

Lesson Plan & Study Guide



Mission Group Process

Part Two: Sharing 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 Two: Sharing a Call

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

Learning Objectives

1. Understand how to convey human needs and a sense of call to others
2. Understand the role of the Holy Spirit in a call to mission
3. Learn a variety of appropriate presentation skills
4. Hone relevant conversational skills

Content Outline

A. Key items to be included in conversations or presentations announcing a call

Need

Opportunity

Invitation to join in prayer

B. How to explain briefly the Mission Group concept

C. Necessary conversations with key people (each one-to-one)

Prayer partner(s)

Elder(s)

The pastor

People who might be interested

People who should be interested

D. Presentation to the congregation

Basic talk

Pictures and/or PowerPoint

Interviews



Stories

Video

E. Continued prayer focus at this stage of development

Background Material for the Instructor

When it comes time to start talking to others about a potential Mission Group—announcing a call to mission—it is very important to have the key message points well in mind.

Keep it simple:

1. State the mission in one short, focused phrase or sentence. Here are some examples of individual calls God gives:

Feed My hungry.

Plant My church in Manhattan.

Rid My city of illiteracy.

Promote wellness among My people.

Care for My creation.

Reach My sons and daughters among young, urban professionals.

Welcome My immigrants to this community.

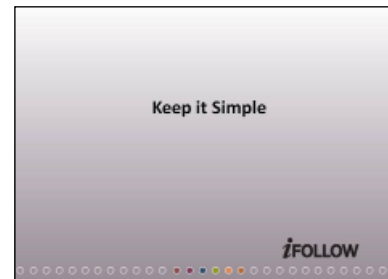
Free My children housed in understaffed, crowded institutions.

Build a multicultural institute that will be a global community.

Pray for My servants in positions of political power.

2. Explain the opportunity that is open to God's people with this mission. Describe your vision for what could happen in one or two paragraphs. Don't hesitate to lay out your hopes and dreams. Tell people what really excites you and don't be afraid to get excited as you talk!

3. Invite people to join you in praying for a clear sign of an open or closed door. Put a "fleece" before the Lord. If you do not find at least four other people who are willing to join the mission group, then you will put aside the idea for the time being and continue to pray for the Lord to give you clarity on how to proceed or remove the burden from you.



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Don't be afraid to say to likely individuals, "I hope that you will think seriously and pray about joining this Mission Group." But, do not "arm-twist" or "pressure" any one. It is important that they join because of the work of the Holy Spirit, not human persuasion.

These talking points are just as important for private conversations as for presentations to groups. You also need to be prepared to give a brief idea of the Mission Group concept. There is material in the unit on "Mission Group Process: Finding a Call" that can be used for this purpose. It is important that everyone understand that a Mission Group is not the same as the usual small group or church committee.

Important Conversations to Have

The person upon whom the call of God has come sounds that call to mission in a variety of ways. "Often in personal conversations within the congregation he or she discovers another to share the call. The fire of God kindled within his or her own spirit inflames another. The two are given to each other." (Cosby, p 59)



There are a number of individuals that it is important for you to talk to if you feel the call of God to start a Mission Group. If you already have a prayer partner from early searching for a call, then this is the first person to whom you should talk about the sense that you have found the call and are ready to share it with others, and actually announce the formation of the Mission Group. If for some reason you have not yet found another person to pray for you in the process, then now is the essential time to do so. You may wish to have more than one prayer partner; that is fine. Be sure to tell them in advance of each of the other private conversations you intend to have as you begin to give voice to the call for a Mission Group and ask them to pray for you specifically as you have these conversations. Email and text messaging can be used as you head to the appointment, or you can make a phone call.

The elders of your congregation are the appointed spiritual leaders. It is their duty to give spiritual guidance and support to church members, especially in regards to the mission of the church. It is important that early on you have a conversation about the call for a Mission Group with one or more of the elders. Of course, it is best to initially pick an elder that you think will be supportive of the idea, but do not be afraid of potential critics. The objections they raise can be useful to hone your call and need not be a barrier.

Of course, you must talk with your pastor about the Mission Group and the mission that you want to announce. It is the duty of pastors to empower and encourage church members in developing their spiritual gifts and branching out in new missions. Do not assume that your pastor will be negative or see the new Mission Group as competing for scarce resources or attention to programs that he is trying to promote. If, indeed, you find him

taking that attitude, gently ask him if those are his real concerns. Tell him that you want to talk openly about those potential problems; it is not your intention to undermine anything else that he or the congregation is attempting to do. Assure him that you will not move ahead without his support and approval, and that if he cannot give his full support for the new Mission Group, you will continue to pray about the mission and wait until he can.

