinion, begin to change things for people?**

Brad: It changes everything. Two overarching ways is I think it's a paradigm shift both for the individual but then also a paradigm shift for the collective body of Christ. In other words, when we recapture the missionary nature of the church, we begin to see that each and every person individually as a called and sent missionary person. The first thing has to do with- We begin to see that we are a sent missionary person but then collectively we see that we are a sent missionary people. So it changes the way we think of ourselves. Really it changes our identity in a sense. And it certainly changes the corporate Body. The implications of that are immense. I mean, it changes the way we think about our work and how we think about where we live. It changes the way we think of ministry. I think it changes the way we think of discipleship and evangelism. It changes the way we think that the structure of church leadership. Just about everything about missiology and ecclesiology I think is shaped or informed by that missionary identity.

Justin: **What sort of false beliefs about identity do you think are most destructive or do you find most challenging where you currently serve?**

Brad: That churches is only a Sunday morning gathering or church is a place where certain things happen and worst of all is understanding the church as a vendor of religious goods and services. We think that we are to provide religious goods and services for Christian consumers. I think that's probably the most damaging. For church planters, it probably has to do with being too Sunday-centric. And I'm not anti-gathering whatsoever. I mean we already a gathered and scattered people. But probably being too "Sunday-centric" and it's probably been to "lead-guy led." That there is one lead dude that's supposed to pull this whole thing off. That's also very harmful.

Justin: **So how do you currently help train others to rethink what you just mentioned or embrace and apply that missionary identity to themselves, first and foremost, and then also to who they're trying to lead?**



Brad: Well first, in most cases, if I had the opportunity to just spend some time talking about paradigm shifts and trying to challenge our traditional thinking on church and mission. It's usually just trying to spend some time, like I said, introducing the idea that we may actually need to unlearn and relearn. And usually, if we have time to really lay that out and in a very gracious way. Ninety nine percent of the time people go, yeah, something's not quite right. And there's different ways to go at it. I mean sometimes kind of go at it, just tell people, rethink the nature of the church. But sometimes you can go at it from kind of a cultural shift perspective just to help people see that we live in a very different time and place. And so it's funny, I'll say people kind of enter into this conversation, one of two directions, I call it either a "crisis of influence" or a "crisis of mission."

Brad: What I mean by a crisis of influence is that people enter into this whole conversation because often what they know is what used to work isn't working. I hear all the time people say, "Yeah, we did this thing and 200 people would show up but now only 40 show up." And they're not sure why and they certainly aren't sure what to do. They just wonder if this whole missional conversation might have an answer. So they kind of enter into the conversation from a pragmatic, you know, "what used to work doesn't work anymore." And then the other group of people, "crisis of mission," and this is typically, it's a generalization, but it's typically a younger generation, but they enter into the conversation because they know something is not right. They just have kind of a check in their spirit. That this can't be what it's all about. I mean meeting for an hour on Sunday morning, singing three songs, and listen to someone give a lecture- that surely isn't what he had in mind. So because of that, you can kind of go at the topic from a different direction and be a little more of a pragmatic or can be a little more theological, theoretical.

Justin: **As you're coaching and training, what are some of the things that you look for to try to measure if people are starting to rethink some of the things that you mentioned?**

Brad: I'd say a couple of things. Some of it is just a "holy discontent" but just people are just, they're just uncomfortable just doing the same thing over and over again. But like much more important than that probably is we actually start to live differently. So they start to have stories about engaging their neighbors or seeing things that they hadn't seen before. The ultimate paradigm shift that starts to take root is that behaviors change. So they actually start thinking and acting like it.

Justin: **But what aspect of presence has been most paradigm shifting for discipleship and in your ministry context?**



Brad: I think the first thing is helpful to recognize because most people today, unfortunately they don't live in their church context. We have a lot of people in churches that might drive 30 minutes to the place where their church meets. Well, because of that, I think we actually have to do context work in two places: where they live and then also what the context around where their church meets. And so those can be two very, very different things. For me personally, this is just my bias, but I think the number one topic or issue for people to struggle with, to reflect on, to really help them fully understand presence, is the incarnation. So it's actually one of the key paradigm shifts for me. The first paradigm shift is for the Church is what we talked about a few minutes ago and the other side of the same coin is the incarnational presence or sometimes I will call it incarnational mission.

Brad: The bottom line of that for me is allowing the incarnation to inform our posture toward our context. And unfortunately in most evangelical tribes, we just don't think about the incarnation. I say this all the time in my tribe, which is the Baptist tribe, when we talk about Christology, we almost always just talk about one thing: the cross. Now I'm not diminishing that, we should talk about the cross obviously. But we have to have a more comprehensive and robust Christology that includes the incarnation. Because the incarnation- what more should influence our posture towards our context? What more should influence our understanding of presence than the fact that God took on human flesh and stepped into the muck and mire of us? That ought to be in a sense almost a model or example of how we ought to step into the muck and mire of our context. I just think it's where we have to start. When we talk about presence, before we can get to any practical contextualization or how to learn about our context, we have to seriously think about the theological implications of the incarnation. We just hardly ever talk about the incarnation. The incarnation is like the Christmas story and then that's about it but it's very significant.

