

Giving shape to intentional discipleship

Simon Jones introduces us to **Mike Breen**, one of our 2007 conference key note speakers.

At the beginning of his book *A Passionate Life*, Mike Breen tells the story of his experience in a sun shower, which his daughters described as like being on the beach in South Carolina. They pressed him to try it. So, pound in hand, he stepped into the white tube by the pool.

And nothing happened. Naturally, everyone was disappointed. But his daughters didn't give up. They persuaded him to try it for longer and longer periods. But each time, he emerged from the sun shower baffled. It wasn't anything like being on the beach at South Carolina.

His daughters were equally baffled. How could he not think this is the best thing ever, they wondered. Persuaded to try it one last time, Mike stood and examined the space he was standing in. Having put in his pound, he'd heard lots of clicking and whirring each time he'd been in – and yet it didn't seem to do anything for him.

This time he noticed a door handle. Turning it, he entered a room 'filled with the most refreshing light rays and replicated ocean breeze I could ever imagine.'

The trouble is, he'd been standing in the changing room each time he'd been in, so no wonder he got nothing out of it.

He uses this story to launch us into LifeShapes. The obvious point is that so many Christians are in the waiting room wondering if that's all there is to the Christian experience. They've put their coin in the slot and are feeling short-changed. Mike's passion is to help Christians get into the spiritual equivalent of the sun shower so their lives will be changed by God's grace.

Mike Breen was team rector at St Thomas Crookes Church in Sheffield, an Anglican and Baptist fellowship. Over his time he grew it into a 2,000 member church, 80% of whom are under 40. Now he's dividing his time between the Community Church of Joy in Glendale, Arizona, the Fuller Seminary where he teaches a course on mission and travelling to introduce others to LifeShapes. He is also the international leader of the Order of Mission.

He and his new colleague in ministry, Walt Kallestad, describe their ministry in these words: 'As pastors, we understand the turmoil church leaders are dealing with today. For the past decade it has become apparent that the modern church models and methods are no longer effective. High control/low accountability church leadership systems are not working. The preoccupation with programmes, property and products is missing the mark. We know you want to see real life change in your people and to see your church grow. We know you want your church to make a difference in your community and in the world. Jesus showed us the way in his teaching to his disciples 2,000 years ago. It is the only way.'

Of course, you could say that what they proceed to offer us is another programme – this one called LifeShapes. But it's probably fair to say that at heart LifeShapes is less like a programme and more like a way of living designed to help people of all kinds and at every stage in their Christian life become more effective disciples.

So what drives Mike Breen? We asked him. And here's what he told us:

Can you tell us how you were called to Christian ministry?

I became a Christian reading the Bible at 16 years old. I immediately felt called to be a missionary leader and over the years I've learnt to understand this more and more.

Where have you had ministries and how long did they last?

My ministries have been mainly city based. In the early years I was based in poor inner city communities such as Brixton and Hackney. In the later years me and the family were based in Sheffield at St. Thomas' Church.

How did the LifeShapes process develop?

When trying to teach non literary people in inner city areas I found that the of discipleship shapes was the easiest way for people to understand the principles Jesus wanted to teach.

What effect do you hope LifeShapes will have on Christians and Churches?

LifeShapes provides transformational tools that empower Christians to follow Jesus more closely.

Can you tell us about the Order of Mission – why it was established, how it operates, where, how many are members of it?

The Order of Mission was established to provide a covenant community for people called to mission in the contemporary world. It was started when church leaders around the UK began to describe us in ways that led us to look at historical models of missional movement. There are about 250 members based all around the world. The three main principles that it operates on are simplicity, accountability and purity.

What is the burden of your ministry now?

My call is now to coach and mentor church leaders as they take on the call to lead the church in radical mission and discipleship.

What are the challenges facing the church in the UK and US at the moment? Are they the same? What differences do you discern?

The difference is mainly centered on the number of people who are God conscious and church attendees. In the US the percentage of the population who are God fearing and church attending is much higher so therefore much of the work is centered on helping churches realize the need to reach out and the perils of future decline. In the UK on the other hand, the churches and Christian leaders realize we are working in a post-Christian environment and therefore the main task is to provide tools that will equip churches to reach beyond their own congregation.

What will you be saying to the delegates at the Mainstream conference in January?

- Discipleship
- How to structure our churches for mission

- How to understand the Scriptures from a fresh perspective

What do you miss about the UK now that you live in the States?

Chocolate and friends

Who were the people who mentored you in the faith when you were a young Christian? Who were your ministry mentors? Why?

A young curate called John Bellam, a local pastor in Hackney called John Pearce and although they didn't know it George Whitfield, Charles Spurgeon, Martin Lloyd-Jones and John Wimber.

Mike Breen is keen for Christians – and especially leaders – to see the days of upheaval we're living in as days of real opportunity for mission. That's why he is currently the leader of the Order of Mission – the Superior in its parlance.

The world is changing faster than the church and this often leaves us – its leaders, let alone the people we lead – feeling disoriented and unsure about where we stand and how to talk about Jesus to our neighbours.

One of the things the Order of Mission's website reminds us is that the church has frequently lived through such times of turmoil. And each time God has stirred his people to fresh thinking and bold action for him – from the Celtic monks to the early Methodists and on to the Salvation Army, God has raised up communities of people who take Jesus at his word and seek to model their lives on his in their context.

So check out the Order of Mission's website (www.missionorder.org/) and look at Mike Breen and Walt Kallestad's two books *The Passionate Life* and *The Passionate Church*. Check out the St Thom's website too (www.sttoms.net/modules/wfsection/). There's a host of useful, thought-provoking stuff here that you'll find useful for your own walk with God and as you work with others in your churches.

And come to the conference and interact with Mike's sessions and the seminar strands. Ask the hard questions and come away armed with the means to fulfil the Great Commission – which is that as we go into world, we go with the intention of making disciples (the only command in Matthew 28:19), starting where we are and working to the ends of the earth.