

Lesson Plan & Study Guide



Mission Group Process

Part One: Finding a Call

Working with Jesus

iFOLLOW

The iFollow Discipleship Series



About the iFollow Discipleship Series Pastor's Edition

Categories

The iFollow Discipleship Series is designed to be used in congregations to assist people in their pursuit of God. This assumes that individuals are in unique places in their journey and there is no perfect set of lessons that everyone must complete to become a disciple—in fact discipleship is an eternal journey. Therefore the iFollow curriculum is a menu of milestones that an individual, small group, or even an entire church can choose from. The lessons can be placed in three general categories: **Meeting with Jesus** (does not assume a commitment to Jesus Christ); **Walking with Jesus** (assumes an acceptance of Jesus Christ); and **Working with Jesus** (assumes a desire to serve Jesus Christ).

Components

Each lesson has a presenter's manuscript which can be read word for word, but will be stronger if the presenter puts it in his/her own words and uses personal illustrations. The graphic slides can be played directly from the Pastor's DVD or customized and played from a computer. There are also several group activities and discussion questions to choose from as well as printable student handouts.

Usage

The lessons are designed to be used in small groups, pastor's Bible classes, prayer meetings, seminars, retreats, training sessions, discussion groups, and some lessons may be appropriate sermon outlines.

Credits

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Mission Group Process, Part One: Finding a Call

This is the first in a series of six units designed to provide the preparation and training necessary to launch a mission group.

Learning Objectives

1. Introduce the concept of “mission group” and define some of the key ideas involved.
2. Understand an overview of the mission group process.
3. Learn “participant observer” methods of gathering information about potential target groups and their needs—physical, cultural, economic and spiritual.
4. Develop a mission-focused prayer life.
5. Hone the missional focus of participants.

Content Outline

- A. God’s purpose and the needs of humanity: the Adventist paradigm for mission in *The Ministry of Healing*, page 143
- B. The doctrine of humanity
- C. Participant-observer methods for gathering information and coming to understand a people group
- D. A missionary prayer life: praying for open eyes and developing a tender heart

Background Material for the Instructor

The emphasis of church outreach of all kinds has been “come to church” or “come to the meetings.” That is the focus of all of our efforts and the basic message to the general public. That approach is simply not working in many places and with many kinds of people. The book *City Reaching*, by Jack Dennison, points out that we need a new approach—a “go to” approach in which church mission goes to people where they are. That is, after all, the example of Jesus who came down from heaven to



incarnate the gospel message as a human being living in the midst of humanity. At the close of His ministry, He prayed in John 17 for His followers, telling the Father, “As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world” (v. 18.) Christ specifically noted that “my prayer is not that you take them out of the world” (v. 15.) The church is God’s agency for bringing His love into the world, Ellen White taught. “When we have come to love the world as [Christ] loves it, then, for us, His mission is accomplished.” (*The Desire of Ages*, p 641)

“The church has not yet provided a deliberate ‘go structure’ to send its committed nucleus to those who have rejected our ‘come structures.’ Even when Christians desire to invade the world of Outsiders, *they find no structure within their church life to help them!* ... Sunday Schools and training programs, along with evangelistic services, are all buried inside church walls. Even our visitation programs and bus ministries are part of a ‘come structure’ mentality which seeks to ‘bring them *in* from the fields of sin.’ [It is] ‘circle evangelism.’ That is, we leave our buildings, to the sinner, and *circle back* with him to our church buildings. There, inside the building, he will hopefully find Christ.” (Neighbour, pp 16-17)

“How do we reach out to share salvation’s message when they won’t come back? ... Is it not logical to create a deliberate ‘go structure’ within the life of the local church? Ministers are desperately needed who will go ... AND STAY ... far beyond church walls. ... Many who have seen the need for such outreach have had no *model* to follow.” The Mission Group is one such model. (Neighbour, p 17)

Church of the Savior, an independent Bible-based Protestant congregation in Washington DC, pioneered this model and has used it successfully since the 1950s. It has resulted in dozens of innovative urban ministries. The story of many of these ministries has been told in a series of books by Elizabeth O’Connor, a writer who was a member of the congregation and a participant in mission groups. These include *Call to Commitment* (1963, Harper), *Journey Inward, Journey Outward* (1975, Harper), *Letters to Scattered Pilgrims* (1979, Harper), *Search for Silence* (1986, Innisfree), *Cry Hope, Cry Pain* (1987, Word), *Eighth Day of Creation* (2007, Potters House).

Touch Ministries in Houston, Texas, has been modeling this approach since 1969. It’s story is told in books by the founding pastor, Ralph W. Neighbour—*The TOUCH of the Spirit* (1972, Broadman), *The Seven Last Words of the Church* (1973, Zondervan), *This Gift is Mine* (1974, Broadman), *Journey into Lifestyle Evangelism* (1974, Baptist Brotherhood Commission) and *Target-Group Evangelism* (1975, Broadman).

