

**The Impact of “Becoming A Missional Family” Series on Christian Families and Its  
Missiological Implications**

***P. C. Mathew Thankachan***

*(This research article is extracted from the thesis for the PhD research of Dr P. C. Mathew submitted to the doctoral committee of Martin Luther Christian University, Faculty of Theology and Religious studies, Shillong, India. Dr. P. C. Mathew is the Founder and Principal of UIM-FRTI, Bangalore and can be contacted on [pcmathew@uimfirti.org](mailto:pcmathew@uimfirti.org))*

**Abstract**

Having come up with critical characteristics of the missional family in the previous research through the reflection on the family of the Godhead, this research study focussed on evaluating the kind of impact the teaching on the missional family would have on Christian families. Does teaching on missional family impact a Christian family to be missional? The study showed a significant impact of this teaching on the family’s beliefs and practices. Above all, writing a family mission statement as a family helped them find a direction for their life and ministry. The research showed that if one’s beliefs are impacted, it will affect one's practice too. The Covid-19 pandemic also taught another vital lesson about using online platforms as an effective tool to reach out to families in the community.

**Keywords**

family, missional, family life education, missiology, missions, theology, understanding missional family

## **Mission as Missio Dei**

The definition of a missional family was formulated and derived from various understandings of a Missional Church. As Eddie Arthur, in an article on the “*Missio Dei* and the Mission of the Church,” says,

First, mission is first and foremost God’s mission. The church does not have a mission of its own. Rather the primary emphasis is on what God is doing for the redemption of the world. Thereafter, consideration is given to how the church participates in God’s redeeming mission. Second, God’s mission is defined in terms of the Triune character and work of God. The Trinitarian emphasis was particularly important. Mission was understood as being derived from the very nature of God. It was thus put in the context of the doctrine of the Trinity, not of ecclesiology or soteriology. (Arthur, 2021)

## **Missional Family**

When translated into a family setting, these two understandings of mission help in defining a missional family. Firstly, Missional Families are not limited by what the “church” does as “mission work”. Instead, they understand their responsibility to fulfill God’s plan in this world as a family. Second, it is a family that lives out God’s character and channels God’s work from the strength of who they are in God. Their engagement in God’s mission is an extension or overflow of who they are. Their mission and their character are intrinsically connected. They emulate the Godhead family in their nature and their mission. Mission flows out of who they are. So, a missional family is a family that lives out God’s mission within their own home and outside.

## **Previous Research**

This understanding of Missional Families gave me the needed direction to formulate the five characteristics of a missional family in my previous research. The five characteristics are worship, affection, incarnation, attractional and nurture. The family of the Godhead, who serves as the model for the missional family, also carried all these characteristics. The earlier research examined the prominent families in the Bible that God used for His mission and were found with these characteristics. The previous research was an exploratory qualitative study using Seidman's phenomenological interview method (Seidman, 2006) to understand the motives, strategies, and challenges of the missional families identified by him. Asbury Theological Seminary, Kentucky, US, approved this study for the Doctor of Ministry program (Thankachan, 2010).

This study was later published as a popular book focusing on the five themes of a missional family interwoven with stories of the selected couples. The book was not published as an academic book but to give families the needed guidance to establish "missional homes". Based on this book<sup>1</sup> and its workbook covering ten chapters, the educational intervention for the impact study was planned. The workbook was mainly used as the discussion guide, and the RightNow Media videos for the intervention to measure the impact.

## **The Need for and Importance of the Current Study**

The "missional families" concept was taught in many settings, such as churches, seminaries, and small groups. But the impact of this teaching had never been evaluated or established. How much does this teaching translate into real-life experiences? Is this only adding

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<sup>1</sup> This book was published by Urban India Ministries in the year 2014 and later a second edition was printed in the year 2018. This book contains ten chapters, which was later supplemented with a family workbook for couples and their children to discuss to apply these principles in their lives. This has been used by many churches both within India and outside. This was later made into a video series by RightNow Media, ([www.rightnowmedia.org/in](http://www.rightnowmedia.org/in)) the largest Christian online library. This is a subscription based online library having more than twenty thousand churches and many individuals worldwide. This teaching has been used by few churches to help their church families to become "missional".

to one's knowledge, or does it make any behavioral or attitudinal change? These unanswered questions prompted me to take this research further. A major influential driver in this research is the foundational belief that Family life education has a key role in changing the perspectives of Christian homes and this understanding is also based on other research done by family life educators as well. This understanding is also based on other research done by family life educators. One such study is the "Effect of family life education on the values and attitudes of adolescents" by John F Crosby. (Crosby, 1971). Empowering every home to live out the mission of God in the place where each family is planted has substantial missiological implications in the witness of the Gospel in India.

