

M. SCOTT BOREN

CULTIVATING COMMUNITY

IN THE

WAY OF
JESUS



A STUDY GUIDE FOR
MISSIONAL SMALL GROUPS

DISCOVER THE WAY OF COMMUNITY & MISSION

Small groups provide great places to connect with a few other Christians, but many are looking for more than a weekly meeting that never goes beyond Bible study and some fellowship. They long for more than sitting in a circle to talk about a book or watch a video. They want to live the gospel of God, not just talk about it.

God made us for more, and deep down we all know it. We know that we were made to manifest community in the way of Jesus.

This study guide serves as a primer to help groups get started on this path. As a companion to the book *Missional Small Groups*, it will set a course for your group to move beyond a good meeting and into a kind of life together that makes a difference in the lives of group members and in the world.

Filled with practical start-up suggestions along with creative exercises to help you develop your own ideas, this resource will guide your journey toward participating in God's life and mission in the world. It will launch you in the way of Jesus.

M. Scott Boren is the president of the Center for Community and Mission, a consulting and training ministry that helps churches develop effective small groups and equips leaders for missional church life. He is the author of numerous books, including *Leading Small Groups in the Way of Jesus*.

CULTIVATING COMMUNITY

IN THE WAY OF JESUS

BECOMING A GROUP THAT
MAKES A DIFFERENCE

A Study Guide
for *Missional Small Groups*

M. Scott Boren

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“Missional” and the Way of Jesus

When I wrote *Missional Small Groups* in 2010, the word “missional” was bouncing around church circles and it was being used by many to generate fresh interest and hope regarding the future of the church. At that point, it made sense to give the book the title that we did. Since writing that book, the “word” missional has been used by so many different people in so many different ways that in some ways it has lost its sense of meaning. In fact, because the word “missional” has expanded so widely to mean such a wide array of things that when it is used we must follow up with What do you mean by that?

In addition, people bring their own experiences and understandings to the missional conversation. Therefore, when average church members engage the word, they do not find it compelling because they assume it's for people who like missions, are passionate about evangelism, or zealous for social justice. As a result the conversation stalls.

At the same time the word is rich with meaning, if we take time the time to reflect

on what it means about God and about God's people. In part, it means joining God in how God is making a difference in the world. God is a missional God who has been, is now and will be at work in the world to restore all things. God is on mission and he invites us to walk with him as the Spirit moves on the face of the earth to make all things new.

At the same time, it is too easy for us to turn God's "mission" into something that we do for God because he has told us do things like "make disciples" (Matt 28:19), "witness," (Acts 1:8), and to "feed the poor" (?). While these are descriptive of God's mission to redeem the world, when we try to make them happen for God then we turn God's mission into our mission. It might look right, but we do it the wrong way.

To join God in God's mission is to join God in God's way, one that was most fully unveiled in Jesus Christ. We are participants in the way of God (2 Peter 1:4). We are not merely activists or practitioners who do things for God. We are participants in the life of God, a way that Jesus demonstrated as living in union with the Son before the Father by the power of the Spirit. God's mission is to give himself and we can only be "missional" as we receive this ongoing gift of relationship. This is all the church has to offer the world.

At the end of *Missional Small Groups*, I included a simple small group discussion guide in the appendix to lead a group to engage the material I wrote. After its publication I subsequently developed a longer study guide which I gave away for free. After over 25,000 downloads, I decided to develop the study guide further and include additional practical ideas that had been used for generations in groups that lived out the way of Jesus—long before the word missional became trendy.

The way of Jesus is the way of missional living, but it will most likely end up being different than you expect. It is a way of making space in our lives for the Spirit to form us in the way that God is on mission, a way of self-giving love. And what this will look like for your group will always be serendipitous.

This is why I called use the image of "the way of Jesus." This is the path that we take in order to enter into God's love for the world. It's not something that we make happen with our smarts, talents, or efforts. It's an encounter with God's presence in us that changes us and changes the world around us.

Introduction

This is not a Bible study guide, at least not in the sense that you will find at your local bookstore. Be assured that the Bible is a huge part of this study, as I am convinced that entering into the imagination of God's Word crucial to being God's people. However, if you approach this Study Guide with a preconceived imagination of a typical small group Bible study, most likely you will miss its point. Instead, think of this as a practice guidebook.

This is a guidebook for practicing community and mission, a starter kit of sorts. In my book *Missional Small Groups*, I introduce how life in missional community could be compared to learning how to play a guitar. When a novice picks up a guitar, he or she learns to play very simple rhythms over and over and then allows them to develop into more complex musical patterns. Missional life might look like radical activism to those looking in from the outside, but really it is comprised of basic rhythms that are played over, and over, and over that make room for the Spirit to lead us in new directions. These rhythms are: Communion, our life together as a community before God; Relating, our life together of loving one

another; and Engagement, our life together as we relate to those in our neighborhoods. All three are “missional” because the Spirit of God works through all three to shape our lives to be a sign, witness, and foretaste of God’s dream for creation.

Each of these rhythms can be developed by adopting a set of practices as a group. In chapters 6, 7, and 8 of *Missional Small Groups*, I introduce seven practices for each of the three rhythms. In this study, you will walk through a thirteen-step process to help a group experiment with and learn how to be missional by putting three of these practices into action. This expands what I introduced in Appendix A of *Missional Small Groups* in short form.

This is not a list of ideas for you to make happen. Nor is this a preconceived model for you to follow that will make your group “missional.” This is a way for your group enter into the Jesus way as you make room for the Spirit to shape and reshape how you operate and share life as a group. This process depends upon the group listening to the Spirit of God and to the Scriptures. In other words, it is not a process of simply going out and doing something called missional.

Different groups will learn missional rhythms at different speeds. Some will pick them up quickly, while others will develop them slowly. Speed is not the key to effectiveness. The Spirit of God never seems to “get stuff done” as quickly as we would like. The Holy Spirit is shaping us to be a people that demonstrates God’s love. And this is cultivated as we choose a practice and repeat it. Even the most gifted and creative musicians practice the basics repeatedly. One professional studio guitarist was asked how he plays with such excellence. He responded, “Every day I repeatedly practice the basic chords that a novice learns.” The goal of these studies is to help a group learn the basics and practice them consistently.

These studies work best if the group takes twelve to fifteen weeks to go through the first twelve steps. Then in study thirteen the group will determine next steps regarding what it needs to process further. For most groups, it will take intentional focus over a period of six months to a year in order for these rhythms to become second nature.

Short video teaching segments can be viewed at www.mscottboren.org.

Session 1

The Idea of Missional Community

Let's Get Honest about Real Life

Personal Reflection

When we think about the ministry of community and how we as a group can be involved in God's mission in the world, the tendency is to think about what we do or don't do in order to make a difference. Action is paramount. We tend to look for a list of things that we can implement in order to move from a group that is simply doing a weekly meeting to a group that really lives out community and mission. We look for a strategy that we can implement so that we can make our group work.

Doing something gets the attention. Being intentional becomes important. And as a result, the pressure often falls upon the leader. If the leader follows the right pattern or leads according to the right set of instructions, then the group will move from a ho-hum Bible study into God's kind of community. With this mindset, the role of this kind of resource is to provide the right set of instructions for you to follow.

That's not what this is. In what follows you will not find something like 8 steps to becoming a missional community or 5 ways to take your group to the next level. I wish that such a step-wise plan were possible, but groups are made up of people, not widgets. People are far too complex for that.

Instead, this study I don't know about you, but the thought of trying to make a group live into the biblical call for community and mission is more than daunting. It scares me. That's something I don't want to sign up for.

One of the biggest lessons I have learned as a leader is that God's mission is God's, not mine. Whenever I forget this, the pressure pours on me like wet cement, waiting to harden and tie me down to something I cannot do. No matter how hard I try, this pressure never actually produces the life and love that are characteristics of God's mission in this world.

But when I surround myself with the truth that God is on mission in our world to make a difference and that the Spirit of God is being sent into this world today to draw us into and empower us to live with God in this mission, then I get swept up in a breeze like a sheet on a warm summer day. Freedom. Freedom to be myself and be with God. Freedom to be loved and to love. Freedom to make a difference in ways that I thought were only possible in my dreams or in stories about other people who are much more radical than me.

Being missional is not about me, my efforts, and my willingness to be radical. If

we start there, while we might do a lot of things that outwardly look like things Jesus would do, I've found that we too often miss Jesus. You see, this is not about doing a lot of stuff, performing a certain set of actions, or trying to change the world. It is about being drawn into what God is doing in the world and becoming part of the story that God is telling. You and I are invited to be characters in the story, of which Jesus is the main character.

The life we live tells a story. The life we live as a group tells a story. When we try to change that story by doing radical things, we become the center of that story. Good things might happen. People might be blessed. But the missional story is not about this. It's about stepping out in the wind of the Spirit and allowing the life of God to change the story we tell. God is the primary character; we only play a supporting role. Yes, there are things we do, but our actions are never the primary plot of this story. We are only receiving and returning the love of Jesus, manifest through the Spirit in us. As we do this, we can make a difference, a lasting difference in the world. Missional is not so much something we do, as it is something we become.

If you have a desire to go deeper with this topic, read chapters 1–3 in *Missional Small Groups*, but especially chapter 3.

The Group Meeting Agenda

Opening Question

If you were a historian in the year 2200 and were given the task of understanding everyday life of the average North American in the decade beginning in 2010, what words would you use? (Give about ten minutes to this activity. It is often helpful to have a poster hanging on the wall and write down the various words contributed by the group.)

Write down responses in this space:

Discussion: How Groups Change Our Lives?

Watch the video.

Read the testimonies below about the four stories, one at a time, and then briefly respond to the questions.

The Story of Personal Improvement

We get together because life is tough in this world and we need a few friends. It is not always convenient for us to meet every week, but we do meet when we can. Usually we meet in short six- or seven-week periods or we meet a couple times a month. We get together, talk a bit about God or study the Bible, and share what is going on at work and in our families. I am not sure that we are close, but it is good to have a place where we can share a little about what is going on in our lives. Being in my small group has improved my life.