Once you have had these conversations, then it is time to begin to contact individuals who might be interested. Talk first to those who you have some idea that they would be interested in this mission based on what you know of them or comments they have made in the past. Later, talk to those who should be interested because of their gifts or occupation or training or location or because they are part of the people group you will focus on.

Public Announcement of the Call

After a number of personal conversations, the time comes when the call needs to be announced to the congregation during the Sabbath worship service or perhaps, initially, to a particular Sabbath School class. These need not be long presentations. The basic talk should be no longer than the talking points for the private conversations. It needs to be stated clearly that if there are at least five people who are interested in making this mission happen, then a Mission Group will form in the near future to explore the possibilities and develop the plans. The group should be told that if they want to know more about the concept of a Mission Group, then come to the front of the church at the end of worship and a fact sheet will be handed out.

It is helpful to include something alongside the general announcement to the congregation that engages the hearts of church members. This could take the form of some pictures in a PowerPoint presentation. Simple digital cameras are widely available today and can be used to get some pictures showing the needs or representative photos of the people group in public places such as the sidewalks of a neighborhood or at a mall or large public gathering. It might also take the form of sharing some stories from the research that has been done about the needs in the community. It might even be possible to get one or two individuals from the community or from the people group that it is appropriate to ask to come to church that day for a short interview. Video equipment is now used widely by young people for all kinds of purposes, so another possibility for the call of your Mission Group is to get the assistance of young people in your congregation or in the community to create a short video for you. You can show the video in church on that Sabbath and upload it on the church website so that others can view it later.

It is important to have some kind of response card or response sheet. A written response indicates a higher level of interest than someone who is simply curious who sits on the



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edge of a meeting. Some church members who have no interest in the specific mission, or may even be hostile to it, will feel that they should sit in on the after-meeting to monitor what is going on. The best way to weed out the curiosity-seekers and “sidewalk superintendents” is to pass out a response card or response sheet and ask everyone to indicate interest in writing. This should be done in the after-meeting with those who stay by, not in the general congregation.

“A number of people may respond or none. If no one responds, the person waits, nurturing his or her own life in Christ and praying for those who can hear. He continues to pursue his call individually, waiting for the moment others can share it with him.” (Cosby, p 59) When others respond, then the group begins to meet regularly, identifying the gifts and abilities of the members, gathering more information, experimenting in small ways and praying for clarity in hearing God’s will for their shared mission. If the new group lives and senses God working through it, then it may share its call in a written, formal presentation to the church board to see if it is confirmed by the leaders of other ministries. “This serious testing of call is extremely important.” (Cosby, p 59) When it is made too easy to launch a mission group, that only adds to the probability that it will fail sooner or later, without ever achieving what God has in mind.

If key leaders in the congregation feel a sense of call to a new mission, there will be strong pressure to keep them in their current role. This is based on a false fear that if they leave those roles, the congregation will fall apart. There is no record of that ever happening. When God wills for gifted leaders to turn to new missions, He makes a way to continue the essential work of His church. If a person is talked into ignoring the new call and remaining with the old duties, it is often fatal to their soul. Faithfulness to God means following His call wherever it takes us and feeling the freedom to leave behind old responsibilities. One of the deadening things in the church is the number of gifted members who have ignored their hopes and dreams to do a round of duties that become boring and eventually lead them to resent others in the congregation who appear lazy, not carrying their fair share of the burden. “I think all of us had best find out what we really want to do and start doing it, with whatever it involves. If you have to give up your responsibility, give it up; if the church goes to pieces, so be it. But we’ve got to find what we want to do, *really*, because nothing else is going to help anybody.” (Cosby, p 74)

Continued Prayer Focus

It may take some weeks (even months) for enough individuals to decide to join the Mission Group. During that time it is well to continue to have a brief announcement in the church bulletin and for the pastor to mention from time to time that, “We continue to pray for the possibility of a new Mission Group. We know that there are those who are thinking of joining and we are willing



to give them time to make this important decision.

