

THE DEEPLY FORMED LIFE | Session 5: Missional Presence

SESSION GOALS

Every session has a point—what each participant should walk away from the discussion knowing, feeling, and doing.

Main Idea: When we realize that we have a God-given purpose, all of life becomes an opportunity to participate in God's mission.

Head Change: To know that God is always active in the world.

Heart Change: To feel empowered by God's Spirit to join him in his work.

Life Change: To partner with God in his mission by opening our lives to people and meeting their needs.

OPEN

If you had to write a mission statement for your life, what would it be? Do you feel like you live according to that mission statement? Why, or why not?

Everyone has a mission, whether you have articulated it or not. There is some sort of ethos, philosophy, or driving force behind your actions. While each of us has our own God-given purpose, we share a collective mission as the church.

In this final session of *The Deeply Formed Life*, Rich Villodas will help us understand the mission God has given to all Christians: to engage those who are disengaged from God.

VIEW

Before viewing the session, here are a few important things to look for in Rich Villodas's teaching. As you watch, pay attention to how he answers the following questions.

What is the purpose of a deeply formed life?

How does Rich describe missional presence?

How does Rich explain what our mission is?

What four truths does Rich say we must remember about living on mission?

Watch Session 5: *Missional Presence* (15 minutes).

REVIEW

Rich opened this session saying, "The purpose of a deeply formed life in Christ is to share it with others." God wants more people to join his family, the church. **Why do you think it is important to realize that a deeply formed life is meant to be shared not hoarded? What do you think it means to share life in Christ with others?**

Rich went on to say, "We will never outgrow the need to totally depend on God's guidance as we share the gospel and embody it with our lives." **Do you agree with Rich's statement? Why, or why not? In what ways have you personally experienced the truth of this statement? How do you seek to acknowledge and draw on your dependence on God?**

We may have different ideas of what it looks like to live on mission for God. Rich shared an example of one of his missteps where, despite his good intentions, he ended up hurting others. **Do you have any examples like Rich of seeking to be faithful to God's mission but doing so in a way that wasn't helpful? If so, can you share an example with the group? What did you learn from that situation?**

Rich said, "We have reduced a lot of our understanding of mission to debating people into the kingdom of God." But he was insistent that this is not what being on mission means. **Why do you think we tend to view evangelism as debating people into the kingdom?**

What do you think it looks like to live on mission? How would you describe your philosophy of mission?

Debating people into the kingdom, Rich said, is akin to trying to change people. But the Scriptures are clear: only God can do that. Instead, Rich argued that being on mission "is to be the kind of person that makes it possible for change to take place." And the first step to becoming that kind of person is to recognize "that God is already active in the world." **Do you feel responsible for other people changing? How does the realization that God changes and saves people affect your view of sharing Jesus with them?**

If the Holy Spirit is the one who transforms people, what is our responsibility in God's mission? In what ways do you seek to model life in Christ for others?

God is at work in the world, and, at the same time, he invites us to join him in his work. **In what ways is God active in your church, community, or workplace? What could does it look like to partner with God in those places?**

Missional presence is "joining what God has already started and seeing his kingdom come on earth as it is in heaven." In other words, the Christian life is not about waiting to go to heaven, as we sometimes suspect, but applying the rule of God to our current situation. **Do you understand God's kingdom as being "out there" or as present here and now? Why?**

What role do you think you play in the coming of God's kingdom on earth?

Rich said that our mission is not to convert the world, judge the world, or simply get people to come to church. Instead, he said our mission is "to continue whatever Jesus started." **How does Rich's description of our mission compare with your own? What are the strengths of Rich's description? Do you see any weaknesses in the way he describes our mission? If so, what are they?**

Rich said, "Any notion of mission in the world must confess that God moves first. Long before we act, God has already acted. Long before we speak, God has already spoken. Long before we arrive, God has already been present." **How does it make you feel to know that, before you ever live on mission, God has already acted, spoken, and been present wherever you're going? In what ways does the presence and activity of God strengthen your commitment to live on mission?**

Partnering with God in his mission requires that we recognize God uses imperfect people to bring about his purposes. Rich said that "in the kingdom of God, our mistakes don't make us unusable. It is rather through our mistakes that God demonstrates his incomparable grace in our lives...God uses broken and available and open people."

In what ways have you let your imperfections, shortcomings, sins, or brokenness sideline you from living on mission? How do you think God might use the mistakes you've made to demonstrate his grace to you and others?

Are you open and available to be used by God? Take a few minutes to reflect. Answer honestly.