### **Objectives**

The objective of this research was multifold. It is aimed to *investigate* the families' understanding of missional families before they went through this study. To *determine* if their perspective was similar to what was taught, or was it different? To *validate* the previous research findings by checking if the concepts are consistent with the families to whom these principles are taught now. To *ascertain* if missional families are produced by teaching these principles or does it require more than just teaching. To *examine* if the teaching of missional families and its impact would have a missiological effect on the witness of the gospel in India.

### **Research Questions**

Three research questions that guided the study were

1. What impact or changes did the families go through in the five aspects of missional families as proposed through the ten weeks of teaching?
2. What are the key stumbling blocks preventing families from becoming missional families today?

3. What missiological implication would this study have for the witness of the Gospel in India?

### **Literature Reviewed**

The reviewed literature included books and articles related to the theology of the missional family and the five characteristics of a missional family. Though many books were referred to and reviewed, some key books played a vital role in shaping my understanding to interpret the impact. The adult learning method associated with the teaching of the missional family was the Transformational learning method by Meizrow. Dr Stephen Seamand's book on the "Ministry in the image of God" provided a theological framework for the internal family dynamics of a missional home. Rob Rienow's book "Limited Church Unlimited Kingdom " gave an overview from Genesis to Revelation to see God's mission working through various families. Ben Freudenburg's book on Family-friendly churches was examined to justify the paradigm shift necessary for churches to equip the saints to promote family discipleship. His proposal of a "Home Centered – Church-supported" approach was recommended over than "Church Centered – Home supported" approach. Since the context of the study was pan India, literature related to the mission context of India was reviewed. The 10-week intervention was done using an online platform, and the relevance of such online media for the research intervention was also studied.

### **Methodology**

The study on "Becoming a missional family" was conducted after an online 10 week family seminar by Urban India Ministries (UIM). This study was planned as a follow up for the couples who went through ten different topics on building a solid marriage through the webinar series. Close to 300 families had signed in every week for this webinar. After this series, with a gap of two weeks, a small group study was planned, and 130 families registered for the same, including married couples and married singles (only one spouse attended). The participants

volunteered for this Bible study on missional families. Urban India Ministries (UIM) divided them into small groups of five to seven couples as per time slots preferred by each family and put them into twelve groups. The participants were all Indians spread across fifteen cities and nine states of India.

Only couples who attended seven sessions and more were counted as participants in this study, which came to about 75 participants. The range of the length of marriage among the participants was also varied. There were newly married couples as well as couples who had been married for many years. The participants were led by eleven facilitators who were carefully selected based on their integrity, missional call, prior acquaintance and had themselves go through this study.

### ***Design of the Study***

The study's design is called the "Sequential explanatory mixed method" (Creswell & Creswell, 2018), using quantitative and qualitative methods to collect and analyse the data. This method was primarily chosen because it allows the collecting of quantitative data from all participants and then, based on the need to explore further, use a qualitative method to confirm and verify the data received. So, two kinds of data collection were done sequentially.

### ***Sampling Design***

The sampling design is non-probability or purposive sampling. This sampling method may give different but valid perspectives (Linda, 1999). The participants are the ones who have already attended the 10-week webinar on marriage organised by Urban India Ministries (UIM) which can be considered a purposeful sample as they have had the needed orientation to move to the small group study, which was conducted as a follow up of the same.

Though the participants volunteered to be part of this research, they are from a group of people who had a foretaste of the 10-week marriage seminar. The sample chosen for sequential qualitative interview data succeeding in the quantitative data collection was purposeful sampling. These participants were picked up based on the analysis of quantitative data.

### ***Data Collection and Data Analysis***

The primary data collection was done using a quantitative method using a closed and open-ended questionnaire as the main instrument. The pre-survey questionnaire was sent to the participants through each of the facilitators before the classes began. Classes were held from Monday to Sunday for various groups as per their sign-ups based on their convenient time. The study was held through licensed Zoom platforms. The timing of the study was for 90 minutes, and the format was similarly followed in every group.

The post questionnaire was sent three months after the commencement of the study. The post-survey questionnaire was collected over three months to six months after the intervention had commenced. As the post-survey questionnaire had seven additional open-ended questions, many gave authentic application-oriented answers rather than just good feedback. If the post-survey had been conducted immediately after the study, the results would have been different. It would have served only as feedback than as a way to assess the impact. But this gap of three to six months gave them time to reflect and share their experiences.