During this time continue to pray daily—or even more than once a day—for the mission and for God to provide a clear open or closed door. Stay in touch with your prayer partners and other interested people and supportive leaders. Do not attempt to go ahead and make any organizational arrangements. Just pray and let the Holy Spirit do its work on the hearts and minds of the people that God is calling into this Mission Group.

Follow-up Visits with Interested Individuals

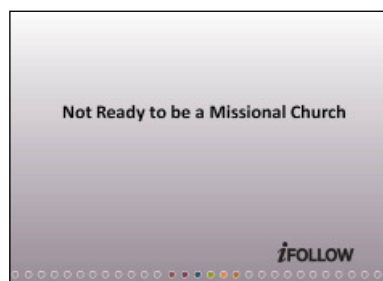
It is very important that each person who turns in a response card or response sheet be contacted within the following week to set up an appointment for a personal visit. Even if you have previously had a conversation with this individual, it is important to set another appointment and have another conversation after the official announcement of the call for the Mission Group. Even if the number of responses is not yet sufficient to have a minimum number of members, it is very important to go ahead with private conversations with those who are ready to join the group. Set the appointments during the week following receipt of the response sheet and make the actual conversation within three weeks thereafter.



At these follow-up conversations, it is essential to discuss certain items. If there are a sufficient number of people ready to join the group that it can begin to function, then the discussion must cover two major items: (1) When to have the initial, exploratory meeting of the Mission Group. (2) Review their understanding of the basics of the Mission Group process. If there are not yet a sufficient number of members for the group to begin to meet, then the essential items for discussion include: (1) To affirm their hopes and dreams for the mission and their sense of call to it. No one should feel that is diminished in any way by the lack of immediate response. (2) Review their understanding of the basics of the Mission Group process. (3) Encourage them to focus on prayer for finding enough members to get started and to stay in touch with you and the others who have indicated an interest in joining.

Not Ready to be a Missional Church

There are a number of factors and forces that contribute to the lack of readiness for serious engagement with mission which is present in many local churches today.



This lack of readiness may prove a barrier in the launching of your Mission Group. If there are enough individuals who are ready to move ahead with a Mission Group, the lack of readiness on the part of the rest of the congregation need not hold them back. But, the general lack of readiness in a congregation may result in too small a number who are willing to join a Mission Group. In any case, it is in the best interest of those with a clear call to mission to help the congregation move toward missional transformation and serious engagement.

The following is an in-depth examination of some of the reasons churches resist becoming truly missional, and some new ways of thinking which will help. It is taken from Raymond Schultze, Newsletter of the Center for Parish Development, January 2000. Notes in square brackets were added for this unit.

“1. When confronted with challenges most church leaders and members expect a quick fix. Getting ready to cultivate the missional church will mean challenging this expectation.

“2. Shaped by vendor expectations of the church most leaders and members look for church programming to have a clear beginning, end and predictable middle. Processes of discernment are by nature much more open-ended and need to be responsive to the Spirit. Getting ready for processes of transformation will help shape expectations, integrate processes in the whole of church life and help leaders and members become more comfortable with the ambiguity that comes with learning.

“3. Most members of churches today come to church with expectations that are shaped more by popular culture than Christian heritage; operating understandings of the church are often unexamined and untested yet drive the ways people participate in the life of the church. Getting ready for transformation will help members begin to surface and test some of their assumptions.

“4. Long-standing patterns of church life have left the majority of church members biblically and theologically illiterate. [Unfortunately, although Adventists know more about the Bible than most American Christians, there has also been a decline of theological literacy among our members. And, there has always been a degree of confusion around issues of church and mission.] Getting ready to cultivate the missional church will require a strengthening of members’ theological muscle and skill.

“5. Most churches have a schedule that is filled to capacity with activities. Burnout and excessive demands on leaders and members are common. Getting ready to cultivate a missional church will require clarifying what will *not* happen as a church prepares itself for an extended period of prayer, study and discernment.

“6. Decision making in many churches today is characterized by a win/lose climate. Key leaders lack collaborative leadership skills needed to guide broadly participative processes of discernment. Getting ready will mean fostering new skills that cultivate the common life of the church.

“7. Some churches are deeply mired in a survival mentality. Getting ready to cultivate a missional church will require abandonment of this self-centered and self-fulfilling preoccupation and a willingness to ask some different questions in search of God’s vision for its future.

