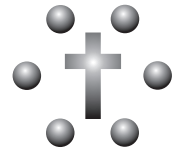




Mission and Service for Small Groups



Quick Start Guide¹¹

How do you help an inward looking group become more outward looking? This guide aims to help small group leaders change the culture of the group so that members will want to reach out with the good news of Jesus Christ and have a heart to serve others.

Mission and service is not optional

Small groups by their nature can have a tendency to become inward looking. Prayer requests are often about needs of the group members or perhaps people they know who are ill or in difficulty. Bible study is often about personal spiritual growth. But if small groups are about being church on a smaller scale then the mission God has for the church should be to the fore. It may help your group to reflect on Matthew 5:14-15...

“You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house.”

Ask: in what ways is our group more like a light hiding under a bowl or a light on its stand?

Mission is a way of thinking not just an action

To become more ‘missional’ a small group might think of inviting non-Christians along (see overleaf) or even starting a dedicated evangelistic group (see the specific resource on this subject). These are good things to do and could be considered but starting point must be a heart for mission and a way of thinking leading to many different possible actions. This can be reflected in the following six attitudes:

1. Loving your neighbourhood. How easy it is to be negative and have a ‘siege’ mentality. God said to Jonah (who was a very reluctant evangelist!), “should I not have concern for the great city of Nineveh...” (Jonah 4:11) The city was not Jerusalem, Jonah’s beloved city, but the city of his nation’s enemies and yet God called him to preach grace to them so they would come to worship God too.
2. Avoiding speaking using Christian jargon that is inaccessible to outsiders. Even if no non-Christians are present, how can group members communicate what they learn from the Bible to others if it is not in plain language?
3. Ensuring the Bible study is applied to the core concerns and stories of the people outside the church—so that group members can engage with them better. For example, the environment, family life, political conflict, etc.
4. A readiness to engage with the art and literature people outside are interested in both in an appreciative and discerning way. For example, how does the Christian worldview contrast or agree with the latest film?
5. Show deep concern for the poor, respect for people of all cultural and ethnic backgrounds and exercise purity in relation to the opposite sex (1 Peter 2:11-12). Neglect in these areas will render mission efforts ineffective.
6. Don’t bash other churches or denominations. This is a ‘luxury’ in which the church cannot indulge in the midst of an ever increasing secular society or it will alienate those outside.

In seeking to have all these attitudes, a small group will be a welcoming place for those who are seeking Christian faith or are new Christians rather than just a refuge for traditional Christians. It will also make the actions that are suggested overleaf much easier to implement.

(These six attitudes are adapted from a paper by Tim Keller called ‘The Missional Church’ published in 2001.)

Every group member has a mission and area of service

Your small group can function as an equipping and support group for each member. Ask each person:

- What is your mission 'frontline'? Is it workplace colleagues, family or friends who don't believe, a social circle with non-Christians, neighbours? If there is no frontline then encourage each member to find one.
- How can we support you in your frontline? Can we hear your testimony, listen to your struggles, pray for you?

Consider doing a Bible Study on the theology of work, sharing the gospel in a relational way (1 Peter 3:15) or on questions raised by the non-Christian friends or family of group members to equip them for their frontline.

Every group can have a mission and area of service

Your small group can function as a mission team! In planning ahead, aim for a balance of activities including social time, equipping, spiritual growth, prayer and support as well as mission. Just mission would mean little prayer or personal growth but most groups probably have the balance the other way. Your group could think of ideas that match the opportunities and gifts of the group members. Here are some possibilities:

- Have a social evening (perhaps a barbeque) in a group member's house and invite the neighbours.
- Go and visit an old people's home as a group.
- Get involved as a group in an outreach programme in the church or through a Christian organisation.
- Help in a practical way in the church—this could be coordinated for all groups by the congregation's leadership.
- 'Adopt a missionary' - be in regular contact with a specific missionary connected with the congregation.
- Have a prayer evening praying for several different countries (use a resource like Operation World).
- Plan a short term mission trip together as a group (if not everyone can go they can support those who do in prayer and in raising funds). See the resource 'Do It Well Mission Toolkit' for more ideas and advice.

Some of these are 'one-off' activities that could be repeated perhaps every year or every few months. Some will require a higher level of commitment. Make sure the group does not commit to too much but decides to do one thing well bearing in mind that discovering a good thing to be involved in may take some opportunities to 'taste and see' before committing—this should be communicated to both the group and those the group is going to.

Inviting non-Christians to the group

If your small group is focussed mainly on discipleship (Bible study, prayer, worship, social time) should non-Christians be invited to the group and if they are should you do things differently? If a significant number of non-Christians come you may wish to start a dedicated evangelistic course. But if just one or two come don't change to a purely evangelistic focus just for them—it's better to let them see what being a Christian is all about:

- Make sure the group has fully embraced the six attitudes listed overleaf.
- Don't stop praying as a group. Ask for their prayer requests but recognise non-Christians cannot pray as you do (but if they come to the point when they are ready pray for salvation allow space for them to do this).
- When they first come make sure you explain everything you are doing—don't make assumptions about their understanding but at the same time don't be patronising.