- What do you see going on in this kind of group?
Make sure that these questions don't take much time. The point is simply to talk. There is no need to go deeply into each question.
- What is the value of this group?

- What is the weakness of this group?
- What is the key value of this group to the individual member?
The key value is “personal benefit.” If it is beneficial to the member, then the group will work. If not, then they will opt out.

The Story of Lifestyle Adjustment

This group has become a priority to us. We have adjusted our schedules to meet together at least every other week, but usually we meet weekly. In our meetings, we either study the sermon preached by our pastor or use a Bible study guide that we all find personally beneficial. We truly enjoy each other’s presence, and we put a high priority on the group and the members in the group. We even do something social once each month. We rise to the occasion when someone has a need, and there is a sense that we are friends.

- What do you see going on in this kind of group?
- What is the focus of this kind of group?
Usually the focus of this group is meeting attendance. People adjust their lives so that they can attend the meeting.
- What is the key value of this group to the individual member?

The Story of Relational Revision

Our group has a weekly meeting, but I am not sure you would call it a meeting in a formal sense of the word. When we get together, it is the culmination of the rest of the week when we have been in one another’s lives. It is a time of sharing what God has been doing, praying for each other, and talking about how God is using us in our normal lives. Yes, we do have a weekly lesson, but the leader usually asks only one or two questions from it.

The most important part of our group, however, is not the meeting; it is how we are connected the other six days. I have never been part of a group in which people are so willing to sacrifice time and energy for each other. And this connectedness actually spills out into our neighborhood. It seems like we are always interacting with, praying for, and serving people who live near us. And in some ways, they are just as much, part of our group as those of us who call ourselves Christians.

I am not sure how I was able to do life before having this group. This might sound a bit utopian, but it is far from it. Sometimes it is hard. Recently we had to wrestle with some relational conflict and hurt feelings. In the past I would have run away from such encounters, but not this time. It was not easy, but we pressed through. We are still learning what it means to be God’s family.

- What do you see going on in this kind of group?
- What is the focus of those in this kind of group?
People in such a group are learning to do life together differently. The key is learning and foregoing any pressure to “arrive” at some kind of ideal.
- How is this kind of experience different from the first two?

The Story of Missional Re-creation

We have developed a way of connecting with each other and God that has resulted in some rather unpredictable developments. Two couples and a single person in our group live within walking distance of each other. So as a group we decided to adopt their neighborhood. We started with a block party. At first it was hard because no one knew us, but after the first party, we started becoming a presence in the community. Then one person started a summer children’s Bible study, and as she got to know the neighbors and their needs, we began to pray. Now we have come around a single mom who has three kids, and we include her as much as we can in the life of the group. She has yet to fully understand who Jesus is, but we feel led to embrace her and the kids and see what God does in her life.

- What do you see going on in this kind of group?
- What is the focus?

This group has learned to do life differently than the world around it. Members have begun to adopt a distinct pattern and therefore they are not as dependent upon specific structures, curriculum, etc. They respond to needs around them and can become creative about how they respond to those needs.

Discussion: A Peculiar People

Read 1 Peter 2:9. Three translations are included below to help you process what the Apostle Peter was saying about the church being unique, distinct, and set apart.

But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. (KJV)

But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light ... (NIV)

But you are the ones chosen by God, chosen for the high calling of priestly work, chosen to be a holy people, God's instruments to do his work and speak out for him, to tell others of the night-and-day difference he made for you—from nothing to something, from rejected to accepted. (The Message)

- What does it mean when Peter calls us a “peculiar people”?
- How has our group been less than “peculiar,” simply a normal group that is simply an addition to our normal lives?
- In what ways has this normal group experience been beneficial?
- In what ways have you longed for more from the group experience?
- How can a group help people live in a way that is different from the normal life experience?

Between the Meetings Options

Here are some things that you can do between meetings each week. They are suggestions, not assignments. Refer back to this page and see what might work best for your group.

Option #1

Read the corresponding material found in Missional Small Groups that goes with specific study. Call one another or better yet meet for coffee and discuss it.

Option #2

Read 1 Peter 2:9 every day and use the following questions to shape your prayer time.

Read: Read the passage. What stands out to you?

Reflect: Reflect on what stands out. What comes to mind as you do?

Pray: Turn your insight into a prayer.

Wait: Wait on God. What do you sense God speaking to you?

Option #3

Reflect on this question: What do you long for from a community? To answer this question you might need some time to reflect and think. In fact, it might be helpful to reflect on this question multiple times.

Session 2

The Rhythms of Missional Community

Let's Talk about a Different Way

Personal Reflection

In his book *Experiencing God*, Henry Blackaby wrote of the truth that God is at work in this world and that our job is to see what God is already doing and get involved. I remember when I was in college and I participated in a small group that studied his material. On the video teaching he often quoted John 5:19–20: “Very truly I tell you, the Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees his Father doing, because whatever the Father does the Son also does. For the Father loves the Son and shows him all he does.” Then he would point out that if Jesus operated from this perspective as God incarnate, so should we.

For years I have wrestled with this verse. I did not question whether it was true or not. Nor have I had trouble understanding what it means. It seems simple and straight forward enough. Rather, I have struggled to understand what this actually looks like in real life. It seems very easy to quote a Scripture like this in church circles. But Jesus is not using religious cliches here. He is not speaking of life in the synagogue. He is talking about seeing what the Father is doing in real life, which means that he is talking about how we follow Jesus in our real lives.

I took piano lessons for six years, but I did not actually learn much. I did not appreciate the music. I did not try to understand what was actually going on in the music. I kept the rhythms at a distance and never let them get inside me. Music for me was a weekly piano lesson and lots of black lines on a page. Sometimes I think this is the way we treat God while at the same time hoping that we can will ourselves into joining God in his mission. As a result, mission becomes an exercise in techniques. We want a list of rules for being a community that lives out the Jesus way so that we can do what God wants us to do.

Instead, God invites us into the music of his life. He sends the Holy Spirit to live within us, draw us into his life, teach us to love one another, and empower us to carry his love to those around us. This is God’s mission in and through us to the world. This is what makes a difference. It’s what makes us stand out or be distinctive. Too much of what is called Christian in our world is really not that distinctively Christian. The words might line up with the Bible, but the patterns of our lives don’t allow the music to flow in and through us.

Imagine that all of us were invited to hear one of the great symphonies of Beethoven. While all of us might appreciate its beauty, those who know how the music works and understand a bit about Beethoven’s style would enjoy it to a much greater degree. And those who have spent years playing the music of Beethoven would not only enjoy it the most, they would actually enter into and

participate in the music while listening to it. The music would get in them because they know the rhythms.

As we allow the Spirit of God to play God's music through us, our ability to see what the Father is already doing increases. We develop a sensitivity to discern what God is doing and wants to do in our world. The music gets inside us and we become different. And as a result, the world around us changes too.

Chapter 5 in *Missional Small Groups* provides the background to this study.

The Group Meeting Agenda

Opening Question

What are the normal activities of our group?

(Write responses on a large piece of paper with a marker.)

Discussion: Learning to be Missional

Watch the video.

When groups decide to be more than a normal group that simply lives according to the patterns of this world, they enter into a time of learning what it means to be missional. This is not a time to adopt a program for becoming missional, nor is it simply a strategy to focus on being external or outreach-oriented. Instead, this is a process by which a group of people learn how the Spirit of God is moving through them to be on mission together. It is a process of learning to put into practice a lifestyle that is distinctively Christian. Here's a story that points out some key things that mark God's people as distinctive:

It was just before the Passover Festival. Jesus knew that the hour had come for him to leave this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end.

The evening meal was in progress, and the devil had already prompted Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot, to betray Jesus. Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power, and that he had come from God and was returning to God; so he got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around his waist. After that, he poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples' feet, drying them with the towel that was wrapped around him.

When he had finished washing their feet, he put on his clothes and returned to his place. "Do you understand what I have done for you?" he asked them. "You call me 'Teacher' and 'Lord,' and rightly so, for that is what I am. Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also

should wash one another's feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. Very truly I tell you, servants are not greater than their master, nor are messengers greater than the one who sent them. Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them.

"A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another." —John 13:1–5; 12–16; 34–45

- What stands out as that which makes us distinctively Christian?

Learning the Missional Rhythms

1. Missional Communion

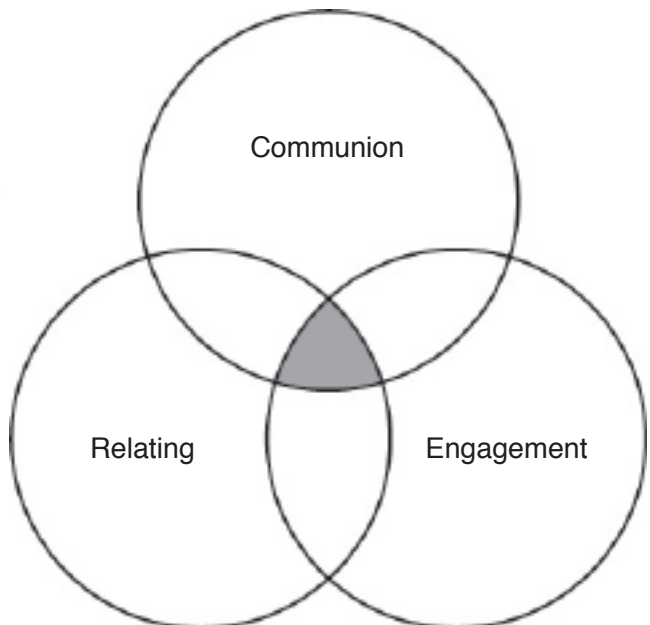
A way of connecting with God together that shapes our life patterns so that we are no longer shaped by those of this world but changed from the inside out and thereby can impact people in our neighborhoods.