What is a mission group?

“A mission group is a small group of people (five to twelve) conscious of the action of the Holy Spirit in their lives, enabling them to hear the call of God through Christ, to belong in love to one another, and to offer the gift of their corporate life for the world’s healing and unit.” (Cosby, p.54)

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Understanding the Mission of Christ

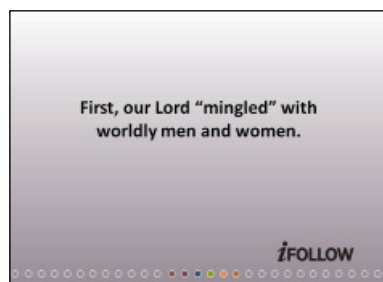
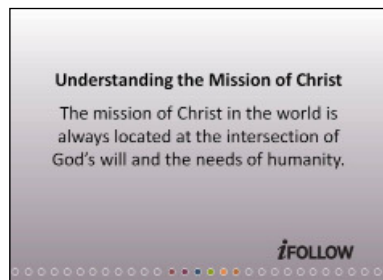
The mission of Christ in the world is always located at the intersection of God's will and the needs of humanity. The call to mission is rooted in the needs of lost people. For Adventists "need" is always wholistic, including equal concern for the physical, economic, social, emotional, intellectual and spiritual needs of each human being and each community. Ellen White provides a fundamental paradigm for Adventist mission in her oft-quoted statement in *The Ministry of Healing*, page 143: "Christ's method alone will give true success in reaching the people. The Saviour mingled with men as one who desired their good. He showed His sympathy for them, ministered to their needs, and won their confidence. Then He bade them, 'Follow Me.'" Finding a call to mission involves seeing and hearing the needs of lost people.

There is much discussion about which approach opens an effective future for the evangelization of North America: How are we to finish the work? Why not begin with Christ's example as described in this Ellen White statement?

First, our Lord "mingled" with worldly men and women. He listened and observed. He became acquainted with their customs, habits, and culture. He gleaned knowledge about their inner thoughts and feelings from the music, art and literature they produced. And always with a stance that identified Him "as one who desired their good"—proactive, compassionate and sympathetic.

To communicate the gospel we must know two things. We must know the gospel—have a real experience in our own lives—and we must know the world—have a real knowledge of those who need the gospel. We need to do research before we launch out in evangelization projects. Our efforts will be much more effective if we have a factual profile of our target audience. We need to concentrate on the growing number of the unchurched as well as the decreasing number of the church-oriented. Our personal ministry will be much more Christ-like if we take the time to know more about the person we are seeking to win—her job, his family, needs, interests, problems and background.

Second, our Lord helped people in practical ways. He proclaimed the doctrine of love as vigorously as He preached the coming Kingdom. Ellen White observes that He spent

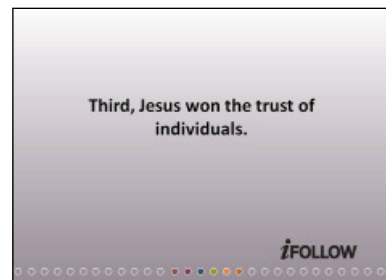


more time healing than preaching. He ministered to people's needs. This means we need to balance our use of words with practical action. For every Bible study, seminar, broadcast and literature ministry we need an equal number of Community Services centers, family life workshops, health screening vans, and homeless shelters. Our message has no credibility apart from a visible demonstration of the quality of the new life in Christ, new relationships in the Body of Christ, and a loving concern and sacrificial service on behalf of the needy.

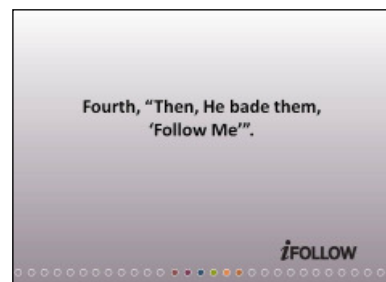


Church members ask, "How do I get a hearing? How do I reach the secular men and women in my community?" The answer is really quite simple. By getting involved in social action ministries where these unreachables come either for help or to help by volunteering their services. The pattern works again and again. A dedicated, compassionate Adventist grandmother gives two mornings a week helping in a day care center. She meets and becomes friendly with a young single mother who leaves her three-year-old at the center. Soon the young mother is taking Bible studies. A consecrated, caring Adventist realtor agrees to take on a 45-year-old warehouse foreman who is unemployed because the company is going out of business. They struggle together to get the man established in a new line of work, and together they meet the problems of family adjustment. One day the ex-foreman is in church for the first time.

