



Toby Mayer

Foundations Course

Spring term 2026

Mission and Evangelism

Journal

Five Marks of Mission

Tell: proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom (εὐαγγελίζω)

Teach: educate, baptise and nurture new believers

Tend: respond to human need with loving service

Transform: change unjust structures of society, challenge violence of every kind and pursue peace and reconciliation

Treasure: strive to safeguard the integrity of creation, and sustain and renew the life of the earth

Journal I

1. *What do you think Christian mission is/means? What does it look like in practice?*
 2. *Which of the “Five marks of mission” do you most warm to? Are there any you regularly engage with? How/when? Which of the “Five marks of mission” are you less involved with?*
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1.

Before I became a Christian, I had a very narrow, and biased understanding of mission, i.e. white, western people going to non-white parts of the world to convert people to Christianity while undermining local culture. From that perspective, I saw mission as self-centred: at its best a drive of the individual to make (as they saw it) a better world; at its worst a way for the missionary to feel self-righteous, “win God points” and get to heaven.

This view softened, and broadened as I journeyed into Christianity myself and learnt from other Christians, especially those who described their own work as ‘missionary work’. I came to see that mission isn’t something that happens in Africa (!) But that it is occurring all around me. I learned that almost every agency concerned with homelessness, social restoration, addiction, alcoholism, debt, human trafficking, asylum seeking and generally any charity working with the marginalised has its roots in Christianity.¹ We are everywhere, and everywhere we are good work is occurring. Counter to previous belief that most Christians just pay lip service to faith, it seems that a great many Christians truly live in the spirit of Jesus, as encapsulated in the verse from James, “*Faith without works is dead*”.

And still I saw mission work as something an individual chooses to do, and it wasn’t for everyone. The real eye-opener came this year, on my Foundations course, when I heard mission referred to as *Missio Dei* — the mission of God. Learning this was a wake-up moment, which caused me to discard my old assumptions, and to see the whole of Christianity with fresh eyes: neither the individual nor the church has a mission, rather God has a mission (or even *is* mission) and invites us to join in what He is already doing. Seen this way, and identifying as a Christian myself, I must already be a missionary. The question then becomes, what kind of missionary am I, or what kind of mission work am I called to?

¹ As noted by the Theos Think Tank, the faith-based ‘last line of defence’ is often the ‘only thing standing between [people] and destitution,’ suggesting that if these initiatives were removed, the social safety net would effectively collapse. — Emma Borland and Paul Bickley, *A Torn Safety Net: How the cost of living crisis threatens its own last line of defence* (London: Theos, 2022)

2.

The two marks of mission that immediately stand out for me are **Tend** and **Transform**. My background includes 1) working with various marginalised groups, including inner-city teenagers suspended from school, long-term unemployed adults with financial, health and self-esteem issues, and newly arrived refugees, and 2) working in the corporate world to support leaders and workers in transforming their culture from hierarchical, power-led, reward/punishment focused and oppressive to humane, collaborative, results-led and engaging. In both cases, where violence, oppression and unjust structures are prevalent I have been called on both to tend the individual and transform the system. This has always felt like a calling, even before I became a Christian. Today the calling is stronger, and the purpose (God's mission) clearer.

At this time I am especially focusing my professional work on guiding Christian leaders to weave their faith values into the corporate status quo, emphasising authentic proclamation over proselytisation. This ensures the system becomes more God-centric, while staying inclusive of people with other beliefs. I see this work as both personally nurturing (tending) and systemically transformational.

I am less drawn to **Tell** or **Teach** people about Jesus, although by that I only mean less drawn to initiating such conversations. I will engage if I detect people are genuinely curious, and/or open-minded. I have no time for people looking to argue, or to prove me (and Christians in general) wrong, so will politely decline such engagement.

As for **Treasure**, I believe it must permeate all that we do as Christians. The first thing the Bible tells us is that God created the world, and gave it to humankind—to us. This gift is a living gift and must be tended to, nurtured and loved. If we fail to take our stewardship seriously, we are essentially denying God.

Reflecting on mission I see that the five marks are not separable, but work together in harmony, but not equally. Sometimes mission requires more of one mark, or two, and less of another, or all the others. But mission itself is a living practice, and as such any particular mission will change and adapt over time according to context and need. We must always be aware that the five marks are at work in all that we do, and pay attention to what is needed, today, right now.

Journal 2

"All of the Anglican 'Marks of Mission' are about treasuring God's creation. Without the fifth mark, none of the others work." In your journal, reflect on this quote - do you agree? Why/not? Also, say in your journal how you are already involved in looking after creation. Write down some ideas about how you could join in with other people to make sure creation is looked after better?

An indivisible whole

The five marks, today, make up one indivisible whole. They are not items on a menu that we can pick and choose at will. In my first journal I established (for myself) that by dint of being a Christian I am a missionary, and as a missionary I must adopt the five marks of mission, not some sub-set.

Yet, reflecting on 1 Corinthians 12, it is clear that each of us, in the body of Christ, has a specific gift or calling. This means, for example, that while some would excel at teaching, others may excel at confronting injustice, but still we do not discard those marks that are not our primary focus. Each Christian, each missionary will live and practice all five marks to one degree or another. There are none that can be dispensed with.

A controversial statement

The statement, *"Without the fifth mark, none of the others work"* is interesting, and somewhat controversial. Given that it was the last of the five added, around six years after the first four were established, it rather implies that all mission work for those six years was worthless—which is clearly not true. More accurate perhaps would be to say that without the *first mark*, none of the others would make sense—certainly none of the others would be specifically Christian.

Anyone of any faith, or no faith, can (and many do) tend to their fellow human, transform unjust structures, and nurture creation (even if they don't call it "creation"), but without proclaiming the Good News of the Kingdom, these would fail to be acts of Christian mission.

Teaching lies on the cusp of this division. If teaching follows from Telling and is purely focused on educating people about the work of Jesus and Christian faith, then it is equal to Telling. But again secular people teach—they teach all kinds of things, even religion.²

² I was given a Bible, and taught how to read it by a non-Christian. I am forever grateful.

Creation

From another perspective, it is becoming clearer and clearer each year that if we don't *strive to safeguard the integrity of creation, and sustain and renew the life of the earth*, then nothing else much matters. We cannot tend to human needs or confront injustice if the ecosystem itself has collapsed. The earth, the entire cosmos is God's creation, so to neglect any part of it is to fail to live up to God's mission, and there is a danger that our telling, teaching, tending, and transforming are carried out from self-interest, ego or self-aggrandisement.

My own involvement

And yet I am aware I am not doing all I can to live out this fifth mark. I do the usual household activities of reducing, repurposing, reusing and recycling as much as is practically possible, and I teach my children to do the same. We actively seek out and buy household products that are "green and clean" But beyond that I am in no way an ecological activist. My own calling is more towards tending and transforming, which sometimes involves teaching.

My wife does better, actively studying zoology and ecology, with a view to finding employment in the field of species preservation, conservation and the protection of biodiversity. I'm a freeloader on her calling, but I am not called myself into this work. Although, I could argue that by being the sole family breadwinner I enable this work to be carried out, as without my income she would not have the time or freedom to be so invested.

There are of course many opportunities to engage in active work to safeguard and sustain our living planet, but it would be disingenuous of me to claim I'm going to do anything more at this time in my life, beyond just paying better attention, and focussing on the small decisions—Fairy Liquid or the slightly more expensive Ecover? Loose bananas or the more convenient plastic-bagged version? If we each paid attention to the small decisions, perhaps the big initiatives would start taking care of themselves.