2. Missional Relating

A way of loving one another that stands in contrast to typical relational patterns of the culture, of mutual service and self-sacrifice that is visible to others and impacts them.

3. Missional Engagement

A way of being with people (friends, next-door neighbors, family members, co-workers) that displays Christ's love in tangible ways.



Discussion Questions

1. What stands out to you from this teaching?
2. How does the way we relate to God impact how we are on mission?
3. How do our relationships with each other impact how we are on mission?
4. How might adopting a few of these practices change our lives?
5. How might they change our group?

Getting Started

Start Simply

The place to begin is to start simply. Before the next meeting, look over the list of 21 missional practices on the next three pages. There are seven for each of the three rhythms. Circle the one or two from each page that you see as being most applicable to your group. Next week you will talk together and pick one from each rhythm, three total, to work on over the next few weeks.

Chapters 6, 7, and 8 of *Missional Small Groups* provide more insight and practical help for discovering how groups can develop these rhythms. Use the corresponding sections to help talk about how the group can begin living these rhythms.

Rhythms of Missional Communion

Worship

The church knows how to do formal worship. But what about worship in a living room? What about worship with friends?

Practicing the Presence

Nothing sets God's people apart like the presence of God. But do we actually expect to meet with God in our groups? If not, why not? What might it look like to meet with God regularly and go beyond the Bible study mentality?

Alone Together

How do we practice silence and solitude as a private discipline but do it together? Usually we think of this individualistically, but there is a way of being "alone together" before God. How do we practice this?

Listening Together

How does a group of people practice the art of listening to God together? How might God speak to "you" for "me"? And how do we create space for such an experience?

Simplicity

The way we spend our time and money relates directly to our worship of God. In our culture we idolize things. If we don't let others in on this part of our lives, we won't change this pattern.

Jesus's Meal

Traditions usually address this in one of five ways in their formal services. There is an alternative way of doing this around a meal, while at the same time not throwing out any of the current formal traditions of communion.

Sabbath

Our ability to rest relates to our ability to trust, both God and others. This practice seems to have shaped the Old Testament people of God as much as any other. What bearing does this have on us as a New Testament people? How can we practice Sabbath today in our 24/7 world?

Rhythms of Missional Relating

A Primary Group

Most people have lots of shallow relationships, but they lack a primary group of people who will walk with them and point them toward the kingdom.

A Safe Place

How do we create relationships that are safe, where there is both honesty and freedom along with accountability and challenge?

Saying Hello

Greeting one another well is about developing listening skills. Often this simple piece is overlooked by church leadership, and it undermines people's ability to relate to one another.

Pressing through Conflict

Relationships are messy. Of this there is no doubt. We must learn to work through conflict and refuse to give up on others. This requires some new relationship skills.

Face-to-Face Contact

Community in our culture must call for face-to-face contact. At the same time we must deal with the reality of how the internet and cell phones are impacting our ability to interact with one another.

Build Up Each Other

Encouragement that flows out of the heart of God through his people for others is essential to God's kind of community. What does this look like in practical terms?

Family Life and Small Groups

Too many times the group is seen as separate from the family connected to each group member. If true relationships are going to be developed, then the group must determine how to connect the two.

Initiation into the Community

How does a group practice baptism in a way that communicates that new Christians are being initiated into Christ AND into Christ's community?

Rhythms of Missional Engagement

Moving into the Neighborhood

One of the keys to engagement is just being present in our neighborhoods. This requires the risk of putting ourselves out there and beginning to engage other people.

Focus

We need to learn to say “no” to a lot of “good” stuff in order to be involved in God’s mission. This may mean saying “no” to some church activities so that we have time to engage the people and needs in our world.

Speaking Peace

We are present in the neighborhood as agents of peace in the midst of turmoil. What does this look like? What are some ways that work in our specific contexts to take peace to people?

Observe

What is God already doing in and through the people and systems around us? We don’t have to generate God’s mission. God is already at work. We only need to see what the Spirit is doing and get involved.

Hospitality

Opening up our homes to one another is essential to knowing each other. How do we do this in our time-starved world? How do we eat together in our fast-food world? We must address the reality of these questions.

Righting Wrongs

Ask the question: What does God want to do? There are injustices in our world that are crying out for God’s people to show up and offer justice.

Speaking the Gospel

Instead of a canned approach, we must learn to communicate Christ in relationships with others, viewing them as equals, not as people to be won over to our way.

Pick Three

Before the next meeting—either during a meeting or on your own during the week—look over the list of 21 missional practices. There are seven for each of the three rhythms. Circle two in each of the three rhythms that you see as being most applicable to your situation as a group. Next week you will talk together and pick one from each rhythm to work on over the next few weeks.

Session 3

Learning to Play the Music

How Do We Get Started?

Personal Reflection

There are many different ways to read. We can read to gather information, we can read to be entertained, we can read to analyze an author's writing, or we can read to learn how to put something into practice. We read different books or parts of books in different ways. But in our modern culture, there is one form of reading that is often overlooked; it's called devotional reading. This is the slow contemplative reading in which we listen not just to what the words are saying to our minds or how they might shape our actions, but to what they are saying to our inner being. Spiritual theologian James Houston writes,

This century [the twentieth] is possibly the first one in which action has been emphasized and valued more than contemplation. Today we do things. We think contemplation wastes time, produces nothing, and bumps awkwardly into our schedules. Devotional reading is a questionable priority for most successful people today. But are we “successful” Christians if we are so busy organizing and propagating the Christian faith that we really do not know God personally—or intimately? Christian devotional reading helps us find intimate union with God.¹

Over the next few weeks, you will be talking about various ways that your group can enter be a community in the way of Jesus. Before you attend the group meetings, it will be helpful if you read the section in *Missional Small Groups* that corresponds with the topic you are discussing. As you read, learn to listen to what the Spirit of God is saying to you through the words. You might want to skim it quickly to get the big ideas, but then read it slowly and when something stands out to you or you sense something in your “inner sanctum,” stop. Pray about it. You might journal what you are thinking. Then you might take some time to share with a friend what you have been contemplating.

At first, reading like this might feel awkward or even like a waste of time. This is natural. However, if you remind yourself that the point is to listen to what the Spirit of God is saying to you as you read slowly, then you will discover and experience the purpose to this kind of devotional reading.

This kind of reading is not about having deep thoughts or about being a spiritual giant. It is simply a discipline of listening to the God who speaks to his people. Here are some questions to help you reflect on what you read:

- Did you mark anything in the section that stood out to you?
- Reflect on what you marked and ask the Lord to speak to you as you reflect.
- Take some time to write down your thoughts.
- Turn your thoughts into a prayer asking God to expand his kingdom in you.

The Group Meeting Agenda

Opening Question

What is your favorite kind of music? Why?

Discussion: Learning to Play the Music

Watch the video for Lesson 3.

So here's what I want you to do, God helping you: Take your everyday, ordinary life—your sleeping, eating, going-to-work, and walking-around life—and place it before God as an offering. Embracing what God does for you is the best thing you can do for him. Don't become so well-adjusted to your culture that you fit into it without even thinking. Instead, fix your attention on God. You'll be changed from the inside out. Readily recognize what he wants from you, and quickly respond to it. Unlike the culture around you, always dragging you down to its level of immaturity, God brings the best out of you, develops well-formed maturity in you. —Romans 12:1–2

- What stands out to you in this passage?

This reading is from the Message translation. Now read it from a more literal translation like NIV. There you will see the contrast between “Being transformed” which is something that happens to us from the inside out and “being conformed” which is something that happens to us from the outside in. Being conformed to our culture takes little effort on our part because all we have to do is go with the flow of how normal life works.

Transformation on the other hand requires focus, effort and practice. Inside change is something that the Spirit does within us as we put ourselves in a place of allowing the Spirit to change us. This is like learning to play a guitar. One does not pick up a guitar and just start playing it. A guitar novice must choose to put himself in a place that is conducive to learning to play the guitar. This place is called “practice.” When a group first tries to be missional, all are novices. To grow in mission requires focus, effort and practice. And the best place to start is break the task down into simple steps that can be practiced repeatedly.

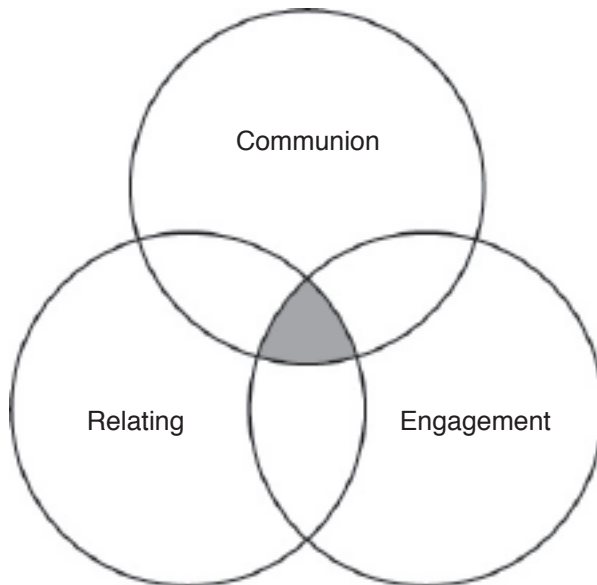
This is the reason for choosing three simple practices that you can figure out how to do as a group.

Discussion Questions

1. Of the twenty-one practices on the list, are there any that we as a group do relatively well? How can we build upon what we already do?

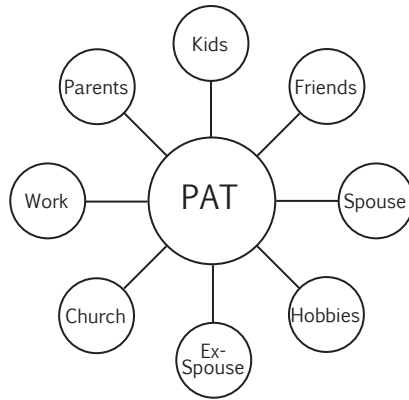
(For questions 2, 3, and 4, make a list on a large piece of paper to see where group members' interests lie.)