Third, Jesus won the trust of individuals. He did not simply participate in a faceless program. His service was "disinterested"—an archaic term which does not mean uninterested, but means without thought of personal gain or results for the church or even grateful thanks—but His love for those He served was unyielding. We must learn to build individual relationships as we "do good" in social action ministries and service-oriented occupations. We must reach across the barriers our society has raised between persons and mold caring relationships with those around us—unselfish, humble, patient friendships.



Fourth, "Then, He bade them, 'Follow Me.'" After He had demonstrated the doctrine of love, and they had accepted it and shown that they understood it by responding with their trust, "then" He asked them to admit they were sinners and accept His saving grace and keep His commandments. He did not impatiently, selfishly rush on to those important doctrines that relate the person directly to God as Lord; He selflessly waited until they had in their own way come to the right moment when speaking of



these doctrines would be best appreciated.

If we are serious about His mission, we must follow His example. “Christ’s method alone will give true success in reaching the people.” We must learn the timing and flexibility that made Christ the Master soul winner. We must know how and when to concentrate on the gospel as love through our actions, and how and when to use the wide array of communications media available to us as we teach the full message that indeed answers the questions in hearts and minds everywhere.

When we have achieved this approach to evangelization—a “relational” approach—we will succeed in the work Christ has given us to do as His “body.” When we begin to bring this Christ-like lifestyle into our congregations, then we will see true renewal in the church.

What is Evangelism?

Your reaction to Ellen White’s five-step approach may be the same as a church member who said, “It is ministry, but is it evangelism?” The word “evangelism” has come to mean different things to different people. It has been used in so many different ways that there is no longer a clear and simple, widely shared meaning. Let us define some key terms briefly.



The mission or purpose of the church is clearly stated in the Great Commission passage, Matthew 28:18-20. It begins with Christ’s authority, which Ephesians 4:7-16 places in the context of His death on the cross and resurrection, and connects with the individual Holy Spirit gifted ministry of each believer as a member of the living, growing body. Matthew then quotes Christ in an explicit command. Verses 19 and 20 use four verbs. The imperative verb is “make disciples.” The other three helping verbs describe elements in achieving the primary end of making disciples—“go ... baptize ... teach.”

Making disciples is what Christ was about in His earthly ministry. He drew men and women to Him, loved them sincerely and deeply, and changed their lives forever. Making disciples is the clear-headed, simple purpose He endowed His followers with. Making disciples is at once personal, spiritual and social because it connects the believer to Christ and to His body. Making disciples is not simply recruiting church members, doing good or chalking up baptisms. A disciple is one who has been born again, joined the fellowship of believers, identified his or her spiritual gifts and has accepted a role in ministry compatible with those gifts. And a disciple feels a sense of being called by the Holy Spirit to that ministry without continual, external motivation. Making disciples is not a short-term task nor can it be done by mass production.

In order to make disciples, we must first “go.” To “go” is what we refer to as “outreach”

today. It is to go to where people live, crossing both geographic and social boundaries, and be present with those whom we would disciple. Outreach is a ministry of presence, of service and bridge-building. But outreach alone is not all there is to disciple-making. It is essential and cannot be put aside or made a low priority, but it cannot be the primary or only activity of the church either.

In order to make disciples, we must “baptize.” This we call “soul-winning” today, although some misuse this term to mistakenly identify with the concept of “soul” as the spiritual “part” of the human being. “Soul-winning” means to win men and women to Christ as whole persons, not just their religious allegiance. “Soul” refers to the person, and it is the whole personhood that must be led to accept Christ as Savior and Lord. But soul-winning alone is not all there is to disciple-making. It is essential and cannot be evaded or made a low priority, nor can it be the primary or only activity of the church.

In order to make disciples, we must also “teach ... all things.” This we call “nurture” today. Having brought a person to Christ and baptized them into His body, there is an ongoing work of spiritual formation, education and growth to be done. The new believer must be brought to understand the continual work of the Holy Spirit in his life, equipping him for ministry, bringing him into community with other believers, lifting up his life in worship and enabling him to discipline himself for the great struggle with evil.

All of these things can rightfully be called “evangelism,” although accuracy demands that they be labeled this way only when all three of the subsidiary processes are working together to actually make disciples. “Evangelization” is a more precise term that speaks of the whole process; outreach, soul-winning and nurture moving in concert to make disciples for Christ. “Church growth” refers to a congregation-centered view of evangelization and means a combination of continual, increasing spiritual maturity and multiplication of the number of active disciples within the church.

New Testament Evangelization

The relational nature of evangelization and church growth is implicit in every New Testament passage on the topic. In John 17 where Christ prays a priestly prayer of ordination for His followers, He sends them “into the world” (v. 18) because “I am no more in the world” (v. 11), and repeatedly invokes a “oneness” or quality of relationship like that of the Trinity (v. 22) “so that the world may believe” (v. 21) implying that this relational quality will be ultimately persuasive to unbelievers. Acts 2:42-47 implicitly states that it is *because* the early house churches “devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and prayers ... sold their possessions ... and distributed them ... as any had need ... breaking bread in their homes ... praising



God” that “the Lord added to their number daily.”