While we've been invited to join God's work, only Jesus can bring it God's kingdom to earth. We can't legislate the kingdom into existence. We can't behave it into existence. So, we have to wait for Jesus to come and make all things new. In the meantime, though, God has sent us into the world to bear witness to him and his soon-coming-but-already-present kingdom—to our churches, to our workplaces, to our schools, and our neighborhoods. We are sent people with a mission. **If we knew God had intentionally placed us in the world, what would change about the way we see our work? Our homes? Neighborhoods? Places of recreation?**

How can we represent God and his coming kingdom in each of those spheres?

BIBLE EXPLORATION

In this final session, Rich discussed our active role in the kingdom and mission of God. He emphasized that God doesn't abandon us to work alone but is actively working with us as we join him in his work. Read Matthew 6:10; John 5:17, 19–20; 15:4–5; 20:21–22.

In Matthew 6, Jesus uses a phrase that Rich repeated in this session: “Your kingdom come.” There are two ways that we can misunderstand the nature of God's kingdom and our relation to it. First, we can view our relation to God's kingdom as passive—as if we are mere bystanders watching God work. But God calls us to be active partners in building his kingdom through evangelism, generosity, and acts of service, to name a few. **What are some ways that you can personally be more active in seeing God's kingdom come on earth?**

The second way we can misunderstand God's kingdom is to assume that it's only a future, spiritual reality, disconnected from our lives here and now. But Jesus's prayer is for God's kingdom to come “on earth” here and now. **How might our understanding of the mission of God change by recognizing the coming of God's kingdom as a here-and-now reality? In what ways could that recognition affect the way you participate in God's mission day to day?**

All this talk about being active in God's mission may lead us to assume that we are trailblazers in bringing the kingdom of God on earth. But the Scriptures make clear that we follow where God is already working. Jesus, in John 5:17, says “My Father is still working [or, as the NIV translates it, “always at work”], and I am working also.” **Do you believe that God is always working to bring his kingdom upon the earth? Where do you see God at work right now? What can you do to join that work?**

Apart from God, we can do nothing. We can't know him, follow him, or engage in his work. And nowhere is our dependence on God clearer than in John 15:4–5, where Jesus says that we must be connected to him—to abide in him—to engage in his work. **What do you think it looks like to be connected to God throughout the day? What would change if we lived and worked, always connected to God?**

Before Jesus ascended to the Father, he told his disciples that just “as the Father has sent me, I also send you” (John 20:21). Those are words that still apply to us today. As followers of Christ, we have been sent by Christ into the world to represent him in words and action. **Where have you been sent? How has God equipped you for the places he's sent you? What are you doing now to bear witness to others about Christ?**

Wherever we're sent, we do not go ill-equipped, and we do not go alone. Jesus gives us his Holy Spirit to equip and empower us for the work he's given us to do (John 20:22).

How have you seen the Holy Spirit at work in your life as you've engaged in God's mission? What can you do to make yourself even more aware of the Spirit's presence with you in your work?

God is at work. Always. And he invites us to join him—but he doesn't leave us to ourselves. He goes before us, he unites us with his Son, and he gives us his Spirit, all for the sake of bringing his kingdom upon the earth as it is in heaven. You are a part of his mission. Every moment of your life is an opportunity to make him known. **What can you do to see all of life as an opportunity to participate in God's mission? How can you make yourself more open and available to the work God wants to do for others through you?**

What small changes could you make today (to your schedule, budget, or leisure time, for instance) that would increase your availability to engage in the mission of God?

LAST WORD

You are sent. Whether in your home, your neighborhood, your occupation, or maybe even the other side of the world, God has sent you into the world to join him in the work he's doing.

In joining God's work, we can be sure that he goes before us, he goes with us, and he empowers us for everything he calls us to do. In other words, wherever we go, we go in the power and with the presence of God, who is always at work among us. So, consider where God has sent you, and go with confidence—God is using you to bring his kingdom upon the earth.

As we wrap up *The Deeply Formed Life*, consider what it would look like for you to practice the rhythms of contemplation, internal investigation, gospel reconciliation, sexual wholeness, and engaging the disengaged. What are one or two takeaways from this series you plan to apply immediately?

Pray that God would use what you've learned in this series to form you deeply and widely into the image of his Son.

DEEPER WALK

Ask: Set aside thirty minutes to ask and answer the following questions. Record your answers in a journal.

- Where in your life is God already working?
- In what ways have you embraced opportunities to join his work?
- In what ways have you avoided opportunities to join his work?
- To what degree do you make yourself available to partner with God?
- Are you confident that God will use you? Why, or why not?
- Do you believe that God can bring real change in the people and places you engage?

After answering these questions, spend the remainder of your time reflecting on your answers.

Pray: Ask God to help you be more open and available to join his work. Ask him to show you opportunities and to empower you through his Spirit to act on the opportunities you see.

Read: For a deeper dive into the topic of missional presence, read chapters 9–10 of Rich's book *The Deeply Formed Life*.