

1 Why?

The Bible's story of God's mission to the world

Contents

1. Small Group Bible Study

Creating an atmosphere for Mission Development

2. Communal Bible Study

Assembling God's story of mission

3. An Exercise in Missional Imagination

The coming of the Kingdom

4. Small Group Bible Study

Mission from the ends of the pew to the ends of the earth

1. Small Group Bible Study

Creating an atmosphere for mission development

Mission is primarily a matter of the heart rather than a plan. As such, a desire for developing mission is a spiritual discipline that must be continually nurtured within congregational life.

It is useful to use the language of 'development' rather than 'change' for two reasons. Firstly, people often have an inbuilt fear of change. Secondly, change suggests moving from one status quo to another. If congregational mission planning is to have a lasting impact, it needs to establish a new culture of mission within the Church. This will involve the learning of new habits and practices which will promote the ongoing development of mission strategy and approach.

These new ways of thinking and doing need to be incorporated as part of the 'operating system' of the congregation. However congregations are neither machines nor businesses, they are made up of the relational web of the lives of the people of God. The spiritual atmosphere in which plans for mission are developed needs to be carefully nurtured and maintained so as to both preserve unity and release the potential of those relationships.

The following small group study highlights the spiritual resources that congregation's need to draw on in developing mission plans.

BIBLE STUDY

The atmosphere in which a discussion takes place can make all the difference. The same issue raised between friends takes on a completely different flavour than when broached by enemies.

As we seek to develop mission in our congregation we will find ourselves stretched in all sorts of ways. Tensions will arise from the different way people see things, as a result of differences of opinion about the past and views as to the best ways forward in the future. Periods of transition are always stressful and adopting changes that enable us to reach out to others often disturb our well-worn ways of going. Attempting to maintain a distinctively 'Christian atmosphere' in which discussion can take place will be key.

The following study, based on selections from the early chapters of the Book of James, reminds us of some of the spiritual resources that God has given us as His people in the Church. It challenges us to draw on these resources to maintain an atmosphere which encourages both reality and respect in our discussions of how God is calling us to mature in developing a heart for mission in the future.

SCRIPTURE

As we plan for mission we will hear many voices. These will include the voices of others within the congregation and beyond, as well as our own voice as we offer our opinions. Above all however, we want to listen for the voice of God. God speaks to us in Scripture and applies it to our own lives and situations by his Holy Spirit. At each stage of the mission planning process we need to stop and reflect on how God is guiding us.

> READ JAMES 1v. 22-25.

1. Describe the attitude with which these verses tell us we should come to listen to God's voice?
2. How do we feel about the idea of using God's Word as a mirror of our congregation's life?
3. How might we be failing to know God's blessing and bring his blessing to others through our lives and congregation (v.25)?

PRAYER

Even as we plan with the best intentions to do God's work sometimes we are tempted to get carried away by our own ideas. Approaching the task of planning for mission with prayer will constantly remind us that we depend upon God.

> READ JAMES 1v. 5-8.

1. How do these verses encourage us to approach congregational mission planning with prayer?
2. What is the relationship between expectation in prayer and God answering prayer?
3. In what ways can we as a congregation make prayer a vital part of seeking God's will for mission?

GRACE

Grace is at the centre of what God gives to us in Christ and the mark of our lives as his followers. We are to seek to act and react to others, even those with whom we disagree, as God acts towards us in Christ.

> READ JAMES 1v.19 & 20.

1. Describe what you think a church meeting in which there were differing views would be like if every person followed the advice given.
2. How would you feel about being part of such a meeting?
3. In what ways can we as individuals show grace when decisions reflect our views as well as when they go against our preferences?

IMAGINATION

One of the sins James wants to warn his readers against is favouritism in the church on the basis of wealth. To spell the issue out in plain terms, he imagines two visitors arriving at the door before a church service.

> READ JAMES 2v.1-11.

1. How might using our imaginations enable us to better put the Bible into practice in our setting today?
2. Think of an example of an issue in your community, nearby or overseas. Imagine what it might look like for your congregation to play a part in helping address that issue.

3. How might we develop the role of imagination in thinking about our congregation's future mission?

FOR PRAYER

- Thank God for the relationships between members within your congregation.
- Ask God to heal strained relationships.
- Thank God for the resources of Scripture, prayer, grace and imagination.
- Ask God to preserve the unity of your congregation as you approach the task of mission planning.

Communal Bible Study

Assembling God's story of mission

Mission reflects the very heart of God for the world. God calls us to participate in the overflow of his love in the ongoing story of what He is doing to redeem and restore his world. The Church is 'the body of Christ', the visibly present representation of who God is and what he does, now that the earthly life of Christ is over (1 Corinthians 12v.27).