Dizzying growth is recorded, jumping from 120 in Acts 1:15 to 3,000 in Acts 2:41 to more than 5,000 in Acts 4:4, “multitudes” in Acts 5:14, “a third of the priests” in Acts 6:7, “a great number” in Acts 11:21 and “many thousands” in Acts 21:20. But it always follows a pattern demonstrated, for example, in Acts 18 where Paul comes to Corinth, an unentered city, finds a couple—Aquila and Priscilla—with which he shares ethnicity, social standing, language and occupation, sets up housekeeping and livelihood with them, and takes them with him as he first dialogues with those who attend the synagogue on Sabbaths, both Jews and interested “Greeks,” and then moves next door to plant a church in the household of Titius Justus, focusing on the “God-fearers” or ethnic non-Hebrews who have come to believe in Jehovah but are unwilling, and perhaps not encouraged, to go through the painful and difficult process of becoming Jewish. He stays 18 months and then travels on to Ephesus, taking Priscilla and Aquila with him, to plant a church there and then, after two years, leave the couple to pastor the new flock. They disciple Apollos who goes on to plant a third congregation in Achaia, and they surface again in Romans 16:3, 5 where they are pastoring a fourth house church which presumably they planted when political conditions allowed them to return to their city of origin.

The process is always one of working the networks of relationships with careful attention to the social currents which will most quickly carry the gospel message. Paul carefully selects key cities where the influence of the Christian faith can flow out to the countryside. Paul adapts to the culture in each province and metropolis. Paul targets responsive hearers among the “God-fearers” and works to reach those with the means both to support themselves and travel. Paul appoints “elders” or pastors in each small congregation which is based in someone’s home, and encourages them to plant more churches and disciple more believers and leaders.

What are the dynamic equivalents today of these Bible examples of evangelization and church growth? Can we again find the rich fellowship, vibrant spirituality and dynamic missionary zeal of the early church? The conviction that the church is for ministry, the deep sense of the Holy Spirit’s activity in the life of each believer, the attention to patterns of people flow, the freedom to adapt to different cultures, the working of relational networks and the centrality of the house church or small group fellowship all seem essential to this process. I believe it is a process that can reach into the secular, urbanized world of the late Twentieth Century and powerfully impact the life of God’s people again.

Compassion is the Key to Mission

How do you begin to witness to people who are not interested in being witnessed to? How do we begin to share Christ with the large number of Americans who believe that religion is personal and it is impolite to bring up the topic?

In fact, what you do is more powerful than what you say. Everyone knows that there is

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a distance between what people say and what they actually do. We call that distance “hypocrisy.” Not only did Jesus have some hard things to say about hypocrisy (Matthew 6), but today’s research shows that one of the key reasons the average American is turned off by the whole idea of going to church is because he sees hypocrisy among church-goers. “They say it’s all about God’s love and mercy,” one nonbeliever told me, “but when you go to church there are too many rules and people are cold.”



You misunderstand if you think this is a visceral reaction one woman said: “I certainly believe there is a God, but I simply cannot get over the basic hypocrisy of organized religion. How can they spend all that money to worship God one hour a week while around them there are so many suffering people?” Surveys indicates that four of five Americans agree with this woman. They do not take seriously any religion that is not visibly engaged in social work.

A few years ago a video producer created a video about how to be a caring church. They hired some professional actors from the secular marketplace. At the end of the project, one of the actors said, “I’m not religious, but if there were a church like this, I would join.”

Do you “walk your talk” at the place where you work or in the neighborhood where you live? Do you act out the love of God in meaningful ways that can easily be seen by those who work or live near you?

This is an essential element in witnessing. Ellen White writes that Jesus “showed His sympathy” as an early step in His approach to “reaching people.” (*The Ministry of Healing*, page 143) If you daily demonstrate compassion in practical ways, you are making a statement about the God who loves the lost so much He gave His life for them. This non-verbal witness prepares the listener for what you may later say about faith.

It is not “random” acts of kindness, but consistent caring that demonstrates a truly Christ-like approach to life. The hallmark of authenticity is a person who regularly gives time, money and energy to feed the hungry, house the homeless, care for the poor, heal the sick and speak up for the oppressed. (Matthew 25) Does your life demonstrate a genuine humanitarian concern?

Where Mission Begins

“The key to reaching Outsiders is to discover their need and to use it to present Christ as the answer. ... What are the *holes* in their hearts? Where do they *itch*? That’s where they will welcome a *scratch*. ... As Christians meet real needs in Outsider’s lives, they will be *welcomed* as



friends.” (Neighbour, pp 19-20) “Only in the midst of the world does Christ become Christ,” wrote Dietrich Bonhoeffer.