After analysing the quantitative data, those who reported no or low impact were segregated from those who said that this had much or average impact. Fifteen participants reported low or no impact out of the 75 participants while analysing the pre and post-survey questionnaires. As per the sequential explanatory mixed-method, a telephonic interview was then conducted to probe and find an explanation for the low impact of the 15 participants. Only 9

participants were available for further interviews over the telephone. However, this constitutes a majority of 60% of those who felt the study had no impact. Using open-ended semi-structured questions, the 9 participants were interviewed. The interview was recorded and then transcribed into written format. The data collected explained their low impact and validated the quantitative findings.

## **Findings**

### ***Impact on Perceptive***

Though there have been many shifts observed in the beliefs and practice comparing the post and pre questionnaire, I could glean five clear impacts on their beliefs or perception based on the teaching on “missional family”. The key findings are 1. Ministering to others outside of the home is an overflow of who they are inside of one’s home. 2. Being creative in the worship experience at home needs to be pursued to accommodate all age groups. 3. Understanding of family oneness comes through a right understanding of the Trinitarian oneness 4. The call to “sacrifice” is not limited to a few people but all the disciples of Christ 5. Home is a place to display Christ to others.

Though the percentage of change varied for each perspective, what was interesting to note is the change of many who stayed neutral. This change indicated a genuine ignorance faced by participants, by which they could not answer the questions either in the affirmative or negative. For example, on being creative in the worship experience, a 67% increase was noticed among those who disagreed or stayed neutral to agree on innovative methods in the post-survey. Similarly, I could see a considerable shift in the usage of their home as a place to display Christ. 65% of them moved from being unsure of their home (many who chose “neutral”) as a place where people would experience God’s love to becoming surer and wanting to make it a home



that displays Jesus's love to others. So, the percentage increase of those who remained neutral or disagreed shows the effect of intentional teaching on missional families.

### ***Impact on Practice***

It was also encouraging to see the impact on their direct practice. The critical impacts concerning their practices are 1. Regular, consistent, creative, and intentional family worship, 2. Personal and other-centered prayers with many adopting the prayer calendar, 3. Family relationships are enhanced through forgiveness, complementing one another, and fixing intentional family time, 4. They were connecting purposefully with neighbors, friends, and relatives, 5. Family boundaries were prioritized 6. They were writing a family mission statement as a family.

In the open-ended question about the impact of the teaching on "worshiping family", 69 of the 75 respondents clearly mentioned a clear "Yes" to the study's impact on them, which is a whopping 92% of the respondents. Some of them still are "trying" to make it consistent and creative. There are also changes noticed in their family dynamics among those who had issues with forgiveness, inability to complement their spouse etc. One of the key hindrances for families to be missional is their unforgiving attitude towards one another. To a question about their willingness to forgive their family and extended relatives as long as their own family is happy, a good number (65%) of them who were unable to forgive before the study moved towards forgiveness and became sensitive towards the same. To a specific change that was asked about becoming "incarnational", many expressed (54%) to have made intentional efforts to connect to friends and neighbors. Some had invited them for a meal so that they can reflect and share Christ.

One of the last lessons on missional family is about fences that one needs to guard their home. It was interesting to note that 52% of them (from those who were previously not taking a stand and those who did not have the right family priorities) have decided to put firm boundaries to see that career or ministry does not come in the way of family priorities. Of the participants who attended the study, 81.3% have written down the family mission statement. Many have been greatly helped by writing this statement, which is evident from their response to the question, “How has this exercise of writing a family mission statement helped you?” Some of the common responses are: helped to re-enforce the mission, realize the gaps, to prioritize, a constant reminder of the truths, be more clear, grow, discuss and make clear steps, reflect, be focused, have accountability, have a team effort, to become obedient, to learn how to live, to become purpose-driven, gave lots of clarity and direction, to prayerfully prepare and humble before God, to Christ-centered direction etc.

### ***Key Challenges to be Missional***

The three challenges that were found through the personal interview are written in the order of the most disruptive issue to the lesser one. They are

1. Lack of marital harmony and commitment to Christ is the most disruptive factor
2. Prioritising work and other schedules over family and Kingdom priority
3. Lack of motivation and personal struggles to be missional.