We represent God by going into the world in the manner and by the means which God has shown us in Jesus. As Jesus said in John 20v.21, 'As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.'

If we are to represent God as we follow Jesus in continuing His mission to the world we need to be clear about the bigger story of God's work in the world. As we better understand all the aspects of that story, we will more fully appreciate what God is calling us to be and to do.

The purpose of this exercise is for members of the congregation to gather together the key themes of the Bible's storyline. Having done so, we will attempt to piece them together into a more comprehensive understanding of God's mission. Each aspect will help shape our thinking about our activity in mission.

LEADER'S INSTRUCTIONS

- Copy and cut out the eight headings of the Bible story and hang them in random order on a 'washing line'.
- Discuss in groups which order they think the parts of the story should come.
- After feedback, hang the parts of the story in the right order as below.
- Divide those present into small groups to discuss one or more of the parts of the Bible's story of mission. Each group will need to report back the key aspects of what they learned for everyone present.
- Finish by pegging the one word learning summaries (see question three) below the appropriate heading along the washing line as a focus for a time of prayer.

Assembling God's story of mission

GOD

1. Look up Genesis 1v.1. Who does the Bible's story begin with?
2. The Bible reveals God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit, three persons in relationship and community with each other. Look up Genesis 1v.26. Given that we are made in the image of God to have fellowship with him, what does that suggest about the importance of relationships and community in Christianity, human life and the Church's mission?
3. Which one word sums up what you have learned about mission from these verses?

CREATION

1. Look up Genesis chapter 1. Which phrase is repeated to reflect how God felt about his creation in vv. 9, 12, 18, 21, 25, 31?

2. Look up Genesis 2v.15. What is mankind's first job description?
3. What do we learn from these verses about God's concern for the world He made?
4. Which one word sums up what you have learned about mission from these verses?

INCARNATION

1. Look up John 1v.14. Where does Jesus come to live, and what does his life display?
2. Look up John 20v.21. If Jesus 'sends us' in the same way the Father sent him, what does that suggest about how we are to engage in mission?
3. Which one word sums up what you have learned about mission from these verses?

CROSS

1. Look up Philippians 2v.5-8. What are the marks that characterize Jesus' mission?
2. In what ways should our attitudes in mission mirror those of our crucified master?
3. Which one word sums up what you have learned about mission from these verses?

FALL

1. Look up Genesis 3v.14-24 and identify as many destructive effects of sin upon our lives as you can.
2. In what ways might God be calling us to seek to counter these destructive effects of sin upon society?
3. Which one word sums up what you have learned about mission from these verses?

PROMISE

1. Look up Isaiah 61v.1-3. What effects of sin does God promise to reverse?
2. Look up Luke 4v.16-21. How did Jesus see his mission to be fulfilling God's promise to reverse the effects of sin?
3. Which one word sums up what you have learned about mission from these verses?

RESURRECTION

1. Look up Matthew 28v.16-20. In whose authority and power are we to do mission?
2. What instructions do verses 19 and 20 give us for mission?
3. Which one word sums up what you have learned about mission from these verses?

RESTORATION

1. Look up Revelation 21v.5. What will Jesus do when he comes again?
2. Describe your visions of what lives, places and the planet restored by God would look like?
3. Which one word sums up what you have learned about mission from these verses?

An Exercise in Missional Imagination

The coming of the Kingdom

As we read the Scriptures it is noticeable in times of crisis and declension in the life of the Church that God often speaks by providing a vision of a future renewed by the coming of his Kingdom. We see this in the vision given to the prophets in the days following the Babylonian exile in the Old Testament, and also in the revelation given through John during the days of persecution experienced by the Christians at the time of the writing of the Book of Revelation.

As we seek to reflect on our part in God's story of mission to the world the use of our imaginations - informed by some of the images of Scripture - can prove a powerful tool. The following piece is

based on an imaginative rendering of the opening sections of Revelation chapters 21 and 22. It seeks to delineate what some of the features of God's restoration of all aspects of life would look like in the modern day setting of the city of Glasgow. It is offered as a stimulus to the missional imagination of congregations as they begin to reflect on their part in God's mission of the restoration of all aspects of life in their local area.

LEADER'S INSTRUCTIONS

- Read Revelation 21v.1-5 and 22v.1-6. • Explain the connection to the New Glasgow piece.
- Read 'A New Glasgow' and give copies out to all present.
- In groups, ask them to write down a few concrete examples of what the coming of the kingdom of God might restore and renew in the life of their community.