Justin: **Is there a false belief about presence that you find is most prevalent in, in or most challenging to discipleship?**

Brad: I don't think we get it. I don't think we think about it or reflect on it. So it's almost like not even on our radar and part of it, again, I don't think we've allowed the incarnation, to truly inform our posture and because of that we distance ourselves from it. I shouldn't say sin but sinners. We think we should keep distance from the world. And that's the reason we get away with that is because we haven't allowed the incarnation to influence our posture. We get away with it, which is separate from the world, uh, because we haven't allowed. Now there's boundaries there and barrier that we have to deal with and maybe train on all that. I always say that like. Look, you don't have to swing your door is open to all the crazy stuff that's out there but it's crazy just how distanced we are from the world. And again that influences then discipleship and

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evangelism because if we think we need to be separate and distanced from the world, and our view of evangelism is some kind of unnatural, artificial, four spiritual laws that we have to share with strangers because we don't have any friends who are lost. So I just think that whole concept or topic of identity and presence are just enormous. I like to think about them on two sides of the same coin. One side of the coin is the missionary nature church and the other side of the coin is incarnational presence.

Justin: **What do you think are some of the most powerful expressions of praxis for believers in your ministry context? And not-yet-believers?**

Brad: That's a good question. I guess I would initially try to frame it individually and collectively. Individually it's doing life with lost people so they could see that we actually live differently. That we live lives of great sacrifice, radical hospitality, and generosity. But if we're not doing life with people, if we are not in close proximity, and we are not present with them they are not going to see that. So, I think individually, it has to do with our behaviors and the way we live. And then I guess there would probably be things collectively as a body. Hopefully, there are things that a church collectively does in the city that people see. I mean in any city, there's probably churches that are known for what they do for the city. Unfortunately there's not a lot but there should be. We all see different stories and if I had time to reflect I could probably think of a story from last week. You know, a church instead of building a building, they give money to such and such. There is a church here in town that is very involved in the last decade. They're real involved in this thing, this movement, it's called "What is the church?" And it's all about churches working together in the city. So they have lots of different service days. They just kind of team up but it's across denominational lines. So I know there's people who see that and it's like, wow, so churches that are not even the same denomination are coming together. You know, I'll tell you, another example I think it's probably foster care. I mean the church is starting to step up to the plate in foster care. And I know there are some cities where the church is trying to eliminate, you know, every kid in the foster care system. And/or looking to be adopted. So there's things like that kind of collectively we can coordinate.

Justin: **I'm just curious, are there things, from a praxis standpoint that maybe the church collectively it needs to stop doing? And if so, what are some of those things?**

Brad: Practically speaking, one of the things we can stop doing is so much stuff for ourselves. I mean that's kind of a silly answer. But years ago I taught at a small a class at a small Mennonite Brethren college for several years. And every year I taught this evangelism class and the very first class I would divide the whiteboard and I would ask them to list every program and activity in their church that was for members. And we make this super long list on the left side of the whiteboard and then after we get that and it would



take a long time. I said, okay, now list every program and activity your church has for those outside the church. And every semester there was always one or two people in class that could think of one or two things. Sometimes they might say, oh, well our Sunday school classes or small groups, those are for people outside the church. Then I was like, yeah, well let's talk about that, you know? And then eventually come around to go, no, okay. Not really. So maybe I guess it would just be things that we probably need to have a longer term instead of just a one shot, hey, let's do this and feel better about ourselves, you know, we're going to do this outreach event on this Saturday and know next year we'll do it again. Let's just have a longer, a long haul and long runway of a this outreach thing.

Justin: **What are some of the indicators that you look for when people begin to rethink praxis and also act upon it?**

Brad: Yeah, well there's a whole slew of like scorecard issues. Different things we count and measure. These are the things I would look for. I don't know that I do look for these because in most cases I work with planters or congregations that are trying to make a shift. I may not like the walk along with them over a long period of time, but, but we do talk about scorecards. I think if we really want to make changes then we need to start counting and measuring differently. So I'll usually frame counting and measuring differently even though we use those two words interchangeably they are actually different. Counting is quantitative and measuring is qualitative. So counting would be, I would say, we need to account "missionary behaviors and activities." There are all kinds of different activities that I think we should actually start counting. To begin to say, "oh well that's important and what gets counted gets repeated. I mean it could be just really a hundred different things. From something as simple as how many meals you share with people outside the church each week to how many hours is the church collectively tutoring kids from school, or how many people have we prayed for outside the church membership, you know, just all kinds of different activity. And then measuring, typically what we are talking about there is are there indicators in the city, having to do with crime or education, or poverty issues, are there things that we can actually measure to see if our involvement in the city is making a difference. So we kind of get a baseline of different indicators today and say, okay a month from now, six months from now, are we making is difference? Does that make sense? I just think scorecard measurements and metrics has to be a part of this whole conversation. We have to start counting differently because right now, typically all we do is we count how many people show up. It sounds snarky but that doesn't give us any indication whatsoever the effect that its having on the community. I mean it just doesn't tell us anything. It just tells us how many people are showing up. So we have to start counting and measuring.