Christ’s mission exists at any point where the purposes of God intersect with the needs of humanity. Christ declared that He “did not come to be served, but to serve.” (Mark 10:45) At the last supper, He knelt and washed the feet of His disciples. He did so to fasten in their minds forever and from generation to generation the correct posture of a follower of Jesus—kneeling to do the practical work of a *servant*. “The role of servant is Christ’s role for the church in the world; *this does not become authentic until each member of the body is serving.*” (Neighbour, p 28)

“Touch ministries are a form of evangelism which always occurs outside church walls. ... Target-Group ministries differ from traditional church evangelistic methods in three ways. *First*, the impact of Christ dwelling in the believer becomes the focal point for witnessing, rather than simply the distribution of tracts and the sharing of canned, memorized speeches. ... *Second*, Touch ministries frequently involved the utilization of small groups, rather than using a one-to-one ministry. *Third*, Touch ministries utilize a cultivative approach in which believers and unbelievers share a relationship for [long periods of time]. It does not concentrate on a quick-visit approach, which usually shorts out the opportunity to discern where the Outsider’s ‘itch’ is.” (Neighbour, p 22)

“If the name of the local church is not used, how do Touch ministries remain church related? In the same way that a Sunday School class relates to a local church! [It] it is a ministry of men and women who are commissioned by the local congregation to become ministers of Christ in the greater community of unreached persons. The church sponsors, directs, subsidizes, and receives reports from each Touch ministry.” (Neighbour, p 22)

Baptist pastor Neighbour gives a number of examples of mission groups his congregation started, including “Divorce Care Groups, a house fellowship of parents of retarded children, a ministry to Internationals who are taught to speak English, a ministry to alcoholics, a ministry to campers at a trailer park, Touch Clubs for children in apartment complexes, teen rap sessions, a Touch hot line, a sharing ministry for grade school boys featuring athletics and Bible study, providing shots to diabetics and people with allergies, and a ministry conducted by men who visit bars, gas stations and the like. ... The ratio of Christians to non-Christians in groups is always approximately one believer to every five nonbelievers.” (Neighbour, p 22)

Initially “your purpose will not be to evangelize but to see the world around you. ... What are the *needs* of the people in your locality? Divide the area into age groups, emotional groups, economic groups and other” segments. (Neighbour, p 29)

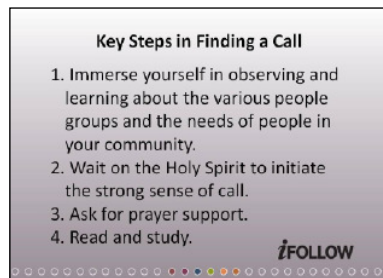
“What do outsiders think of your church? One question you might innocently ask at the gasoline station closest to your church building is, ‘Where is the _____ Church located?’ It would be surprising if the man at the station knows. Talk to teenagers. Ask them what *they* think about the churches of the community. ... Secure permission to go on a police ‘ride-along’ in your area. Talk to the Narcotics Division about the drug prob-

lem in your area. Attend an Alcoholics Anonymous meeting. Visit with prisoners in your local jail. Spend a night in the waiting room of your county hospital's emergency ward. ... Sit in the mall and visit with the [senior citizens]. ... Chat with the waitresses at the all-night diner. Don't forget the folks at the posh country club. Ask the counselor at the high school about the pregnancy problem and the rate of dropouts. Talk to the doctors and lawyers of the community." Spend an evening helping serve the meal in a homeless shelter. (Neighbour, p 30)

If some group, some need has not touched your heart, take another six months! "Don't get anxious ... 'flash programs' fizzle. Plant roots so they will grow deep into the lifestyle of the body." (Neighbour, p 30)

Key Steps in Finding a Call

1. Immerse yourself in observing and learning about the various people groups and the needs of people in your community. Spend time in the community as a participant observer—go to community meetings, walk the streets, do a "windshield survey."
2. Wait on the Holy Spirit to initiate the strong sense of call. Spend time asking God to open your heart, your ears and your eyes.
3. Ask for prayer support. Find at least one other person to join in praying with your for a powerful sense of the Spirit's call to a particular mission.
4. Read and study. Begin to read information about the community and people groups, books about mission and ministry and the Scripture and relevant writings of Ellen G. White.



A Mission Group Must Form Around a Clear, Compelling and Specific Mission

"In our beginning years we assumed that a group of committed people who gathered faithfully for Bible study, prayer, and the seeking of God's will for their lives would be given their corporate mission. They never were. This is not a fruitful course to pursue. The reason is the great diversity found in any group. The call that comes to be recognized by one person is not the call of another. No one call emerges to which all in the group can respond.