“8. Frequent pastoral transitions are a way of life for some denominations and congregations. [Unfortunately, this is true in general for the Adventist denomination.] Getting ready to cultivate the missional church will require attention to creating a level of stability, commitment and trust as leaders and members engage in a journey of renewal.

“9. In many churches current expectations of members and behavior by clergy and staff reinforce unhelpful understandings and practices for staff-driven program and ministry. Getting ready to cultivate the missional church will help leaders and members name those patterns and hear anew the Gospel call to be the Body of Christ and People of God.

“10. The lack of a shared vision, or the presence of competing visions within the life of the church, can lead to conflict or the absence of excitement and momentum in mission. Getting ready for transformation includes honestly naming current tensions and gaps to claim them as issues that must be addressed.

“Creating readiness for a journey begins by gathering the community, asking some questions and catching people’s attention. Surfacing dissatisfaction with the present is a function of helping people become aware of forces at work that are being ignored or taken for granted. Creating readiness involves creating a critical mass of people who begin to see reality in the same way. Creating readiness means naming the gaps that exist between our understanding of God’s call and the current life and practice of the church. No one leader or member has all the wisdom or perspective to initiate a change, but processes that facilitate the sharing and analysis of present realities can lead to commitment for taking action. Returning to Scripture and [Adventist] heritage can enable church leaders and members to go back to their roots, to open themselves to the Spirit and begin to surface and test operating assumptions about current church practice.”

Handouts in this Package

1. Response sheet (for a newly proposed Mission Group in a church setting)
2. Ten Obstacles to Becoming Truly Missional

Additional Resources

Cosby, Gordon (1975). *Handbook for Mission Groups*. Waco, TX: Word.

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



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Discussion Questions

1. How can we know that enough preparation has been done and the time has come to announce a call for a new Mission Group?
2. What is the best way to present such a call to the congregation in your local church?
3. How would you sort out the curiosity-seekers, the self-appointed monitors and the spiritually immature from those who are ready to make a commitment to a Mission Group? How do you say “No” to those who should not join?
4. What if key leaders in your congregation want to set aside the roles they have had for some time and put themselves whole-heartedly into the new Mission Group?
5. Why is it vital to have a written response card or response sheet from those who indicate they are ready to join the new Mission Group?
6. Why is it important to make contact with those who fill out a response card or response sheet during the week after receiving it and set up a private conversation with them within the next three weeks?
7. Why is it important for the individual(s) who feel the call to the new mission to continue to pray quietly for enough members if the initial response is insufficient?

Group Exercise

Purpose: To help participants understand how to hone their basic message and be prepared to share it smoothly in both private conversations and public presentations.

Preparation: Make sure that there are supplies available of writing paper and pens so that each participant can do some writing on their own.

Assignment: Each participant is to write out a set of basic talking points and then practice presenting them in either a one-on-one conversation or a presentation to the group.

Time: First, give everyone about 20 to 30 minutes of quiet time to write out their talking points and prepare for their presentation. If participants do not already have an actual mission idea in mind, tell them this is their chance to reach for the stars and present that far-fetched missional dream they've had and never thought they'd dare to do.

The actual presentation of the talking points should take about five minutes per participant and feedback will take another five or ten minutes per participant. If you have relatively few participants, then it may be best for each to make their presentations to the entire group. If you are teaching this to a larger class, then it would be a good idea to break out into teams of two and have each person make their presentation in a conversational mode to their partner, get some feedback and then switch off and do it again. It is important to plan on about 15 to 20 minutes at the end, when all of the participants have done their practice rounds, for a general debriefing: What have we learned about making this kind of presentation?

The entire exercise will take an hour to two hours to be completed, depending on how many participants there are.

Handout 1

Response Sheet

Yes, I would like to be a member of the _____ Mission Group that is forming soon. I am willing to participate in the first round of meetings to develop a covenant for the long-term operation of the group. It is my understanding that I will not be called upon to confirm my membership for the long term until the covenant (ground rules) is developed by the group members.

- | | | |
|--|-----|----|
| 1. I am a committed follower of Jesus Christ: | Yes | No |
| 2. I am a member in good standing of this congregation: | Yes | No |
| 3. I feel that God is calling me to be part of this mission: | Yes | No |
| 4. I will begin today to pray for this new mission: | Yes | No |

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State ____ Zip Code _____

Telephone number(s) _____

Email address _____

Handout 2

Ten Obstacles to Becoming Truly Missional

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