



## Recognizing and Awakening Missional Christians on Campus

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If you are planting or building an InterVarsity chapter, you know that one key to developing that chapter is gathering missional Christians. ***A missional Christian is defined as a student or faculty who is motivated by their relationship with Jesus to advance the gospel on their campus, someone who is willing to devote time, resources and take risks for Jesus' sake, to engage with cynic and seekers in order that they might be moved to belief.***

In the chapter planting and building frameworks, they are the essential component. But knowing who they are isn't always obvious. Missional Christians have certain characteristics which make them unique and as you spend time with students, you begin to recognize that not every student or faculty is missional. So how can you recognize missional Christians?

We begin to understand who missional Christians are from watching Jesus and his interactions with his disciples. Jesus gathered men and women around him who were going to be essential for the future of the work he set out to do. As we watch these early disciples in action with Jesus and after his resurrection, we can see that these were Jesus' missional leaders.

So what might a missional Christian student look like today?

Bill arrived on campus as a new believer. He'd had a profound conversion and had begun his life as a disciple in a dynamic, conservative, charismatic church. By the time we'd met he was eager to evangelize everyone he knew. He gathered up other frosh and brought them to IV and He mobilized freshmen guys to join a small group. As he recruited others to join him in contact evangelism he was an effective force on campus. He was also effectively offending a wide variety of people. The longer he was on campus, the more complaints I received from other campus ministers, faculty and even the Dean's office. His assertiveness came across as intolerance and arrogance to many. And while the extent of the criticisms went too far, the core issues that were identified were correct. Bill's gifts were big and so were his liabilities. Unchecked, untrained, and unmentored he was a menace to the group. His willingness to take risks was welcome but the randomness of his actions were not. His fearlessness in the face of opposition and conflict meant he wasn't easily intimidated but it also meant *he* could be intimidating and cause those he was confronting to run in the other direction. It would have been easy to decide that Bill didn't fit our group, that he belonged with someone else, that he didn't fit our culture. But it was clear that Bill was a leader and would be important to us if we wanted to see the ministry advance. He was willing to be a part of IV and it became my job (along with other staff) to help Bill not only identify his many gifts but learn how to practice them on campus with love and care. Sometimes that meant correcting some aspect of his behavior that was offensive. Other times it meant standing up for him and protecting him from those who were simply offended by his willingness to be public about his beliefs. It meant giving him space to practice his gifts and flourish in leadership. It meant taking time to teach him from scripture what faithful followership looked like. It meant taking the time to help him understand and find his place in our mission on campus. Bill was definitely a missional Christian. And because we could see it in him, we connected to him and helped him take

his place in leadership. As a result, Bill became a key contributor to the success of the ministry. He was and is an evangelist, a leader and an influencer wherever he goes.

Mary arrived in the group as a freshman. She was quiet and tended to stay on the edges of whatever was happening. The IV group was growing and beginning to become committed in new ways to evangelism but Mary didn't display any of the obvious gifts the group was needing in order to move ahead in conversion ministry. But she kept showing up. She was faithful though quiet and she seemed to determine to go where the group was growing. As staff began to get to know her, they gave her small jobs to do at events they were holding. Mary not only faithfully carried out her responsibilities but began to take initiative to find ways to do those jobs with greater efficiency and effectiveness. As staff and student leaders gave her greater responsibility they began to realize that Mary's gifts were in strategic development. Not only could she organize but she could think through the weaknesses of any system and figure out how to help work better in order for the group to achieve its evangelistic goals. And Mary worked in concert with where the group wanted to go. She was not only a team player but over the net four years became the essential strategist for the development of the most significant large group ministry the group had ever had. Mary was and is a missional Christian. While her gifts are different than Bill's, her impact for the mission was just as great.

As staff, we are watching for missional followers and as we find them, are inviting them to join us in a new endeavor on campus. Some missional believers are already demonstrating their abilities. Others are just beginning to show their talents. Missional Christians don't have the same personality types, nor do they look alike, nor are they exclusively female or male, or a particular ethnicity. They are a diverse group. And because they are young, sometimes they won't demonstrate characteristics that are as easy to see as those shown by the disciples in scripture. They can be opinionated in their enthusiasm. They might show their risk taking talents by taking the wrong risks. Their determination to make a difference may come across as arrogance. Their fearlessness may be interpreted as hubris. Their eagerness to make an impact for the kingdom may be experienced as disruptive to the group. Yet, they do show up on campus and do display some common characteristics.