... Our procedure now is to start with one person or a small nucleus of persons who have heard a call for a specific mission. Then others gather around that call; they gather initially around 'call' incarnated in a person or persons. A new mission group *begins* with a clearly understood outward journey as well as a commitment to the inward journey. It is crucial that these dimensions be embodied from the very beginning, otherwise the group begins with many general hopes, aspirations and longings, but is never able to agree on the common task or the specifics of spiritual disciplines." (Cosby, p 58-59)

Finding a call is work that is done before a group comes together. It begins as individual work, often lonely work. It may include one or two partners, or it may be entirely the work of one person who longs to follow Jesus in meeting the needs of a specific people group. This is the ground work that must be done before a call can be announced.

"The form in which a call is first heard may be very simple, although in terms of conventional wisdom, impossible." (Cosby, p 59-60) Using examples from his church, Pastor Cosby says it may first be heard as:

- Free my children housed in understaffed, crowded institutions.
- Rid my city of illiteracy.
- Build a multicultural institute that will be a global community.
- Pray for my servants in positions of political power.
- Feed my hungry.

Other examples of call to mission:

Plant my church in Manhattan.

Promote wellness among my people.

Care for my creation.

Reach my sons and daughters among young, urban professionals.

Welcome my immigrants to this community.

Other examples of call to mission:

- Plant my church in Manhattan.
- Promote wellness among my people.
- Reach my sons and daughters among young, urban professionals
- Welcome my immigrants to this community.

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The mission is first heard in very personal terms as a direct request from Jesus Christ. "My children ... my poor ... my suffering ... my city ... my lost." It is heard in these terms because Jesus identifies Himself so personally with the needy. "I was hungry ... I was thirsty ... I was an alien ... I was sick ... I was in prison.... whatever you did for one of the least of these

brothers of mine, you did for me.” (Matthew 25:35-36, 40)

“As one is obedient to the call, new light is given. The implications and ramifications of the call are seen over time. A simple call faithfully followed takes one into many interlocking systems. There is no limit to the horizons opened to one’s gaze.” One may begin with three people with no clearly defined strategy. How insignificant a mustard seed! One may end with fifteen groups each carrying a necessary part of an incredibly complex task affecting the quality of life in an entire community or region and involving the labors of hundreds of volunteers and scores of employees. (Cosby, p 60)

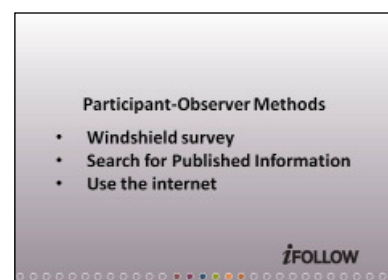
Participant-Observer Methods

The most simple method of finding a call to mission in your city is to begin to pay attention to the needs of people and learn about the various segments of the population. You can use the “participant-observer” method which is a key tool in anthropology used in a type of research called an “ethnographic study.” It consists of simply hanging out where people gather, going to community meetings and events, eating in local restaurants, etc.

Observation skills are key. Keep your eyes open. Listen carefully. Don’t focus on your own feelings and reactions to what you hear and see, but concentrate on learning about the others. An example of this approach: You want to learn about students at a nearby university campus. You go and sit in a coffee shop where they go for lunch and simply watch and listen and take notes.

Picking good locations is very important. Where are the places where people congregate and spend time talking and interacting? Incidentally, although this approach does not involve taking a survey or interviewing people, it is OK to meet people and interact with them just in a simple, friendly manner. It is also OK to just “be a fly on the wall” and watch and listen. In order to really learn from these experiences, repeated outings are needed in various locations. It is also important to write notes immediately after each experience. Reflection on the accumulating notes from repeated sessions is the key to learning anything important and sensing the call to mission. Is this the kind of people that God is calling you to serve on His behalf? Are there other people groups that may be of greater priority to God right now? Or, that better fit your personality and spiritual gifts?

Windshield survey—A variation on the participant-observer method of research is a method called a windshield survey. It is used by Red Cross volunteers who drive the streets of a community hit by a disaster to identify how many homes have been destroyed or damaged and how many people are without drinking water, food or shelter. It is a way to get a quick overview of a neighbor-



hood or suburban community. It can be done by walking or driving. A worksheet that can be used and instructions on how to do this method are available in *Understanding Your Community* by Monte Sahlin (2004, Center for Creative Ministry).

Search for Published Information—A simple way to begin to find a call to mission is to read the newspaper every day, paying attention to the local stories about needs in the community. Read stories in national news magazines that discuss the needs of families and individuals. Work around the political views and focus on the concrete information about various types of people and their health, economic, social and spiritual needs, their values and attitudes. Ask yourself, “Who has a ministry with these folks? Do any of them live in my community?”

