

Frost, Michael. *Surprise the World! The Five Habits of Highly Missional People*. Eugene Oregon: Pickwick Publications, 2014, 125 Pages.

Reviewed by Richard William Shaw

Michael Frost's work, *Surprise the World! The Five Habits of Highly Missional People*, is a concise (125 pages), clear, and articulate expression of the author's scholarly premise—BELLS, the five disciplines practiced by those who are soldiers in the “army of ordinary people” (xii). Frost is convinced that evangelism is the work of a few, those gifted by the Holy Spirit to the “bold proclamation to which” they are called (3). In lieu of evangelism, the author attempts to persuade the reader that for the vast majority lacking, the five habits are the biblical model which must be followed. These five habits—BELLS—configure the pathway forward for those debilitated by the theology that all are responsible for evangelism, and coagulate to lead the ungifted majority to “live questionable lives” (5).

One of the greatest strengths of Frost's work is found in his consideration of *habitus*, “the way a society helps people to think, feel, and act in determinantal ways, which then guide them” (18). Coined by French philosopher Pierre Bourdieu, the term—and the construct behind it—carries both positive and negative flanks. A believer's habits—disciplines—shape her or his values. On the flip side, habits—disciplines—can become ritualistic rote, if one loses the axial core of the practice. Frost labels this side “the shadow side” of habits, and notes the tripartite antidote: 1) the role of the gifted evangelists who are to, following the mandate of Paul in 2 Timothy 1.17, “be fanning into flame” a mindful awareness of the purpose behind the disciplines; 2) the centrifugal nature of the BELLS—pushing us beyond ourselves and into the lives of others; and 3) the necessity of establishing and nurturing accountability groups in which we ensure that we are maintaining a commitment to the disciplines.

Notwithstanding, the reader is distracted by the often caustic nature of Frost's articulation. Though succinct, the author, at times, verges on diatribe. His use (abuse?) and condemnation of Southern Baptists as the quintessential archetype of "proper" evangelism, leave one averse. The example of how not to be missional, according to Frost, is found in the Baptist way. "You see, it's not 'questionable' when a Baptist refuses to attend a margarita-and-poker night. It's expected" (54). Serious missional traction, the author avers, is found within the antithesis of the Baptist way.

The five habits—or disciplines—of Frost's BELLS include B (Bless), E (Eat), L (Listen), L (Learn), and S (Sent). The author desires that his reader engage in acts of kindness, or blessing. Juxtaposing blessing with converting, Frost urges us to change our missional impetus from seeing souls converted to Christ, to blessing those around us. He cautions the readers in our blessing of others that the "recipient must *feel blessed*" (italics in the original, 36). Likening misguided blessing to Christian empire colonizing, Frost is careful to align the misguided to being part of the "terror and dehumanization inflicted upon indigenous cultures" (37).

Eating as missional practice is traced historically and theologically. Of the 125 succinct pages, this section may be the most profound and useful in its application. The diatribal nature of Frost's rhetoric is reflected in his eschewing of the pulpit and proclamation; "If we took Jesus' directive seriously, we'd know that the table is a better metaphor for Christian worship" (46). Moreover, the author's exegesis of passages such as I Corinthians 11.23-28 buttresses his argument of emphasizing the inclusivity of Communion, and de-emphasizing the recognition of conviction of and confession of sin. "When he [Paul] insists they 'examine themselves' before they eat and drink, he is asking them not to search the deepest recesses of their hearts . . . (as

some contemporary preachers interpret this verse) but rather to consider whom they've excluded from fellowship" (51-52).

The first L of Frost's BELLS is Listen to the Spirit's Voice. In this third habit component, the author presents some strong missional practice instruction. The two primary sins of those on mission—which, eventually we learn, is all of us—are fear and laziness, the “mission killers” (58). “Fear will shut down missional engagement every time” (58). And perhaps one of the best jewels of the book, “Figuring out how best to be an intriguing, blessing, godly presence in community isn't easy” (59). The third discipline, that of listening to the Spirit's voice, will provide the missionary with nurture, sustenance, and accountability “for the missional lifestyle” (61). The reminder of solitude is quintessential to the missional/missionary life, and Frost is correct to emphasize it. There is a lack of emphasis on scripture in this section; notwithstanding, the historical and contemporary references are helpful. The absence of scriptural emphasis, juxtaposed against centering prayer, is puzzling.

The second L of Frost's BELLS is to Learn Christ, correctly ascribed to the early church. The emphasis many readers have awaited has finally been revealed, our task as missionaries is to build our lives around the biblical presentation of the life and teachings of Christ. Frost defines the two aspects of studying the four Gospels, viz. the “devotional and missional purposes” (72). Quoting C. S. Lewis, the author affirms that “The Church exists for nothing else but to draw [people] into Christ, to make them little Christs” (72). The correct emphasis upon the “example and teachings of Jesus for the purposes of emulation by his followers” is duly noted (73).

The fifth habit of Frost's BELLS, the “S,” is Sent, the author's advocacy of the position that while we are not all evangelists, we are all missionaries. Borrowing from N. T. Wright,

Frost contends that the initiatives of reconciliation, justice, beauty, and wholeness are the missional quartet we should strive to practice.

Eschewing a “short-term project, like *Forty Days of Purpose*,” Frost demands a more extensive habit-forming ritual for his BELLS. Referencing the work of Jeremy Dean, the author articulates the contention that, if we are to become little Christs, we must develop a greater tenacity than that demanded in the aforementioned work of Warren.

While *Surprise the World! The Five Habits of Highly Missional People* is concise and reasonably presented, many will find the diatribe behind the structure bothersome. Frost presents some helpful materials; notwithstanding, his tone demands nuance.

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