

TEAMWORK

makes the dreamwork



Teamwork and Evangelism Series

The goal of this series is to revive an awareness of how significant church small groups are to the mission as the Church. They are the home base of evangelism because everyone needs encouragement, few can sustain this focus alone, and we're simply better together!

In application, this series introduces six simple habits that church small groups could adopt to help them achieve this.

Of note, the content of this series is designed to be communicated through utilising both the message and small group discussions together. To have one without the other would not result in the most important thing, which is application!

We highly recommend that preachers give 30 minutes total to watching the below videos before starting this series – to know where it's going:

1. Restoring the outreaching focus to the church small group - Video #3 for small groups: alltogether.co.nz/atconsulting/
2. A summary of these same points created for youth leaders - Videos # 4 and 5 at godtalk.nz/leadership

Message 1: Different for a reason
Discussion 1: It starts with the basics

Message one introduces the series. It is a very simple message – encouraging the value of every person in the outreaching equation. In application it affirms that (1) expertise only comes about after we have first mastered the basics. We are wise to seek to each master some basic skills for outreach while, (2) recognising that God made us each different for a reason – and that these differences can work well in outreach if we can learn how to work from a team base (which is what the rest of the series is about)

Message 2: The power of a team approach
Discussion 2: Knowing the goal

Message two affirms the idea that 'two are better than one'. It looks at the small group dynamic of the early church, and discusses how this focus became lost through history. In application, it suggests that all small groups annually pray about who they'd like to reach out to, and then considers any hindrances to faith in these people (for prayer) and their interests (because they are connection points). The message suggests that making an annual habit of this exercise would be wise.

Message 3: One step at a time
Discussion 3: The principle of proximity

Message three affirms the reality that journeying toward faith is quite a journey for some people (the Engle Scale). It then gives examples of Jesus dining with sinners and Pharisees. Through time together, conversational opportunities arise. If we do not spend time with non-believers, how will we ever get these opportunities? The message then concludes by affirming the benefits and strengths of church small groups for this purpose – because safe social environments are easily created into which new friends can come. In these environments, each person can also work to their strengths, which makes outreach a whole lot easier and more fun for everyone!

Message 4: Only teamwork makes the dream work
Discussion 4: Teamwork makes the dream work (application)

Message four concludes the series by showing how Jesus trained his disciples to work in a team environment – as a team of 12, and also in twos. To train them Jesus not only taught them – he also modeled what he taught. He then sent them out for some 'on the job training' – and then spent time debriefing with them afterwards. He was intentional to teach them how to serve their mission, *and how to do so in teams!*

The application of this message is the most important part of this sermon series. It introduces some final small group habits that haven't yet been mentioned in the series – and then summarises the 6 habits in total that have been covered. The question is whether groups would be willing to embrace these 6 things as annual habits.

The small groups then discuss these habits. 'Spurring one another on toward love and good deeds' (Hebrews 10:24-25) requires intentionality. These six simple habits summarise principles for how they could achieve this in their outreach!



Beyond this series – for the pastor

How might you reinforce and remind your small group leaders of the 6 simple habits? Leadership meetings would be a key context for this. If this were done two to four times per year, this might help these to genuinely become their habit – and yours.

There is no question that this could make a very significant difference to the outreaching efforts of your church's small groups, and of each of the members within them.

As a reminder of other support resources:

You could show your leaders the *Outreaching Culture Strategy* video for small group leader, which is about how to build 'outreaching culture' in a church and its small groups:

See video #3 at www.AllTogether.co.nz/ATConsulting.

A similar resource – designed for youth leaders, can be found at the below link. (These videos are 5 minutes each – and in all cases 'student notes' including simple discussion/reflection questions can be found underneath them)

See videos #4 and 5 at Godtalk.nz/leadership

This could help to get the thinking of your leaders (and youth leaders) aligned, so you can lead your congregation toward greater intentionality in team work in outreach together.

How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them?

Romans 10:14



Message 1. Different for a reason

Goal: A perspective session to help people be secure in playing their part in evangelism without needing the change personality and become something they are not.