2. Of the seven listed under Missional Communion, which two interest you the most?
3. Of the seven listed under Missional Relating, which two interest you the most?
4. Of the seven listed under Missional Engagement, which two interest you the most?
5. As a group, pick one from each of the three rhythms to begin practicing.



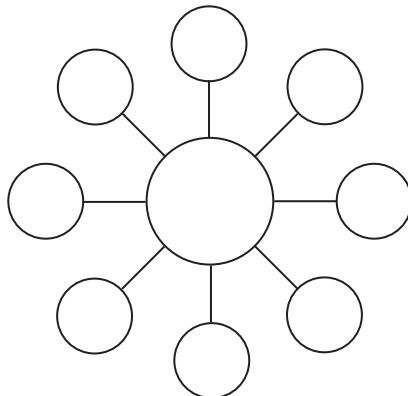
Personal Activity

Look at page ten at the list of words used to describe common life today. In *Missional Small Groups* (page 31), a diagram is used to illustrate how this plays out in our lives. It looks like this:²



Each of the circles around Pat represent different activities and groups that require Pat's attention. This could be extended even further. When you think about work, it's rarely just one circle. There are multiple groups within most workplaces. If you have kids, there is a secondary circles of kid's school—one for each kid—and for kid's activities. Then if we add circles for neighbors, friends from college, etc. then the circles could be go on for quite a while.

In the space below, take about ten minutes and fill in your own circles. If you need more space, there is room on page 32.

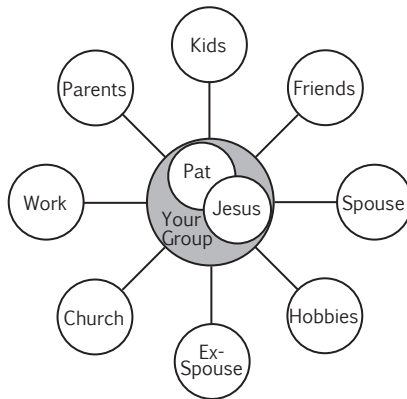


Discussion

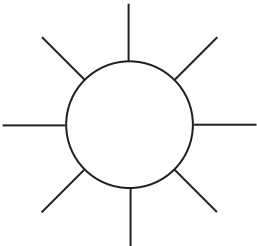
1. What do your circles reveal about your life?
2. How does your diagram illustrate “conformed to the pattern of the world”?
3. How does this impact your ability to participate in God’s mission in the world?

The Way Forward

The goal of this study guide is to help you work together as a group to live in such a way that you are being “transformed by the reknwewing of your mind.” This is not about will-power. It is about learning together what it means to participate in God’s life as God is on mission in the world. This involves how we commune with God, how we connect with each other and how we engage our context. As we move forward, our circles will shift. It is illustrated this way on page 42 of *Missional Small Groups*.



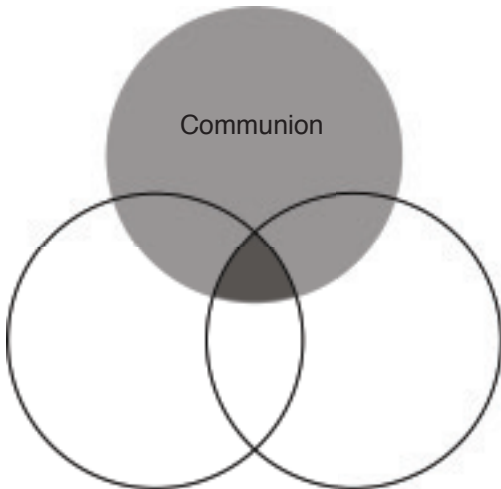
1. How can we support one another better on the journey?
2. What excites you the most as you think about the next steps as a group?
3. What do you think will be the biggest challenge?
4. Spend some time in prayer about what you have discussed.



Session 4

Missional Communion Practice

Introduction



Personal Reflection

Read the section in chapter 6 of *Missional Small Groups* that corresponds with the topic your group chose for Missional Communion.

Use the space below to reflect on what you read:

- Did you mark anything in the section that stood out to you?
- Reflect on what you marked and ask the Lord to speak to you as you reflect.
- Take some time to write down your thoughts.
- Turn your thoughts into a prayer asking God to expand his kingdom in you.

The Group Meeting Agenda

Opening Question

What is one thing you see God changing in your life?

Teaching and Discussion

- Read the Scripture passage from the practice the group has chosen from chapter 6. Then watch the video that corresponds with it.
- What stood out to you from the video that corresponds with this practice. What did you find the most challenging? What do you find to be the most exciting?
- Share your responses to what you read about this practice. This sharing works best if people can read a short piece from the book that has sparked the response. This allows those who have not read to participate.

Discussion Questions

1. How might this practice change our group? Our individual lives?
2. In what ways might this practice help us have an impact upon the world around us?
3. What information about this practice would be helpful?
4. What is one way we could practice this during the next week?

Activity—Lectio Divina

If you have time (about 30 minutes) in your group meeting, the practice of reading scriptures in the ancient pattern called lectio divina can help you group take steps into God's mission. Eugene Peterson writes:

Lectio divina is a way of reading the Scriptures that is congruent with the way the Scriptures serve the Christian community as a witness to God's revelation of himself to us. It is the wise guidance developed through the centuries of devout Bible reading to discipline us, the readers of Scripture, into appropriate ways of understanding and receiving this text so that it is formative for the way we live our lives, not merely making an impression on our minds or feelings. It intends the reading of Scripture to be a permeation of our lives by the revelation of God.³

There are four parts to reading the scriptures in this way that help us listen to what the Spirit is saying to us through the Scriptures. Use the passage that you discussed in the previous section. The facilitator will read the instructions listed below that describes the part of the exercise. Then he or she will read the passage aloud.

Part #1 Read—Pay Attention to what is written.

Facilitator reads: "Prepare yourself to hear God's Word. When listen this the first time, pay attention to what's being said in a broad way. Make yourself comfortable and open yourself to God. Pay attention to the words you hear. What stands out to you? Notice any thoughts, pictures, memories or experiences that arise in your imagination. After you read it, sit in silence and allow what you read to resonate within you."

- Facilitator reads the passage.
- Pause for about a minute.

Part #2 Reflect—Meditate and reflect on what stood out to you.

Facilitator reads: "With this second reading, give yourself permission to reflect on the words. What thoughts naturally arise? What's the response of your heart? After reading sit in silence and roll the words, thoughts and feelings over inside you."

- Facilitator reads the passage.
- Pause for about a minute.

#3 Respond—Offer your thoughts, emotions, and sensations back to God.

Facilitator reads: “Let the words enter of this text into your imagination in such a way that prompts some kind of response. Let the ways that the reading has touched your heart and mind spawn a prayer or emotion back to God. Let what is in you be expressed, whatever it may be.”

- Facilitator reads the passage.
- Give time for people to express themselves to God.

#4 Remain—Wait before God in his presence.

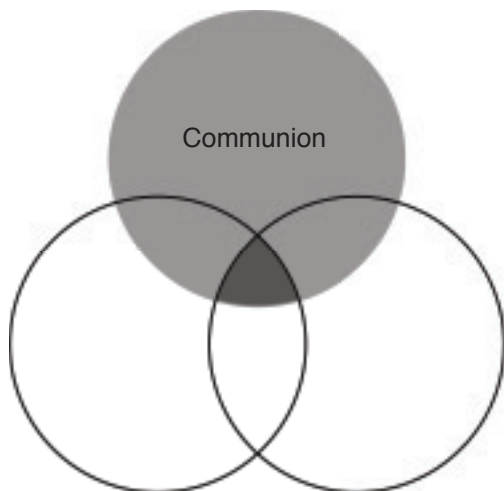
Facilitator reads: “Allow yourself to sit with the words as if you are sitting with a best friend. Then imagine that you are sitting in stillness with God. Rest in God and be with God. Is there something emerging from this time with God that we sense that we need to ‘try out’? What action steps, experiments, might be called for?”

- Facilitator reads the passage.
- Open up the time for sharing what you sensed God saying. If the group is larger, break into smaller sub-groups.

Session 5

Missional Communion Practice

Practical Ideas



Personal Reflection

Read for a second time the section in chapter 6 of *Missional Small Groups* that corresponds with the topic your group chose for Missional Communion. Repetition is good. We don't typically read like this, but this is often the way God speaks to us. Try it and see.

Use the space below to reflect on what you read:

- Did you mark anything in the section that stood out to you?
- Reflect on what you marked and ask the Lord to speak to you as you reflect.
- Take some time to write down your thoughts.
- Turn your thoughts into a prayer asking God to expand his kingdom in you.

Opening Question

How have you seen God in the normal stuff of life over the last week?

Teaching and Discussion

Start off with a time of reflective reading. Everyone should get comfortable, take a deep breath and ask the Lord to speak to them through the Scripture reading.

- Someone read the Scripture passage corresponds with the chosen practice from from chapter 6. After reading it notice what the passage says.
- Read the Scripture again. Break up into pairs. Each person should share what stood out to them about the passage.
- After about five minutes of sharing in pairs, come back together as a group. Take turns reporting back to the entire group what was shared in pairs. Each partner should share what they heard the other person saying.

Discussion Questions

1. What are some practical ways to grow in missional communion as a group?
2. Look over the suggestions on the next couple of pages. What ideas stand out to you?
3. Make a list of a few things the group can do. Make some plans using the worksheet on page 40.
4. Who feels called to help lead the different activities?

Ideas for Missional Communion

Worship

- Hold an evening of small group worship.
- Join with another group that worships well and learn from them.
- Carve out a time each time you meet for worship, even if it cuts into the Bible discussion time.

