



Berry reflects on the formational nature of fresh expressions.

I once went to see the great Mountaineer, Doug Scott, talk. One part really stuck in mind. It wasn't about the moments of great peril, where life hung on the load strength of a single Carabiner. It was about his process of packing!

Scott developed a particular way of packing for a trip. First, he would empty all of his bags and boxes of the detritus from the last trip, but as he did so, he made a note of what he didn't use on the trip. What in hindsight was superfluous or unused luxury?

Then he would gather everything he had put aside for the upcoming journey, lay it all out on the floor so he could see exactly what was there. Then he would begin to pack, then he would unpack and repeat the process, three times! Each time refining the load, removing items and working out where everything needed to be.

This process served two purposes. Firstly, he ascertained how much space he had, which helped to work out how much he could take. He therefore had to prioritise items in a very disciplined, even brutal way.

Secondly, he was rehearsing. Packing and repacking in the comfort of his living room meant that when it came to finding something while in a ramshackle Himalayan airport, or in a tent during a blizzard, he would know exactly where everything was.

Each trip increased his knowledge of what was needed and what wasn't, to be able to launch deeper into the wild. Each trip was formational for the next.

He wrote, *"Each of the mountains I have climbed has been unique, presenting my friends and me with a new set of challenges every time. During the course of an expedition, and in overcoming these challenges, we became far more aware of ourselves and of each other."*

Years later, I spent an afternoon with fellow Pioneer minister, Luke Larnier. At the time, Luke was very involved in ministry alongside outlaw biker gangs, and I had spent a few years similarly with a far-right skinhead scooter club. We talked about the road trips we had been on.

On the road, we share experiences that shape us. Often these experiences are challenges, a breakdown in a remote location, an encounter with a different group, the "do you remember when..." moments. These moments become stories, even legends, that we keep retelling. They form part of our bigger story. They grow a language of their own, a language that we alone share. There comes a point when a single word alone is enough to take everyone who was there back to that moment, and it begins to form a part of who 'we' are. In short, we make shared meaning and culture together as a community.

But there is a danger as we return from the road trip, back to the club house. This new meaning and language we have made can become exclusive, particularly as new people join our community. Language which has meaning for 'us' can be meaningless to 'them'. They have not shared in its making, they do not carry with them the depth of the story. To them it can feel like jargon, arcane language which separates and

identifies them as being 'other'.

For community to grow, it needs to be constantly making new meaning, new language together, creating a new shared culture for all of us.

This is why formation is a key part of the Fresh Expressions journey. We are a church of the road trip, of the adventure. The heart of Fresh Expressions is a call to make new and shared meaning together as God is experienced and the Gospel is lived in new places and in new cultures.

[More about Mark.](#)

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