Note to preacher:

- This first sermon in the series sets a gentle context. The text does not need much deliberation. It would be better to save time for the application – to illustrate and consider the two points given.
- Note that Powerpoints are provided, which synch with the points of these messages.

OPENING ILLUSTRATION: I love how God made us different! (Illustrate with something you struggle to do which someone else finds a breeze). God gave us different gifts for a reason!

SERIES INTRODUCTION

Today we're talking about how we can best achieve the mission God has given us

- Which is 'to make disciples of non-disciples' (The Great Commission of Matthew 28: Evangelism and discipleship)
- And my point will be that 'teamwork makes this dream work!'
- I.e. We will each be most effective in achieving our mission when we're working in teams!

While we are not all *specialty gifted* as evangelists **we are all called to evangelise.**

- We all have the same mission. We all have friends, neighbours, colleagues and family.
- God wants to make us fishers of men (Matt 4:19).
- Yet, having noted this, the point of this series is that **we can become even more effective in this if we learn how to work in teams** to connect with and encourage others to consider faith in Jesus together.

There are four messages in this series:

1. Different for a reason (a perspective session)
2. The power of a team approach
3. One step at a time (about understanding the progression toward faith)
4. Only teamwork makes this dream work (About the re-integration of our mission in our small groups)

My hope through this series is that... (state your vision for this series)

During this series, in your small groups you will...

(State what you'd like to see happen in the small groups during this series – noting that studies are provide to match message outlines)

Let's pray.



TEXT: Titus 3

(Ideas adapted from 'Working as a team' by Bill Brian, found at www.sermoncentral.com)

12 As soon as I send Artemas or Tychicus to you, do your best to come to me at Nicopolis, because I have decided to winter there. **13** Do everything you can to help Zenas the lawyer and Apollos on their way and see that they have everything they need. **14** Our people must learn to devote themselves to doing what is good, in order to provide for urgent needs and not live unproductive lives.

15 Everyone with me sends you greetings. Greet those who love us in the faith. Grace be with you all.

From this otherwise-obscure passage we can learn a few things about Paul and his team.

V12-13 Paul was a team-player.

While Paul is the 'hero' we know about – he worked as part of a team. He did not 'use' people – he valued people, and his approach was to build relationships.

- For example, consider Paul's attitude in 1 Corinthians 16:7 - "I do not want to see you now and make only a passing visit; I hope to spend some time with you, if the Lord permits."
- The greatest 'asset' any organization or team has is its people!

Note the different gifts that his travelling team members had

- Artemas:** We don't know anything about Artemas – Maybe a lesson for us here is that God uses 'no bodies' (who play important roles that others know little about)
- Tychicus:** In contrast, Tychicus has a very impressive spiritual resume (Acts 20:4, Ephesians 6:21, Colossians 4:7, Ephesians 4:12, 2 Timothy 4:12. In these verses Tychicus was a courier, reporter, encourager, reliever – and highly commended.
- Zenas:** Zenas was a lawyer (which could mean he was an expert in the Old Testament law – or that he was a legal lawyer). He was maybe someone with knowledge, strategy, and an ability to put systems and processes into place. He helped their team be organised, and therefore effectively engaged.
- Apollos:** Acts 18:24-28 tells us that Apollos was a Jewish believer who was well trained and had a tremendous knowledge of Scripture. He spoke with fervour, taught accurately, was bold, and was open to learn more. As in 1 Corinthians 3:6-8, in some place Paul planted the seed while Apollos watered the seed. Apollos was clearly a strong leader in his own right!

Within this team we note a wider team supported an up-front team

- They met practical needs – accommodation, food, assistance with travel and contacts, and finance.
 - o Tychicus seems to have been a practical-partner like this.
 - o Maybe Zenas was also, bringing organisation and planning to the table.
 - While Apollos could teach and preach, hold the attention of a crowd, and lead with influence.
- Generosity to those working on front roles in outreach is important – because the work is important, and outreach work especially is most-often underfunded and under-supported!