Practicing the Presence

- Half-night of prayer. You may need to schedule it on a night other than the regular group meeting night to allow it to go later. You may invite group members who want to join you in fasting for one or two meals preceding the evening. (See agenda on page 44.)
- Take more time for praying in group meetings. Minimize other dimensions of the meeting. Divide into smaller groups for times of personal prayer for one another

Alone Together

- Take a retreat together where all are asked to spend some time alone and then come together to talk about the experience.
- Challenge each person to spend some time alone over a period of a week and then spend one small group meeting talking about the experience.

Listening Together

- Fast together as a group.
- Take a prayer walk as a group in the neighborhood.
- Keep a group prayer journal.

Simplicity

- Any kind of group commitment to pooling resources to give to a common cause.
- Commit as a group to downsize so that life can be simpler.
- Share common resources, e.g. lawnmower, snow blower, etc.

Jesus' Meal

- Host a meal once per month and include a time of communion. Talk about this experience with one another.

Sabbath

- Talk about the meaning of Sabbath keeping
- Commit to talking a Sabbath on the same day for a month and then review.
- Take a retreat together where all can rest at the same time.

Other Ideas:

Communion Worksheet

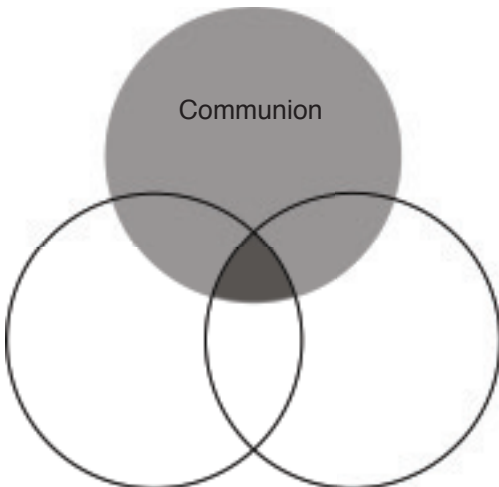
Develop a plan to deepen the level of connecting to God in your group. Look over the ideas listed above and discuss as a group what you will do, when you will do it, and who will take the lead.

What	Date	Who
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Session 6

Missional Communion Practice

Forming New Habits



Personal Reflection

Read for a third time the section in chapter 6 of *Missional Small Groups* that corresponds with the topic your group chose for Missional Communion. Remember, repetition is good.

Use the space below to reflect on what you read:

- Did you mark anything in the section that stood out to you?
- Reflect on what you marked and ask the Lord to speak to you as you reflect.
- Take some time to write down your thoughts.
- Turn your thoughts into a prayer asking God to expand his kingdom in you.

The Group Meeting Agenda

Opening Question

What do you see God doing in your life to change you?

Teaching and Discussion

Reading the same section of a book repeatedly can feel futile, but it can be a way opening up unexpected truths we cannot see upon the first reading.

- Did you see anything this week you did not see before?
- Are there any additional Scriptures that have come to mind related to this practice?

Discussion Questions

1. What are some habits you do without thinking?
2. What has been the biggest challenge related to doing the practice your group has chosen?
3. How is God using this practice to change your life?
4. What is something you can do to help make this practice a habit?

Application

Spend some extended time (30-45 minutes) during the meeting praying. Pray for each of the following areas for 3-5 minutes.

- Worship and Praise of God. (as a whole group)
- The group and the journey you are on. (in groups of 3-4)
- Needs of group members (in groups of 2)
- The church leaders. (in groups of 2)
- Needs of families represented in the group. (in groups of 3-4)
- Non-Christian friends. (as a whole group)

Option for Session 6: Half-Night of Prayer

A half-night of prayer is a gathering that focuses on extended time in worshiping, interceding and seeking God. When done regularly, it will provide a cyclical forum where the members learn how to pray with others and thereby grow in their ability to connect with God on their own.

Preparation:

- Choose a date (Fridays usually work best) at least two weeks ahead of time. It would take the place of the normal group meeting for that week.
- Prepare an agenda for the evening so that all can have one when they arrive. Don't feel like you must follow the agenda exactly, but sharing it with everyone eases the fear some have about an extended time of prayer.
- Delegate different parts of the meeting. The leader should initiate the first and the last group prayers.
- The ideal host home would be located in a neighborhood where the group has or desires to have contacts with non-Christians. This helps make the prayer walking activity come to life.
- Some groups find it helpful to fast on the day of the gathering.

Sample Agenda:

Part 1-Private Reflection (30 minutes)

- Find a private place somewhere in the house where you can slow down from the day and listen to God.
- Turn to Psalm 103.
- Read the first verse. Stop and reflect. Note what stands out.
- Read it again. Pray that verse to God.
- God to the next verse and do the same thing.
- Repeat the process for the balance of the time.

Part 2-Worship (30 minutes)

Slower, quieter songs usually work best.

Part 3-Discussion (20-30 minutes)

Read Luke 11:5-13

- Do you view God as being like the sleepy man or like a good Father?
- How would you describe the person in verse eight who is seeking the help?
- When was the last time you were like this before God?
- What is the result of the boldness demonstrated in verse 9-10?
- What does it make you feel like to be bold before God?

Part 4-Pray for each of the following areas for 3-5 minutes each:

- Worship and Praise of God.
- The group and the journey you are on.
- Needs of group members that are commonly known.
- The church leaders.
- Needs within families represented in the group.
- Non-Christian friends.

(You can do this part in concert prayer, a practice where every person prays aloud at the same time. It need not be loud or domineers. It's just a way of getting everyone involved and talking to God, instead of waiting on others to pray for each thing.)

Break (15-30 minutes)

Snack time.

Part 5-Prayer Walk (30-45 minutes)

In groups of 3-4, walk the neighborhood and pray for the people who live there. Pray for any school or church building you pass.

Part 6-Prayer for One Another (30 minutes)

In gender-based groups, share needs and pray for one another.

Part 7-Pray for Friends Who Don't Know Jesus (20-30 minutes)

In groups of three, share the names of two or three neighbors, family members, co-workers or friends and pray for them.

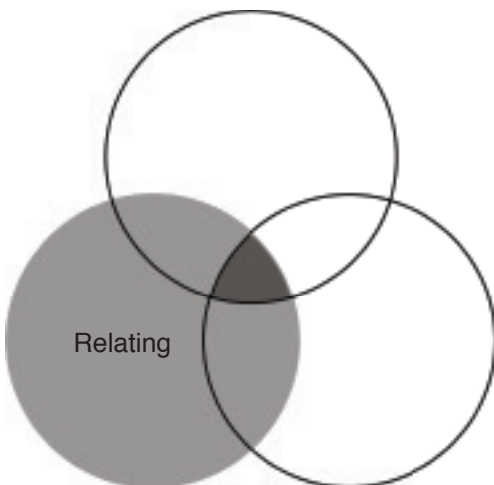
Part 8-Closing (5-10 minutes)

Spend some time in worship and thanking God for what the Spirit is doing even though you don't see it yet.

Session 7

Missional Relating Practice

Introduction



Personal Reflection

Read the section in chapter 7 of *Missional Small Groups* that corresponds with the topic your group chose for Missional Relating.

Use the space below to reflect on what you read:

- Did you mark anything in the section that stood out to you?
- Reflect on what you marked and ask the Lord to speak to you as you reflect.
- Take some time to write down your thoughts.
- Turn your thoughts into a prayer asking God to expand his kingdom in you.

The Group Meeting Agenda

Opening Question

What is one thing you see God changing in your life?

Teaching and Discussion

- Read the Scripture passage from the practice the group has chosen from chapter 7. Then watch the video that corresponds with it.
- What stood out to you from the video that corresponds with this practice. What did you find the most challenging? What do you find to be the most exciting?
- Share your responses to what you read about this practice. This sharing works best if people can read a short piece from the book that has sparked the response. This allows those who have not read to participate.

Discussion Questions

1. How might this practice change our group? Our individual lives?
2. In what ways might this practice help us have an impact upon the world around us?
3. What information about this practice would be helpful?
4. What is one way we could practice this during the next week?

Activity—Lectio Divina

Part #1 Read—Pay Attention to what is written.

Facilitator reads: “Prepare yourself to hear God’s Word. When listen this the first time, pay attention to what’s being said in a broad way. Make yourself comfortable and open yourself to God. Pay attention to the words you hear. What stands out to you? Notice any thoughts, pictures, memories or experiences that arise in your imagination. After you read it, sit in silence and allow what you read to resonate within you.”

- Facilitator reads the passage discussed in the previous activity.
- Pause for about a minute.

Part #2 Reflect—Meditate and reflect on what stood out to you.

Facilitator reads: “With this second reading, give yourself permission to reflect on the words. What thoughts naturally arise? What’s the response of your heart? After reading sit in silence and roll the words, thoughts and feelings over inside you.”

- Facilitator reads the passage.
- Pause for about a minute.

#3 Respond —Offer your thoughts, emotions, and sensations back to God.

Facilitator reads: “Let the words enter of this text into your imagination in such a way that prompts some kind of response. Let the ways that the reading has touched your heart and mind spawn a prayer or emotion back to God. Let what is in you be expressed, whatever it may be.”

- Facilitator reads the passage.
- Give time for people to express themselves to God.

#4 Remain—Wait before God in his presence.

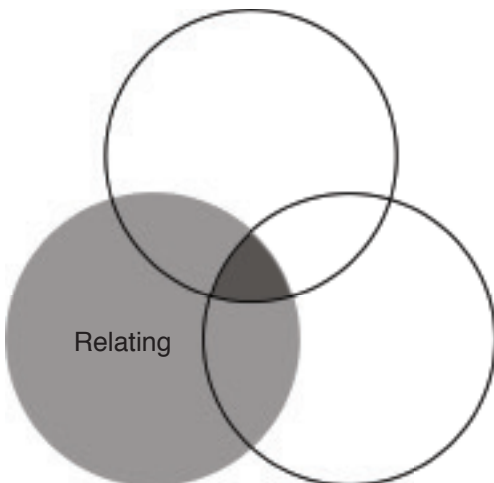
Facilitator reads: “Allow yourself to sit with the words as if you are sitting with a best friend. Then imagine that you are sitting in stillness with God. Rest in God and be with God. Is there something emerging from this time with God that we sense that we need to ‘try out’? What action steps, experiments, might be called for?”