We are looking for students who:

- *Show up.* They are attracted to what we are doing and like the fact that there is a new risk to take that has a great purpose behind it.
- *Are eager to see something happen* that isn't currently happening on campus. They may not understand what it is we are trying to achieve but they understand enough to engage with us in reaching out to parts of the campus we had never impacted.
- *Are willing to make accommodations in their lives to see something develop.* They rearrange their schedule, are available, and make some sacrifices to see meetings take place and the work gets done.
- *Want more in their relationship to God* and want it for those around them even if they aren't sure how it will be done.
- *Are able to engage with others and seek to have an influence on them.* It's not just that they are smooth relationally, but they make significant connections.
- *Take risks.* The level of risk looks different with different people, but students who are missional demonstrate that they're willing to step out beyond their comfort zone for the sake to this movement they have joined.

- *Are teachable and are willing to learn* and contribute ideas of their own.
- *Can and do gather others* around them.
- *Aren't afraid to stand out* in some way in public as followers of Jesus.

Missional students are both leaders and partners but there will be rough edges. Missional Christians are young when we meet them. Their big gifts are unwieldy and often unmanageable. They may seem brash and full of hubris. They may come across as hard to teach and too eager to take leadership. It takes patience and lots of communication to make headway.

How will you find them? First of all, there must be a missional environment in the group. Missional students won't come to a group that is lacking vision. Staff need to be dedicated to being missional themselves. Like will attract like. Staff should look for opportunities to both demonstrate the fundamental values of the mission they are leading and practice their missional skills. Where are new frontiers on campus for advancing God's kingdom? Staff should be going there. As staff live out a missional lifestyle on campus, they must constantly and consistently cast vision for the work they are doing and be able to explain their strategies. As the group culture becomes more missional, staff must at the same time be out among students, searching out the missional Christians God has sent. You'll find them through Info tables, Contact forms handed out at churches, by following up family friends who you find out attend your campus, through meeting friends of original campus contacts. Each avenue of contact with new students that presents itself is your opportunity to go looking for them. Each day you should be praying for God to give you divine appointments with those he is sending your way. Ask Him to give you eyes to see them and ears to recognize them through the things they are saying.

Each time you meet someone you are looking for signs. How do they respond to your vision for campus ministry? What do you notice about how they relate to others? Do they demonstrate good people skills? Are others gathered around them? Do they want to engage with you in conversation about the mission, asking why you are there? Are they eager for something to begin? Are they willing to meet again?

When you think you've met a missional student, invite them to something else. Over time keep exploring with them their interest in ministry and keep giving them parts of the vision to think about and understand. As you extend an invitation for them to join the group and participate more fully in the ministry, invite them into leadership. As you welcome them in, take them with you as you take steps of faith in bringing the gospel to the campus.

It's important to note that not every outgoing student with good people skills is necessarily missional. I've met many Christian students with strong faith background, who, while friendly and outgoing aren't ready or interested in going with us on the journey we have ahead of us.

Matt came from a strong Christian background. He had been to a Christian high school and had been a leader in his youth group. He was outgoing and attractive and knew how to lead. He signed up for the group early on and seemed like exactly the right person to help us move the group forward. Matt looked like a missional leader because he had sophisticated people skills. He knew his way around the evangelical world and knew the right language. He seemed to want to see the group grow and engage the campus. But Matt wasn't eager to lead change. Matt wanted to head up an organization. He was happy to lead meetings but unlike the missional Christians we were looking for, he didn't have or want to be an integral part of leading a group that sought to take risks in order to advance the impact of gospel. He didn't want to be in a group that crowded his schedule. He was willing to gather students, but his goals were to have a group that supported and encouraged one another but not engage with the secular edge of the campus. Matt didn't

turn out to be the missional leader we needed. He eventually found another group to be a part of that suited his needs more fully.

Be ready to be surprised about who God is calling. Be praying for them. Help them gain a biblical understanding of their role as you work together. And prepare for the day when you will hand the mission over to them.

Missional Christians are essential to the development of mission. May God give us eyes to recognize those he sends!

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[Recognizing and Awakening Missional Christians on Campus](#) is posted on the [Collegiate Ministries website](#) with related resources for InterVarsity staff and student leaders.