A New Glasgow

I saw a vision – it was last Thursday at 11 o'clock in the morning: I was standing on the Necropolis, looking down over the city; And the cold blue winter sky broke open above my head And the spirit of God breathed on my eyes

And my eyes were opened

I saw Glasgow, the holy city, coming down out of heaven; Shining like a rare jewel, sparkling like "clear water in the eye of the sun"; And all the sickness was gone from the city, There were no more suburbs and schemes; No difference between Bearsden and Drumchapel

I saw the Clyde running with the water of life, As bright as crystal, As clear as glass, The children of Glasgow swimming in it.

And the spirit showed me the tree of life growing in Glasgow Green I looked out and there were no more homeless people, No more women working the streets, No more needles in the alleys, HIV and Aids were things of the past, There were no more racist attacks, No more rapists,

26 No more stabbings No more sectarianism Because there was no more hate!

And I saw women walking safe at nights, Saw the men were full of passion and gentleness, That none of the children were ever abused, Because the people's sex was full of justice and of joy.

I saw an old woman throw back her head and laugh like a young girl; and when the sky closed back, her laughter rang in my head for days and days and would not go away. This is what I saw, looking over the Gallowgate, Looking up from the city of death; And I knew then that there would be a day of resurrection, And I believe That there will be a day of resurrection.

Small Group Bible Study

Mission from the end of the pew to the ends of the earth

'You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.'

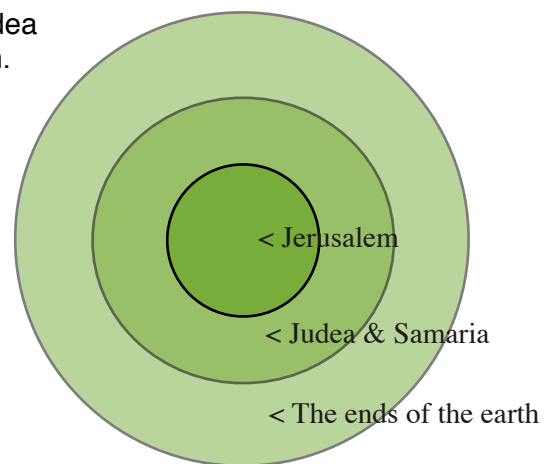
Acts 1v.8

Acts chapter 1 verse 8 records Jesus' famous last words to His followers before he was taken up into heaven. They reflect his Father's big plans for the world. From this little band of first disciples God was going to grow a Church that, in the power of the Spirit, would extend a witness to His glory to the farthest horizons of the world.

As we begin to approach the task of mission planning this verse gives us a helpful way of understanding God's call to be involved in the work of his Kingdom in its widest perspective. Jesus offers his first disciples three horizons for mission – Jerusalem, Judea & Samaria and the ends of the earth. We might best view these horizons in terms of a ripple effect, stretching out from the

point of local impact in Jerusalem, to national impact in Judea and Samaria, to international effect to the ends of the earth.

The Church in every age is called to keep the task of mission in this multiple perspective. In the global village in which we now live the opportunities to cross boundaries in mission is ever extending. It will be important to keep these horizons for mission in view as we develop our Congregational Mission Plan. With that in mind, we turn to consider how Jesus' last words to his disciples apply to our involvement in mission today.



You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem...

> READ ACTS 2v.1-13

1. The verses you have just read record how 'mission began at home' for the first disciples. What does your congregation's mission in its local area look like at present? What other challenges might local witness pose?
2. Acts 2v.1 - 8v.1 records the story of how the first disciples brought the good news of Jesus to the first horizon of their local community. Scan the section headings in these chapters in your Bible. What familiar stories do you recognise? What do they suggest about what local mission might involve?

You will be my witnesses in Judea and Samaria...

> READ ACTS 8v.2-7

It took a persecution to move the early Church to mission on the next horizon of Judea and Samaria. This horizon represents a regional or national area. Mention of Samaria particularly points to mission among those like the Samaritans, whose backgrounds were different from those of the first Jewish believers.

3. What opportunities do we as a congregation, or as individual members, have to be involved in mission outside our parish area and in aspects of wider life and society?
4. Where is our 'Samaria' – a place or people group with a different setting, background and lifestyle from that of most of our members? What might it take to move us to action on this horizon for mission?

You will be my witnesses to the ends of the earth...

> READ ISAIAH 49v.5-7

In these verses Isaiah prophesies the spread of the gospel beyond Israel to the ends of the earth that we begin to see in the second half of the Book of Acts. It should always be 'too small a thing for us' (v.6) to set our horizon for mission at local, regional or even national level. Our vision must always stretch to the world beyond.

5. What part is our congregation playing in taking God's good news to the nations?
6. How might we better incorporate this as part of our planning for mission?