V14 Paul's affirms that all believers have a part to play

There are urgent needs in the world around us. God does not want us to live unproductive lives. Life is short. We need to make the most of the opportunity to make a difference!

APPLICATION

Application 1: Affirming the value of every person in this team

In a team, every member counts

AN ILLUSTRATION THE PREACHER COULD USE:

View <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uFTipiyFfAk&t=6s&pbjreload=10>

Found at <https://alltogether.co.nz/pastor2pastor>

Title: Teamwork in Evangelism

Length: 1.59mins

PREPARATION: Make signs on pieces of paper re 'George coming to faith' (as per the video):

1. Intercessor prayed
2. Someone fixed something for him and said 'bless you'
3. Someone befriended
4. Someone explained a bit of testimony leading to curiosity
5. Another answers some questions/misconceptions about God
6. Someone explains gospel
7. Someone baptises
8. Someone does follow up
9. Someone welcomed him into their church small group.

- Who was the 'evangelist' in this story / who made this disciple?
- Everyone in the process was involved in making this disciple!
- It's about a team effort!

Application 2: Mastery of the basics precedes specialisation in one area

Illustration: A friend is an eye-surgeon (ophthalmologist). But before specializing he had to become a regular doctor first. Skills for caring for a whole person were necessary before he could focus on just the eyes.

- It is the same with the work of the gospel. We must all learn the basics first. Then, while we may be most effective by specializing within a team, we are still able to adapt to a range of situations – so people hear of Christ.

Question: Have you truly mastered the basics of conversational and gospel skills needed to encourage others whom you meet in your everyday life toward faith in Christ?



To summarise some possible areas of learning and resourcing (some items from a 'tool belt' for everyday conversational outreach)

- List items from the attached article: '10 ways we could share the gospel – 8 of which don't involve words'

Or play via video:

'Because we care' – the original series.

Tutorial 12 - https://alltogether.co.nz/portfolio_page/12-becoming-part-of-the-team/

Title: "10 ways to share the gospel – 8 of which don't involve words"

Length: 6.13mins

Note: You will look at these same points as a part of this week's small group discussion.

Closing words

There are different ways to encourage and share faith. What is important is that we do something.

- Romans 10:14-15 *How can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard?*)
- What can you do to encourage faith?
 - o Who can you meet for coffee?
 - o Who can you ask a question?
 - o Who could you bake a cake for / make a meal for?
 - o Who could you visit / bless / encourage?
 - Because a great conversation is never further away than a few great questions!

Next week – we will study the power of the team approach in outreach that builds upon our individual strengths.

Let's pray.



ARTICLE:

10 ways to share faith - 8 of which don't involve words
What will work best for your friends?

There are many things we can do to encourage others to consider faith in Christ.

Verbal communication

1. Share the gospel directly within a conversation

There is simple equipping online (E.g. video #4 - alltogether.co.nz/equipping-videos-members)

Teamwork idea: Revise these skills together, so everyone is able to summarise the key Christian message in under 2 minutes.

2. Communicate through a carefully crafted testimony

In your small groups practice sharing your possibly Christian testimonies concisely.

(Then consider what stories each member can tell in the most compelling way - because when we tell a story we can 'feel' we are more interesting and effective).

Gifts

3. Give a tract

Do you have access to some good ones? Then ask them what they thought afterwards.

4. Give a booklet

These can potentially address a topic of interest.

5. Give a book

These can communicate a broad perspective on a topic you have been discussing with someone.

6. Give a DVD

These can achieve the same as a book, including testimony or miracles and apologetic or historical knowledge.

Invitation

7. Invite them to a small group activity

What could you group do that your members friends might enjoy? Including short prayer or devotion can create a context for conversation on a topic to arise naturally in the hours following.

8. Invite them to a large group activity

These can spark conversations, communicate messages, and can be something you engage a conversation about afterwards.

Referral

9. Refer them to a Christian TV program or online video

What have you seen on TV or online that you could now recommend?