- Facilitator reads the passage.
- Open up the time for sharing what you sensed God saying. If the group is larger, break into smaller sub-groups.

Session 8

Missional Relating Practice

Practical Ideas



Personal Reflection

Read for a second time the section in chapter 7 of *Missional Small Groups* that corresponds with the topic your group chose for *Missional Relating*. Repetition is good. Even if you think you understand the concepts, read it again and listen to what the Spirit might say to you.

Use the space below to reflect on what you read:

- Did you mark anything in the section that stood out to you?
- Reflect on what you marked and ask the Lord to speak to you as you reflect.
- Take some time to write down your thoughts.
- Turn your thoughts into a prayer asking God to expand his kingdom in you.

The Group Meeting Agenda

Opening Question

How have you seen God in the normal stuff of life over the last week?

Teaching and Discussion

Start off with a time of reflective reading. Everyone should get comfortable, take a deep breath and ask the Lord to speak to them through the Scripture reading.

- Someone read the Scripture passage corresponds with the chosen practice from from chapter 7. After reading it just notice what the passage says.
- Read the Scripture again. Break up into pairs. Each person should share what stood out to them about the passage.
- After about five minutes of sharing in pairs, come back together as a group. Take turns reporting back to the entire group what was shared in pairs. Each partner should share what they heard the other person saying.

Discussion Questions

1. What are some practical ways to grow in missional communion as a group?
2. Look over the suggestions on the next couple of pages. What ideas stand out to you?
3. Make a list of a few things the group can do. Make some plans using the worksheet on page 62.
4. Who feels called to help lead the different activities?

Ideas for Missional Relating

A Primary Group

- Share Your Experience Exercise (See page 66)

Step 1: Every group members is encouraged to encounter God alone in a way that is meaningful, possibly by breaking the normal pattern of praying. Ways include: walk and talking to God while experiencing nature, listen to a CD, reading a devotional book, writing a journal entry, meditating on a painting of Jesus or other biblical story.

Step 2: The experience of step one will serve as the content for an entire meeting(s). Each person is to bring some expression that has helped them to connect to God. It could be a picture taken on a walk. A painting that you used to guide prayers. A poem. A song. A scripture. A candle. A clay creation. A paragraph from a book or even a novel. Something that done at work encountering God on the job. Spend an entire group meeting, sharing this experience one-by-one.

A Safe Place

- Share a meal together on a regular basis.
- Talk about the importance of keeping confidences and not talking about group conversations with others outside the group.

Saying Hello

- Create a pattern of asking questions that inquire of other's normal lives. Small talk is important.
- Use ice breaker questions at the beginning of meetings.

Pressing through Conflict

- Develop a Group Agreement (See sample on page 60)
- Challenge each other when you see that promises are not being kept.

Face-to-Face contact

- Do some kind of official group “thing” once per month outside of the

group meeting.

- Throw a party and invite a few friends who do not know Jesus. Let them see how you interact with one another. After all our unity is one of the greatest ways to share the Gospel (see John 17). See the activity on page ?.

Build Up Each Other

- Work through an activity where you can discuss your personality differences so that you can understand one another better. This is especially helpful for newer groups or for groups that are stuck in their communication. (See page ? for a small group lesson on this topic.)
- Take a risk. Give someone a call. Invite them over. Show up at their school activity and watch them perform. Send them an email. Pray for them.

Family Life and Small Groups

- Include the children in the ice breaker and worship parts of the meetings. Then rotate who takes the children during the discussion and ministry parts.
- Ask someone to volunteer to coordinate the children's activities.

Initiation into the Community

- For those who join the community, hold a baptism at a lake or in a hot tub and hold a party to celebrate.

Other Ideas:

Note: See page 64 for instructions about how to prepare for the next meeting.

Sample Group Agreement

A small group agreement helps a group of people clarify how they are going to live in love with one another by defining the expectations of how the group will operate. The following includes some basic elements to help you talk about the things around which you want to agree. Feel free to modify or add to it. It is broken into three sections: 1) Technical Details, 2) Directional Parameters, and 3) Patterns of Participation.

Technical Details:

- We will meet on _____ (day of the week).
- We will meet for _____ weeks, after which we will decide if we wish to continue as a group.
- We will meet from _____ to _____ and we will strive to start on time and end on time.
- We will meet at _____ (place) or we will rotate from house to house.

Directional Parameters

(Check if you can agree to participate in this way):

- ☐ I will value the relationships in this group outside of the weekly meetings.
- ☐ I will contribute to the life of this group by supporting the idea of team leadership.
- ☐ I will contribute my gifts to the life of the group.
- ☐ I will work through relational conflict that will surely arise.
- ☐ I will begin to build relationships with a person or two who needs a touch of God's love.
- ☐ Other: _____

Patterns of Participation:

(Check if you can agree to participate in this way):

- ☐ **PRIORITY:** We will make group meetings a priority in our lives.
- ☐ **PARTICIPATION:** Everyone is encouraged to participate. However, we will not allow any one person to dominate.
- ☐ **RESPECT:** Everyone is given the right to their own opinions, and all questions are encouraged and respected.
- ☐ **CONFIDENTIALITY:** Anything that we share in the meeting will not be repeated outside the meeting.
- ☐ **CARE:** Permission is given to call upon each other at anytime, especially in times of crisis. We will care for each other.
- ☐ **CHALLENGE:** We will care enough about each other to challenge one another to keep the commitments that we have made.
- ☐ **Other:** _____

Relating Worksheet

Develop a plan to deepen the level of connecting with one another. Look over the ideas listed above and discuss as a group what you will do, when you will do it and who will take the lead.

What

Date

Who

Plan a Party

Plan a gathering for the group which simply focuses on sharing a meal and having fun together. This could include the entire group or smaller groupings within the group. It could be a cook-out at a park or an informal meal with board games to follow.

Think about who you will invite that does not know Christ or is not involved in church life. Think about your neighbors or co-workers who might enjoy getting together.

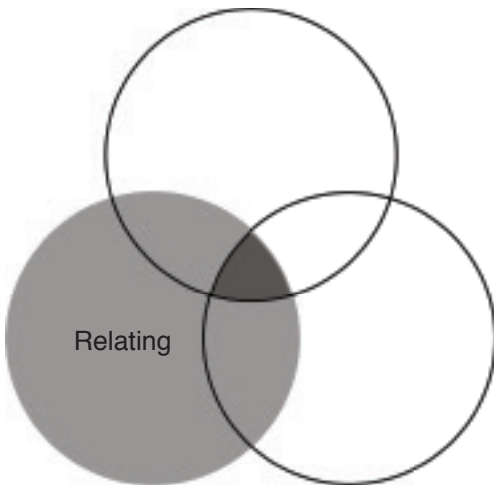
This is not meant to be an evangelistic gathering of any sort. It's simply a time for dialogue and getting to know one another.

1. Who wants to host?
2. When will you hold the gathering?
3. Who will bring what?
4. What will you do?
5. Who will you invite?
6. Who will do the inviting?

Session 9

Missional Relating Practice

Forming New Habits



Personal Reflection

Read for a third time the section in chapter 7 of *Missional Small Groups* that corresponds with the topic that your group chose for Missional Relating. Remember, repetition is good.

Use the space below to reflect on what you read:

- Did you mark anything in the section that stood out to you?
- Reflect on what you marked and ask the Lord to speak to you as you reflect.
- Take some time to write down your thoughts.
- Turn your thoughts into a prayer asking God to expand his kingdom in you.

Between the Meetings

At some point during this next week, connect with God in a way that is unique to you. If you enjoy nature, go for a walk and talk to God. If you connect with music, spend some time worshipping. You may meditate on a work of art or read some poetry. It could be that you connect with God in an unexpected serendipity through something like a movie or while cooking dinner. Whatever the case, bring some kind of artifact from this connection to the next meeting.

The Group Meeting Agenda

Opening Question

What do you see God doing in your life to change you?

Teaching and Discussion

Reading the same section of a book repeatedly can feel futile, but it can be a way opening up unexpected truths we cannot see upon the first reading.

- Did you see anything this week you did not see before?
- Are there any additional Scriptures that have come to mind related to this practice?

Discussion Questions

1. What are some habits you do without thinking?
2. What has been the biggest challenge related to doing the practice you group has chosen?
3. How is God using this practice to change your life?
4. What is something you can do to help make this practice a habit?

Application

This activity works to the degree that you are willing to share your connection experience with God. This is not a time to preach or to instruct. You are not allowed to apologize or explain. You are invited to share your experience with the group. Use your artifact if you have a rock for your walk, hold it and remember what you sensed. If you listened to a worship song, play it. If through food, feel free to offer a sample. This is a time to express yourself to the group. Be as creative as you feel you can be.

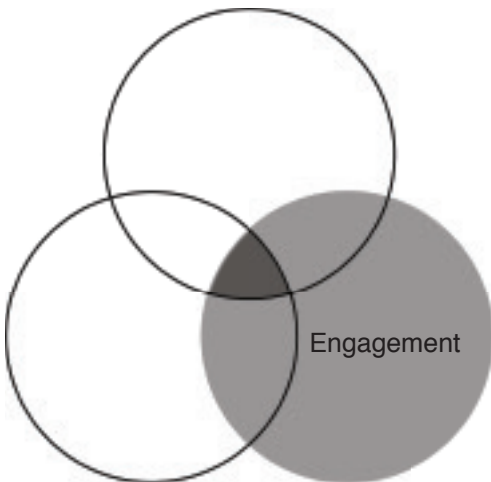
These insights will feed the group's prayers, and it will connect members with each other more closely. Our vulnerability always speaks. By simply sharing our connection with God, we build one another up and experience what Paul wrote about. Here are some basic guidelines:

- When you meet, there is no Bible study per se. This is an invitation for people to share what they have to offer.
- Read Colossians 3:12-14. Someone should state that this is a time to practice this passage, not to study it.
- Open the floor for people to share voluntarily what they have brought to the group.
- Commit as a group to listening to what each person offers. For some, this is a very vulnerable experience. Affirmation is crucial.
- This is not a time of preaching or instructing—the focus of the sharing should come out of each individual's encounter with God. If someone goes down a didactic track, steer him or her in a different direction.
- Emphasize that whatever is shared should have an encouraging tone. This is about experiencing the love of God, not about religious performance or self-condemnation. If someone shares a condemning experience with the group, listen, but also help that person to hear God's love.
- For a groups larger than ten, this activity may take more than one week.

