

PAINTING MISSION

So what does mission look like? Here's my clumsy attempt at a snapshot. Take a deep breath:

On any given day all across this planet, people are....

holding the hands of dying children and not looking at their watches. They are cleaning the toilets of office blocks with smiling patience and grace. They are telling stories to their neighbours of how God has transformed their lives. They are listening to the stories of their neighbours without interrupting. They are releasing slaves from bonded labour. They are painting canvasses and writing songs that cry for a future where people are not just economic units. They are laying hands on cancer victims and seeing some of them healed. They are doing the dishes with joy. They are planting crocuses in council estates. They are speaking truth to long-repressed painful memories, bringing release and freedom. They are dancing when there seems no reason to dance. They are lifting war-scarred hands in praise.

They are counselling those drowning in debt. They are pouring love into their children. They are giving prisoners a second chance. And when that's gone wrong they are giving them a third chance. They are carrying floppy teenagers home at 2am. They are baking brownies to befriend the lonely. They are mentoring young people who have never had positive role models. They are running rehab programmes not because they are paid to, but because they love the addicts. They are singing unashamedly cheesy songs because their street-cred has been left on an altar. They are blogging the reason for the hope that they have. They are living simply and loving the earth. They are learning the difference between want and need. They are rediscovering the word 'enough'. They are making movies that ask important questions. They are standing in parliaments and councils, speaking up for those who cannot speak for themselves. They are running ethical businesses.

To be more specific, they are helping Sam with his homework because his mum hasn't got time to. They are picking up Daisy from the children's centre because Tuesdays just aren't a good day for her Dad. They are giving out tins of food to Sharon, because the benefits just aren't enough anymore. They are campaigning for a better system that might give Sharon a chance to get off benefits.

They are flying medical expertise and supplies into unreachable parts of Burundi. They are comforting Shola, whose partner has just died of AIDS. They are teaching life-skills to Bernice, whose confidence levels are through the floor. They are challenging big High St names to look after the workers who produce their clothes. They are running a safe-house for Nadia who has been rescued from the sex industry. They are challenging Tom, a CEO, to raise his bank's ethical standards. They are helping Lucy, a geography student, to find her way in life. They are building a low-cost home for Steve and Kerry who could never afford it otherwise. They are giving Declan and Cian an opportunity to play sport when there is no space in their streets. They are giving Don who is homeless the

first breakfast he's had for weeks. They are also helping Don to get off the street with the carrot and stick of tough love. They are caring for Tony, whose MS is deteriorating faster than his family can handle.

John and Sheila are adopting Keziah because her mum simply can't cope. Sasha is running birthday parties for the elderly in her village. Ken sets up the chairs and the coffee for the weekly AA meeting, and then quietly slips away. Jeanette prays for people with arthritis on her local high street and sometimes they walk away skipping. Maisie runs a coffee morning in her local community hall and Hannah, Grace and Kiran have all become Christians through their chats. Terence runs a community choir for women who thought they would never want to sing again. Chris and Isobel are sending shoeboxes full of toys to Romanian children like Ilaf. And many are praying, "Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven."

Amen

God is at work all over the world in countless ways, breathing hope and new life into brokenness. And when you begin to piece these fragmented stories together, something bigger and more beautiful emerges – a grand narrative of restoration. This is God's work. This is his mission. This is the promise of more to come. These are glimpses of where the story is headed.