Use the Internet—When you see something interesting about the needs of a particular group in the newspaper or a magazine, go on line and use a search engine to find additional information. Go to the local Chamber of Commerce and ask for the packet of information that they regularly share with people interested in starting a business in the community. This includes demographics, lists of the largest employers, as well as the churches and nonprofit organizations. Check on line for local social service organizations such as the United Way, as well as municipal government. They usually have documents available on line with needs assessments of the community. You can use the official government census web site to get a demographic profile for any Zip Code or postal code area. Most nations include information about the religious affiliation of the residents in the census data. In the United States, you have to go to www.thearda.com to get a religious profile of your county. Because Americans tend to drive quite a distance to church and these data are collected from the churches, not from individuals, the data are not published for more local levels.

What does all this reading and listening to social issues like poverty, crime, health care, schools and youth have to do with finding a call to mission? Remember, mission is always located at the intersection between God’s will and humanity’s need. If you are to hear an authentic call from Christ, you will hear it from “these my brothers” who are “hungry ... thirsty ... an alien ... sick ... in prison.” You will not hear it in sermons about church growth or appeals for “soul winning.” At least, that is what Jesus said in Matthew 25.

Prayer is Fundamental

In order to hear a call to Christ’s mission from among all of the information that you can tap into about your community and various people groups in it, it is also absolutely necessary to spend regular time in prayer on this topic. Ask God to open your eyes and tune your ears, to see your community as He sees it, to hear what He hears. Ask Him to help

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you understand the information that you gather from many sources and to enable you to see the patterns that He wants you to see.

In John 8 when a woman caught in adultery is presented to Christ, what does He see? A degraded sinner who fit only for destruction or a woman with the capacity to leave behind her the life of sin she had been leading? Which view of the people in your community comes closest to the lenses that Jesus wants you to look through?

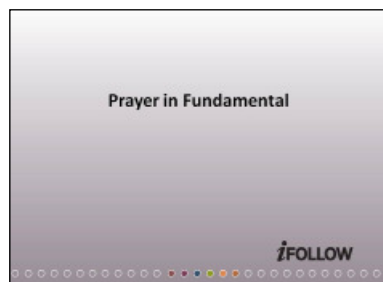
In John 4 when Jesus encounters a woman trudging to a well located nearly a mile outside of town, what does He hear? A woman with five failed marriages that propriety indicated He should not even speak to or a woman with a spiritual thirst and the capacity to share the gospel with her town? (See verse 39.) What does He want you to hear in your community?

In John 6 when Christ is confronted with five thousand hungry people, does He send them away or find a way to feed them? This situation has the potential for disaster in it. The disciples tell Jesus that caution indicates that it is an impossible task, but Jesus knows the power of prayer. He takes the only resource available—a young man willing to share his simple lunch of “five small barley loaves and two small fish”—prays for God’s blessing and directs the disciples to distribute the food. Which sense of mission is Christ pushing you toward? A caring heart that expansively reaches to touch all in need, or a cautious feeling that is careful to “color within the lines”?

Ten Things to Pray For

If you are serious about finding a call to mission, then here are some essential things to begin to pray for:

1. To see clearly a particular people group
2. To feel the pain and suffering they feel
3. To hear their lostness in their conversations, stories and songs
4. To understand deeply who these people are; their lifestyle, culture, values and beliefs
5. To learn more about specific needs and opportunities for ministry, key leaders in the community, the organizations and businesses that are the backbone of the community
6. To find a prayer partner to join with you in praying for a specific sense of call
7. To sense God speak to your heart in a simple, straight-forward call to mission that is



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specifically related to a particular community or people group and their needs

8. To be able to articulate that in short phrase or sentence

9. To have the courage to share this with one or two other people, including a leader in your congregation

10. To have the conviction that gives you the strength to stand before your congregation and propose that a mission group form around this call to mission



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Additional Resources

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----- (1972). *The Seven Last Words of the Church*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

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----- (1974b). *Journey into Lifestyle Evangelism*. Memphis, TN: Baptist Brotherhood Commission.

----- (1975). *Target-Group Evangelism*. Nashville, TN: Broadman Press.

O'Connor, Elizabeth (1963). *Call to Commitment*. New York, NY: Harper.

----- (1975). *Journey Inward, Journey Outward*. New York, NY: Harper.

----- (1979). *Letters to Scattered Pilgrims*. New York, NY: Harper.

----- (1986). *Search for Silence*. Washington, DC: Innisfree.

----- (1987). *Cry Hope, Cry Pain*. Waco, TX: Word.

----- (2007). *Eighth Day of Creation*. Washington, DC: Potters House.

Sahlin, Monte (2007). *Mission in Metropolis*. Lincoln, NE: Center for Creative Ministry.