Of the nine interviewed participants, based on their responses, seven of them could not be missional because of the lack of family unity and harmony. Many of them spent much time sharing their frustration about their marriage relationship during the interview. The participants selected were from various walks of life and professions, from corporate businesses to Christian ministry. The second finding on priority was derived as close to half of the interviewees shared

their busy schedules and how some are exhausted to do anything. The third finding emerged as I wanted to know if they think the five elements of a missional family were practical and can be practised in homes. They all agree that this is important and should be taught to everyone. But nearly half of the interviewees expressed that they find it challenging to display Christ. Except for two pursuing what they have learned and continuing to be excited, many have become cold and got busy with other priorities and have forgotten to practice what they have learned.

### ***Missiological Implications***

There were six findings on the missiological implication for the witness of the gospel by teaching the concept of missional families. These findings are a result of analyzing the learnings from the impact and challenges. They are 1. Teaching on missional family needs to be given to the whole family for greater impact. 2. One's beliefs need to be changed to have an impact on practice. 3. The conviction that each family has a mission to accomplish, and it starts in their own home is pivotal. 4. Consistent reminders, teaching and motivation is needed for all. 5. Hurting and broken families need special help and care, as many feel helpless though inwardly they desire to be missional. 6. Use of online platforms is effective and should be used to reach out and teach people.

One of the regrets that all of them who attended alone shared was their spouse missing to hear this truth. They greatly desired that their spouse would also be able to hear this truth. This was expressed in the interview and the open-ended question where one spouse did not attend the study. Hence the need to teach to the whole family is a missiological need as it will accomplish more in a home than only one partner attending the sessions.

Another interesting phenomenon observed during the data analysis, was when their beliefs about a few aspects changed, it was reflected in their practice. If their ideas about their

relationship with their spouse changed, they brought them into practice. The same applies to their beliefs in the teachings of Jesus. It changed their approach. This phenomenon was especially noticed in the area of being an affectionate family. When their understanding of their marital relationship was understood through the lenses of the trinitarian relationship, a noticeable change was seen in the practice of mutual submission and treating their spouse with equality. Hence working on one's beliefs is of missiological significance than on developing some "Christian" habits, which may even be good, but not helpful.

When asked about the impact of the study, a few of them have only described their hurts. Though they desired to be missional, their disharmony, lack of oneness and ideological differences hindered that desire. Hence the teaching on missional family is not a therapy for conflicted couples. Many dropouts during the study can also be attributed to marital disharmony and unhappy marriages. So, missiologically, it does not make sense to teach about "missional families" to broken homes, rather the focus should first be on their healing and mending of their relationship.

### **Conclusions and Recommendations**

Through this research, it was more than clear that teaching about missional families is the need of the hour. The findings indicate that many have not been taught or even challenged to live out missional lifestyles. If every church would teach this truth, transformation can happen both within one's church and outside.

The second conclusion is the aspect of Family unity being fundamental to becoming a "missional family". When family unity is disrupted through conflict it affects all other areas of the characteristics of a missional family. It affects their spiritual intimacy, physical intimacy, relational intimacy, parenting, ability to attract others, etc. Their mission gets affected, and they

cannot fulfill God's mission as a family in togetherness. However, even in such cases, the Lord uses the one who strives to be Christ-like to attract the other spouse and the children towards fulfilling God's plan.

The third conclusion is that the mission through every home has both multigenerational and evangelistic impacts. Mission only moves out when one has put their house in order. The sad reality of many countries that sent missionaries to India is a deep famine for godliness and character. This has happened due to the neglect of their own next generation, while they became concerned about other nations and people groups.

The fourth conclusion is that the missional families are not a substitute for church or organised mission work. Many unreached places are reached today by the Gospel because of intentional efforts taken by mission agencies and missionaries who have gone to share the good news of Jesus Christ. While that work should continue both by churches and mission agencies, empowering every believer to become missional would yield an exponential harvest for generations. The Work of God displayed by one's life and their ability to incarnate into their situation and attract others will bring many to the Lord.

## **Recommendations**

### ***Recommendations to the Churches***

a. Pastors should not ignore ministry to their family b. A Church should become more family-oriented than just program-oriented c. The Church should move from a church-centered to a home-centered model d. The Church should care and motivate families struggling with more intentionality e. The Church should look for family champions within the church to lead f. The Church should teach, encourage, and motivate families to witness the Gospel g. The Church should establish and teach a biblical understanding of family life.

### ***Recommendations to Mission Organizations/Agencies:***

a. To understand mission from the aspect of the Trinitarian Godhead family b. To train and bring the culture of being a missional family to all the missionaries c. Ministering to others should not play down ministering to their own families d. To have the family emphasis on discipling of new believers e. To Make “missional family” a mandatory mission strategy and not an option.

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