Session 10

Missional Engagement Practice

Introduction



Personal Reflection

Read the section in chapter 8 of *Missional Small Groups* that corresponds with the topic your group chose for Missional Engagement.

Use the space below to reflect on what you read:

- Did you mark anything in the section that stood out to you?
- Reflect on what you marked and ask the Lord to speak to you as you reflect.
- Take some time to write down your thoughts.
- Turn your thoughts into a prayer asking God to expand his kingdom in you.

The Group Meeting Agenda

Opening Question

What is one thing you see God changing in your life?

Teaching and Discussion

- Read the Scripture passage from the practice the group has chosen from chapter 8. Then watch the video that corresponds with it.
- What stood out to you from the video that corresponds with this practice. What did you find the most challenging? What do you find to be the most exciting?
- Share your responses to what you read about this practice. This sharing works best if people can read a short piece from the book that has sparked the response. This allows those who have not read to participate.

Discussion Questions

1. How might this practice change our group? Our individual lives?
2. In what ways might this practice help us have an impact upon the world around us?
3. What information about this practice would be helpful?
4. What is one way we could practice this during the next week?

Application

The easiest way to begin engagement is to think about our neighbors and those in our relational networks (friends, family, co-workers). A tic-tac-toe diagram provides a way of identifying these two groups. Spend some time writing the names in the grids below. For your neighborhood, your house represents the center square. For your network, put your name in the middle.⁴

Neighbors

Networks

Activity—Lectio Divina

Part #1 Read—Pay Attention to what is written.

Facilitator reads: “Prepare yourself to hear God’s Word. When listen this the first time, pay attention to what’s being said in a broad way. Make yourself comfortable and open yourself to God. Pay attention to the words you hear. What stands out to you? Notice any thoughts, pictures, memories or experiences that arise in your imagination. After you read it, sit in silence and allow what you read to resonate within you.”

- Facilitator reads the passage discussed in the previous activity.
- Pause for about a minute.

Part #2 Reflect—Meditate and reflect on what stood out to you.

Facilitator reads: “With this second reading, give yourself permission to reflect on the words. What thoughts naturally arise? What’s the response of your heart? After reading sit in silence and roll the words, thoughts and feelings over inside you.”

- Facilitator reads the passage.
- Pause for about a minute.

#3 Respond —Offer your thoughts, emotions, and sensations back to God.

Facilitator reads: “Let the words enter of this text into your imagination in such a way that prompts some kind of response. Let the ways that the reading has touched your heart and mind spawn a prayer or emotion back to God. Let what is in you be expressed, whatever it may be.”

- Facilitator reads the passage.
- Give time for people to express themselves to God.

#4 Remain—Wait before God in his presence.

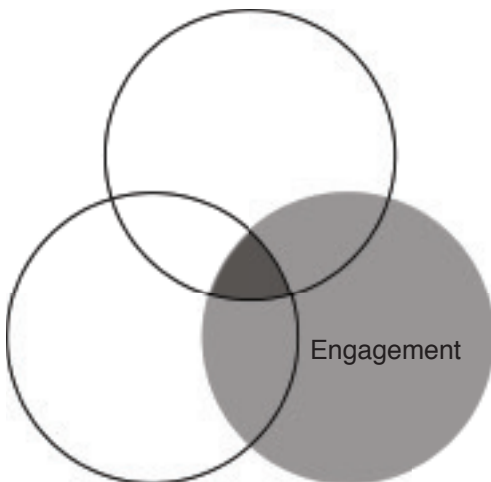
Facilitator reads: “Allow yourself to sit with the words as if you are sitting with a best friend. Then imagine that you are sitting in stillness with God. Rest in God and be with God. Is there something emerging from this time with God that we sense that we need to ‘try out’? What action steps, experiments, might be called for?”

- Facilitator reads the passage.
- Open up the time for sharing what you sensed God saying. If the group is larger, break into smaller sub-groups.

Session 11

Missional Engagement Practice

Practical Ideas



Personal Reflection

Read for a second time the section in chapter 8 of *Missional Small Groups* that corresponds with the topic your group chose for Missional Engagement. Repetition is good. Listen not for more information but for what you sense in your gut as you read.

Use the space below to reflect on what you read:

- Did you mark anything in the section that stood out to you?
- Reflect on what you marked and ask the Lord to speak to you as you reflect.
- Take some time to write down your thoughts.
- Turn your thoughts into a prayer asking God to expand his kingdom in you.

The Group Meeting Agenda

Opening Question

How have you seen God in the normal stuff of life over the last week?

Teaching and Discussion

Start off with a time of reflective reading. Everyone should get comfortable, take a deep breath and ask the Lord to speak to them through the Scripture reading.

- Someone read the Scripture passage corresponds with the chosen practice from from chapter 8. After reading it just notice what the passage says.
- Read the Scripture again. Break up into pairs. Each person should share what stood out to them about the passage.
- After about five minutes of sharing in pairs, come back together as a group. Take turns reporting back to the entire group what was shared in pairs. Each partner should share what they heard the other person saying.

Discussion Questions

1. What are some practical ways to grow in missional communion as a group?
2. Look over the suggestions on the next couple of pages. What ideas stand out to you?
3. Make a list of a few things the group can do. Make some plans using the worksheet on page 76.
4. Who feels called to help lead the different activities?

Ideas for Missional Relating

Moving into the Neighborhood

- Introduce yourself to neighbors.
- Spend time in the front yard.
- Take time to talk with neighbors or those in your networks to learn about their lives.

Focus

- From the tic-tac-toe exercise, share with the group the neighbors and those in your networks who need an experience of God's love. Identify four or five who would be the focus of the group's prayers. Take time regularly in the group meetings to pray for those people.
- Identify any common threads between people. Do they live in the same neighborhood? Do they have common interests or activities? (See page 85 for this activity.)

Speaking Peace

- Identify a Third Place, some kind of neutral ground that offers a safe environment for those in the small group to interact with those who do not know Jesus. (First place is the home, and the second place is work.) A third place is a public space that allows people to interact and connect. Examples include: coffee shops, parks, community swimming pools, restaurants, playgrounds, lakes, beaches and community centers.

Observe

- Make a list of people connected to the group who are already open to God right now.
- Identify obvious needs of those connected to the group. (i.e. A lonely widow who lives next door to a member, an unemployed family who cannot afford food).
- If there new Christians in your group with unsaved friends or relatives that your group might how might you get to know them.

Hospitality

- Throw a party. What birthdays or holidays are coming up that would be natural times to include friends, neighbors or coworkers?
- Connect around an interest. What are some interests of neighbors or networks in your group's circle of influence? Do they like to bowl, eat, watch or compete in sports?

Righting Wrongs

- Make a list of the needs in your neighborhood. Do a “neighborhood exegesis. See 86 for an example of how to do this.
- Identify passions of group members. What specific gifts do the members of the group have to offer? How do they line up with the needs?

Speaking the Gospel

- Practice sharing a three-minute testimony with others in the group.
- Learn a simple way to explain the Gospel.

Other Ideas:

Engagement Worksheet

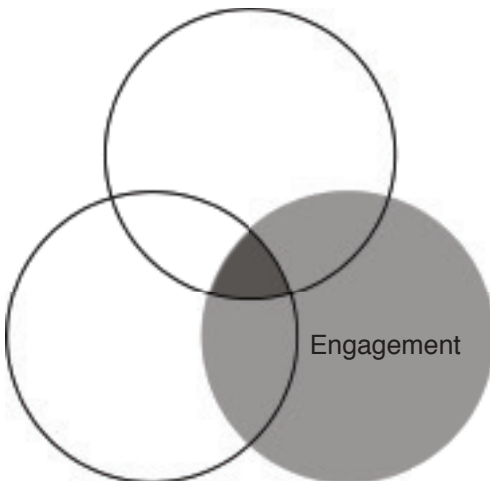
Develop a plan to deepen the level of connecting with neighbors and networks as a group. Look over the ideas listed above and discuss as a group what you will do, when you will do it and who will take the lead.

Who

Session 12

Missional Engagement Practice

Forming New Habits



Personal Reflection

Read for a third time the section in chapter 8 of Missional Small Groups that corresponds with the topic your group chose for Missional Engagement. Remember repetition is good.

Use the space below to reflect on what you read:

- Did you mark anything in the section that stood out to you?
- Reflect on what you marked and ask the Lord to speak to you as you reflect.
- Take some time to write down your thoughts.
- Turn your thoughts into a prayer asking God to expand his kingdom in you.

The Group Meeting Agenda

Opening Question

What do you see God doing in your life to change you?

Teaching and Discussion

Reading the same section of a book repeatedly can feel futile, but it can be a way opening up unexpected truths we cannot see upon the first reading.

- Did you see anything this week you did not see before?
- Are there any additional Scriptures that have come to mind related to this practice?

Discussion Questions

1. Why are habits so hard to break? Why are new habits so hard to develop?
2. What has been the biggest challenge related to doing the practice your group has chosen?
3. How is God using this practice to change your life?
4. What is something you can do to help make this practice a habit?