Web Sites

www.seekerschurch.org is the offspring of the Gordon Cosbys' original Church of the Savior and continues to resource mission groups across the country.

www.touchusa.org is the web site of Touch Ministries in Houston, Texas, which publishes Ralph Neighbour's materials.

www.seekerschurch.org/coredocs/mission has some articles on mission groups; what they are, how to start one, their life cycles, etc.

Discussion Questions

1. Is the work of Jesus primarily in the church or in the secular world?
2. In Acts 16:9, Paul has a dream in which a man appeals to him, “Come over to Macedonia and help us.” If you were to have a similar dream tonight, what would “Macedonia” be?
3. Where are you at with the Mission Group concept? Is it new to you? Have you thought it about some already? Are you want to know how to move ahead in the formation of a Mission Group?
4. Are you feeling a sense of call to mission? If so, how would you state that mission in one, simple sentence?
5. How often do you pray about mission? What do you pray for?
6. Make a list: What do you know about the needs in the community?
7. Make another list: What additional things would you like to know about needs in the community?

Group Exercise

Purpose: To help people focus on needs in the community or people group of interest. (Individuals can work on different communities/people groups, if need be. Or, the entire group can all work in reference to the same community or people group, but make separate representations.)

Preparation: You will need a flip chart or large sheets of poster paper—one sheet for each person, as well as a pair of scissors for each person and a bottle of paste or rubber cement. (If scissors are not available, participants can be instructed to tear out their pictures and not use scissors at all. If paste is in short supply, you could share one bottle between two participants or put a small amount in a paper cup for each participant, if it is the kind that does not dry too quickly. Even with an adult group, it is advisable to use the kind of paste that is used for children’s activities, which can be washed off with water.) You will also need a good supply of magazines and newspapers. It is best to have some publications that are local or from your metropolitan area as well as national in scope. They should include a good number of news publications, but can also include other kinds of publications. These need not be entirely current, in fact many of them can be from the last several years.

Assignment: Each person is to make a collage representing the needs in the local community (or a selected people group) or a community or people group of their choice (depending on the context in which you are teaching this unit). Picture things as God sees them. Show what people are doing, how they are hurting and what they believe.

Time: Allow at least a half hour for participants to make their collages. It could go as long as 45 minutes or more.

Debriefing: At the end of the work time, allow about five minutes for each person to present their collage and make a few remarks about it. Also, fifteen or twenty minutes for the group to gather for a discussion of, What did we learn from this exercise?

Handout 1

Finding a Mission

Every believer is a missionary. If you say in your heart, “Christ is my savior,” then He will send you ... if you are listening. When you hear the invitation to go, what do you do next?

1. Pray—Not every request for you to do something at church or elsewhere is really a call from Christ. All too often the church asks people to do things that benefit the church, keep the machinery going, but have little to do with the mission of Christ in the world. So ask the Lord, Is this really your call? Is this the best place to use the gifts and resources you’ve given me? And if you begin to feel more and more that the call is authentically from Jesus, then pray for wisdom and strength.
2. Study the needs—Who is God calling you to serve? What is the “target group” of your mission and what are their needs. Authentic, Christlike mission is always unselfish, compassionate and servant-like. It begins with serving practical, non-religious needs—demonstrating the compassion of Christ—not telling or teaching.
3. Find a team—Christ almost never asks us to go on mission alone. Authentic mission is always grounded in the Body.
4. Mingle—Spend time with those to whom Christ is calling you in His mission. Listen to their songs and stories. Learn the culture, and learn to see their culture through God’s eyes—with pain and love, not judgement.
5. Do something practical to help. Meet needs. Show compassion. Build community. Bring healing. Ellen White wrote that Jesus spent more time healing than preaching. Authentically Christlike mission follows His example, not evangelistic traditions.
6. Make friends—The gospel is best shared friend to friend because bonding comes before believing. Unless you become friends with the people God has sent you to serve, no evangelism is going to happen. You will know when they are ready to

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hear the message because you've become friends and learned to listen. You will recognize the God-shaped hole in their hearts when it is revealed.

7. Make disciples—Invite them to follow Jesus before you invite them to join the church. Church is a support group for people who have decided to give their lives to following Christ. Don't major in minors; get first things first!

8. Open the Scriptures—Teach them to learn for themselves. If you give a man a key text, you will answer today's question and he will be hungry again tomorrow. If you teach a man to study the Bible, he will be able to feed himself every day on the Bread of Life.

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Handout 2

Outline for Notes

1. “Come to church” or “go to the people”
2. Mission Group is a “go to” structure
3. Mission is located at the intersection between God’s purpose and the needs of humanity
4. The Adventist paradigm for mission in *The Ministry of Healing*, page 143
5. The doctrine of humanity
6. Participant-observer methods for gathering information
7. Developing a missionary prayer life

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