

Teaching to Obey Rather Than to Know By Mike Ruhl

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In recent research and writing, missiologist Milfred Minatrea assembles a fresh and challenging portrait of the missional congregation. *A missional congregation is a reproducing community of authentic disciples, being equipped as missionaries sent by God, to live and proclaim His kingdom in their world.* Such a congregation views "mission" as a matter of being and doing, not simply "sending, praying and supporting." Mission is participative, not simply representative. In fact, mission is the essence of its very existence, not simply one expression of a diverse ministry.

In his book *Shaped by God's Heart--The Passion and Practices of Missional Churches*, Minatrea identifies nine "essential practices" of the missional congregation. Earlier *Mission Moments* summarized the first two essential practices, High Threshold Membership and Be Real, Not Religious.

A third essential practice of the missional congregation is teaching to obey rather than to know. Christians are reminded and instructed about what Christians *do*, not simply what they *are*. The goal of biblical instruction is *obedience to God*, rather than just the transmission of information and accumulation of knowledge.

The saints and ministry staff of the missional congregation demonstrate a high commitment to the study of the Word of God. A variety of teaching methods produce not just information, but *transformation*. Scripture teaching equips the saints for active participation in God's mission. It has a definite *action outcome* which facilitates active obedience to the great Gospel-imperative, the Great Commission. Such an orientation does not diminish the value or validity of theological reflection, for what is *known* of God is *enhanced* by obedience, especially as disciples observe the impact of the Word of God on people engaged in spiritual pilgrimage.

By the way, Minatrea's research indicates also that missional communities often help their members to obey the Scriptures through emphasis placed on classical Christian disciplines, such as meditation, prayer, fasting, solitude, submission, service, and simplicity. Although the disciplines hold no special power or grace in and of themselves, a hunger and thirst for righteousness and holy lifestyle can be cultivated by the Holy Spirit working through the Word of God in the context of the spiritual disciplines.

Such research challenges some of our traditional approaches to biblical education and discipleship training. Perhaps we are in need of such a challenge. And perhaps we need to be reminded of the ancient quip: *Is it not significant that the history of the first century church is called the **Book of Acts**, not the **Book of Truths**?*

This article is one of a series on the 9 characteristics of missional congregations. Access the others from our website: Resources – listed by topic and type – under the topic “Missional congregation.”