10. Refer them to a website

There are many amazing Christian websites, including materials on a wide range of issues and topics. What have you found that you could share with a friend at an appropriate time to feed a conversation?

Remember: There is only one thing you must never do in evangelism! It is 'nothing'! So long as we're doing something, God can use us as a part of his team.

What could you do?



Message 2. The power of a team approach

Goal: A very practical message that will highlight the central place that small groups had in both the fellowship and outreach of the early Church. The application is that, whatever other purposes we may consider there to be for our church small groups, multiplication (which is a product of outreach) must be one of them!

Note to pastor: This message introduces as its application the first of 6 simple habits that this series will suggest for embracing within your small groups. The matching small group discussion asks your small groups to do the suggested activity. It might be useful if you discussed about this with your small group leaders at a leaders meeting prior. The intent is that this activity be done within your small groups at the start of every year from this point onwards.

As a strategic note: What is being suggested in this series is a set of simple habits by which you can return the mission of the church small group to the church small group in a way that is authentic, measurable and also realistic for delivering results. But – more than this – it's about achieving this *without overriding other good things that these groups are already achieving!* Put differently: Church small groups achieve a *number* of purposes. The applications of this series are about restoring one area of focus to the church small group, because we recognise that it has been generally overlooked in the Western church context.

OPENING ILLUSTRATION

Draft horse pulling weight illustration

- A single draft horse can pull a load up to 8,000 pounds (3600kg). However, two draft horses can pull – not 16,000 (7200kg), but 24,000 (10,800) pounds!

Another illustration: a Rugby scrum – power together.

How do you break the power?

- Stop them working together (*or stop them from ever starting to work together!*).

Today we're going to discuss the teamwork dynamic of the Church, looking

- (1) at a bit of the Biblical picture,
- (2) some things that have happened in the history of the church, and
- (3) how we could respond to that today.

This will serve to affirm the importance of small groups in Christian churches both for

- (a) our spiritual health as well as
- (b) the greater success of our outreaching efforts.

PART ONE:

The small group dynamic of the New Testament Church

1. Small groups have a strategic strength

After this the Lord appointed seventy-two others and sent them two by two ahead of him to every town and place where he was about to go. (Luke 10:1)

In the Western Church we value our individuality – and also our big groups.

- Jesus sent them in twos. We serve better when we're in a team – as compared to individually.



2. The early church was a small group church (and existed only as a small group church during persecution!)

Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts... (Acts 2:46)

It is noteworthy that **the early Church was a small group church!**

- They met in the synagogues for teaching,
 - o and house to house for fellowship and discussion.
- The kind of health and growth reflected in Acts 2:42-46 reflects a community who were relationally connected, with open and authentic friendships being created, and efforts being embarked upon together.
 - o These kinds of relationships develop in small groups much better than in big groups!

When persecution came, so they only met 'from house to house' – and kept growing!

Observations 1: The mission of the church is also the mission of the small group

- This point is often overlooked.
- The outreaching of the early church didn't stop when their big group meetings and programs were stopped. But why?
 - o Their outreach was based in the efforts of the members as they lived out their faith in community together – rather than on a set of programs run from the larger 'congregational' base (though both are valid and needed). (Is ours?)
- Their approach was, no doubt, made up of a combination of many individual conversations, small group meetings and discussion over meals in homes.

Observations 2: Small groups are a necessary part of Church structure

There are over 50 'one another' statements in the New Testament.

"...Be at peace with each other." (Mark 9:50)

"...Wash one another's feet." (John 13:14)

"...Love one another..." (John 13:34)

"Be devoted to one another in brotherly love..." (Romans 12:10)

"...Honor one another above yourselves. (Romans 12:10)

"...Stop passing judgment on one another." (Romans 14:13)

"Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you..." (Romans 15:7)

"...Instruct one another." (Romans 15:14)

"Greet one another with a holy kiss..." (Romans 16:16)

"...When you come together to eat, wait for each other." (1 Cor. 11:33)

"...Have equal concern for each other." (1 Corinthians 12:25)

"...Serve one another in love." (Galatians 5:13)