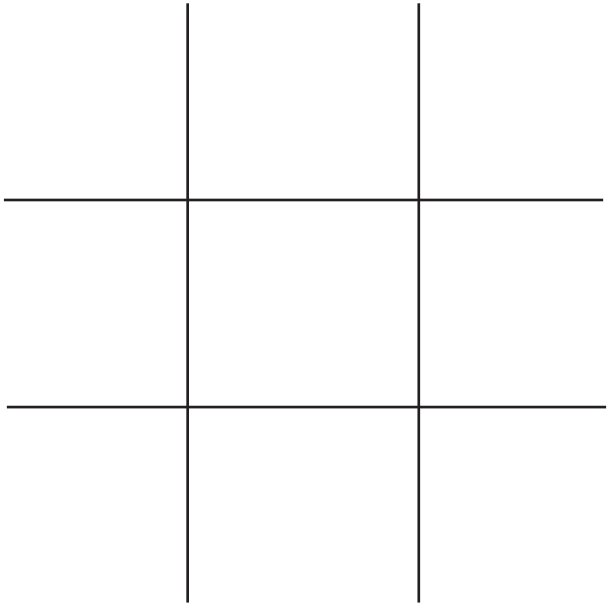
Application

On the next page, for each of the names on the tic-tac-toe grids on page 66, list something you have observed about the person. Even if you don't know much about them, list anything that you do know (i.e. kid are into sports, recently lost her husband, loves to golf).

Neighbors

Networks

1. What do you observe from this exercise? What stands out to you? Common interests?
2. Identify two or three names that you would like to share with the group. Maybe your friendship is growing with them or you sense they might be open to the Gospel.
3. Compile a group tic-tac-toe by identifying seven people you can pray for as a group.



4. Are there any specific needs that you see?
5. Are there any ways you can build a relationship with them?

Neighborhood Exegesis Exercise

An exegesis is simply a word to describe “deep understanding.” Many times we are so familiar with our neighborhoods that we don’t see what’s going on in them. This exercise can get you started on a new path. In his book *God Next Door*, Simon Carey Holt states, “A neighbourhood exegesis means taking a close look at our neighbourhoods, reading them sensitively and critically, understanding and naming them intelligently.”⁵ Rather than thinking about your neighborhood on a surface level, get a deeper view by seeing four streams of life:

1. What is positive and therefore calls for a response of support (e.g., a local battered-women’s home)?
2. What is a natural part of life and therefore calls for redemption and use for God’s kingdom (e.g., vacant buildings that resulted from a recession)?
3. What is unacceptable and therefore calls for subversion (e.g., hungry, undocumented families)?
4. What is negative and therefore calls for active resistance (e.g., sex slavery)?

You can do this by yourself, but it works better if you do it in groups of two to four. If you have time to do this during one of your regular meetings, then it works great, especially if you live in close proximity to one another. It can also be done outside the group meeting. This is an exercise you can do by yourself or with a group. It’s a way to see what you don’t normally see, to pay attention to what is going on in your neighborhood.⁶

First, draw a simple map of your neighborhood so you can visualize how it is laid out. Focus on the area where you live that is actually walkable.

Set the boundaries of an area that you can walk in a two-hour time frame. Then take a notebook, a pen, and a few of the following questions to help you see what is not obvious. As you stand outside your residence, look both ways.

- What do you see?
- What do you hear or sense?
- What activities do you notice?

As you walk, notice the architecture of the residences.

- What is the average age of the buildings?
- Is there any renovation going on?
- What do you notice about the exterior and yards of the residences?

- Are they cared for?
- How many residences are for sale?
- What indicators of transience do you notice?
- Is there a major highway nearby? Imagine how the introduction of this highway changed the neighborhood.

Stop in a quiet spot. Then stop by a busy intersection.

- What are the smells and sounds of the different places?
- How many community or civic buildings are there? What are their purposes? Do they look inviting? Well used?
- Is there a local park? What do you notice about it?

Notice the buildings in the area.

- What do the design and appearance of the churches in the area communicate to you?
- What kinds of commercial buildings are there? Who makes up the clientele?
- Are there places where you wouldn't go? Why?
- Where are the places of life, hope, and beauty?
- What evidence of struggle, despair, neglect, and alienation do you see?⁵

Discussion Questions

1. What did you notice in your exegetical walk?
2. What impact did it have on you?
3. What do you sense that God is already doing in your neighborhood?
4. What do you sense that God wants to do?
5. Spend some time praying over what you discussed.

Session 13

**What's
Next?**

Personal Reflection

As I mentioned in a previous reflection, I took six years of piano lessons, but for the most part, the only time I ever practiced was for the thirty minutes that my teacher was sitting beside me each week. To say the least, the music did not stick. My sister, on the other hand, would sit down for extended times trying to figure out how to play all kinds of complicated rhythms. It goes unstated that she will inherit the antique piano one of these days.

Instead of music, I practiced baseball. When I was about ten, I had a contraption with a net that would bounce the ball back to me. My parents bought me this after I ruined our chain link fence and quite a few balls because I would not stop throwing a ball at the fence. I would throw the ball for hours in the backyard. I would walk around the house acting like I was throwing a ball. When I walked to the barn, I was always looking for a big rock to aim at something. Even though I have not played in years, I can still pick up a ball or a bat and do pretty well. And when I watch a game, I notice nuances and appreciate the sport in all kinds of unique ways that someone who has not practiced cannot see.

At the same time, my skills are rusty. I would probably rip all kinds of muscles if I went to the batting cage and tried to hit a good fastball. I still know the game, but I am out of practice. You have had an introduction to some practices that make a difference in the world. But like playing the piano or a sport, the only way to develop and maintain your ability to live out God's mission in the world is to keep practicing these things that make a difference.

Sometimes they will result in quick impact that is visible and worthy of comment. But most of the time, our practices are small acts of love that when stacked on top of one another and over time—assuming that we keep practicing them—make a significant difference.

One of the changes you will discover is the reality that the biggest change has occurred in you. If you put a new habit in place, the way you think, love and live, will change. You will become different. It's not magical. And in most cases it takes more time than you thought it would, but by now you are well on the way. Don't stop now. Don't succumb to the pressure to learn more information or move on to something else. Find a way to make these rhythms more and more a part of your life.

The Group Meeting Agenda

Opening Question

How has our group changed since we began this process?

Teaching and Discussion

We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, because we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love you have for all God's people—the faith and love that spring from the hope stored up for you in heaven and about which you have already heard in the true message of the gospel that has come to you. In the same way, the gospel is bearing fruit and growing throughout the whole world—just as it has been doing among you since the day you heard it and truly understood God's grace. —Colossians 1:3-6

Celebrating and being thankful for what God is doing in you stirs faith for the next steps. Look at this passage and talk about the various things for which Paul was thankful. Spend some time sharing the things about this group which stirs you to be thankful. Spend some time offering God thanks.

The mission of God's people is God's mission. This is not about how good church people do something to become missional. This is about the reality that God is on mission to redeem all of creation and the fact that one of the primary ways that God does this is through God's people. God moves through us via Communion, Relating and Engagement.

The reality though for most groups is that this work of God might look very small



at this point. Jesus spoke to this as he compared the kingdom to a mustard seed.

He told them another parable: “The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and planted in his field. Though it is the smallest of all seeds, yet when it grows, it is the largest of garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds come and perch in its branches.” He told them still another parable: “The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed into about sixty pounds of flour until it worked all through the dough.” (Matthew 13:31-33)

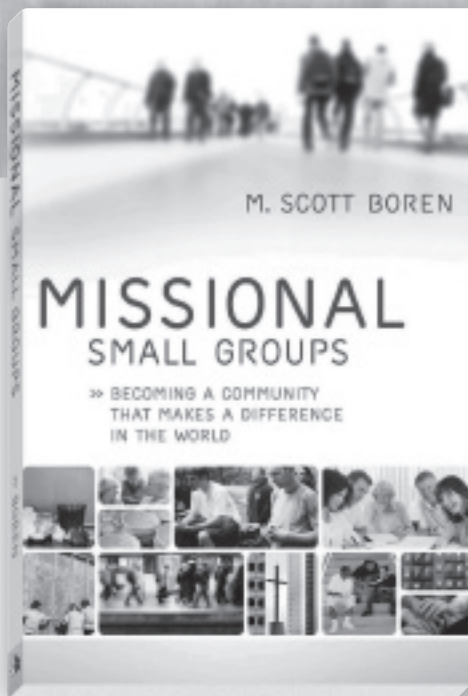
Discussion Questions

1. What do the “seed” and the “yeast” represent?
2. Reflect on what you know about the ministry of Jesus. How did his ministry seem small and insignificant?
3. What are some of the seemingly small, yet surprising ways that God has worked in your life over the last couple of months?
4. What are some of the small, surprising ways that God has worked in our group over the last few months?
5. How is the “seed” growing in you? Is there anything unexpected stirring you?
6. How can we continue developing these practices into habits?
7. What’s next? What’s next for our group?
(For this last question, take another look at the list of mission practices from Study #2. You don’t need to focus on the practices to the same degree that you have over the last 13 studies, but you can choose three more to focus on and begin to build aspects of them into your life as a group.)

Notes

- ¹ James Houston, “A Guide to Devotional Reading” in Jonathan Edwards, *Religious Affections* (Portland, OR: Multnomah Press, 1984), 189.
- ² This activity is adapted from Randy Frazee, *Making Room for Life: Trading Chaotic Lifestyles for Connected Relationships* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2003), 19.
- ³ Eugene Peterson, *Eat this Book* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2006), 81.
- ⁴ This activity is adapted from Jay Pathak and Dave Runyon, *The Art of Neighboring: Building Genuine Relationships Right Outside Your Door* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2013).
- ⁵ Simon Carey Holt, *God Next Door* (Victoria, Australia: Acorn Press, 2007), 103.
- ⁶ Adapted from *Ibid.*, 104.

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MAKES A DIFFERENCE



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