"Carry each other's burdens..." (Galatians 6:2)

"...Be patient, bearing with one another in love." (Ephesians 4:2)

"Be kind and compassionate to one another..." (Ephesians 4:32)

"...Forgiving each other..." (Ephesians 4:32)

"Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ." (Ephesians 5:21)

"...Admonish one another (Colossians 3:16)

"...Build each other up..." (1 Thessalonians 5:11)

"Encourage one another daily..." Hebrews 3:13)

"...Spur one another on toward love and good deeds." (Hebrews 10:24)

"...Pray for each other." (James 5:16)

"...Live in harmony with one another..." (1 Peter 3:8)

"Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling." (1 Peter 4:9)

"Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others..." (1 Peter 4:10)

"...Clothe yourselves with humility toward one another..." (1 Peter 5:5)



These instructions can only be applied in a context that is relational.

- Members can be 'invisible' in a large group (How many of us can nod and smile at the sermon while actually thinking about what we will have for lunch?).

- While in small groups we cannot be invisible. There is friendship, trust, care, encouragement and accountability.

(Rhetorical question) Is it possible that the small group life of our churches might be more significant for our outreach than we have realised?

PART TWO: The small group dynamic – lost in history

Constantine was Roman Emperor from 306 to 337

His conversion:

- In 312, prior to a battle, he saw a flaming cross in the sky with the words 'By this sign you will conquer'.
- Following success in battle his views toward Christianity changed.
- In 313 the Edict of Milan was signed, officially tolerating Christianity, thus ending 250 years of persecution.
 - o Extra info: During this period Constantine made church leaders his advisors – with some to travel with him to bring blessing. He gave money to have the first church buildings built, gave a great deal of money to the care of the poor – whether Christian or not, and did many other things like outlawing infanticide, ending the abuse of slaves and peasants, ending crucifixion, and made Sunday a day of rest.

Changes that resulted in the 'Church' (Note to preacher: The provided PowerPoint follow the points here in bold):

In the following years Christianity went from being persecuted to being promoted. However, some of the integrity of the faith was compromised in the process.

For example, church **buildings** began to be built following the Roman style.

- Instead of meeting in small groups the church began to meet in large groups.
- As clergy were appointed, instead of studying the **Bible** for themselves members handed over this role to the 'pastor'
 - o (Extra: In the years that followed Biblical knowledge declined significantly, resulting in what is known as the 'dark ages', because the light of the gospel was lost. The Bible was a banned book for many years during this time. Only clergy were allowed to read it – and only in the original Greek and Hebrew, or alternatively Latin language. The 'common man' therefore had no legal access to the Scriptures. He or she had to trust what the clergy told them).
- Instead of 'loving one another' **when they had a problem**, it was only natural to go see the pastor – so the ministry of believers to each other encouraging one another, was broken down
- Instead of 'go to them' approaches to **outreach**, the mantra became 'come join us in our church at our programme'



Church **leadership** also changed from a servant-model to a power-based model. Church hierarchy became increasingly corrupt. Clergy had social and financial power. The role of 'pastor' became a desirable occupation because of its benefits – rather than being a calling. Over time, a 'church' structure developed in which people were being controlled and manipulated.

PART THREE: The small group dynamic – being rediscovered

- Over the past 70+ years many Christians around the globe have become convinced that the small group dynamic of the Church has needed restoring.
- During this time the home group, house group and cell church movements of Asia and Latin America have come about, with significant church growth resulting.

Toward an application:

John 13:35 – 'by this will all people know you are my disciples'

One of the evidences of our faith to the world is the love we have for one another.

- But how can the non-believer observe this love if it is confined to a few short conversations over coffee after a weekend service?

RHETORICAL QUESTIONS

Q – *Could it be that God has always intended that his children would fellowship in small groups, meeting and serving within their communities (rather than only in bigger meetings – like our weekend Sunday services)?*

Q – *Put differently, could it be that the role of the coffee and dinner table in the home has been significantly underestimated in our outreach?*

And so my application is very simple today (Preacher note: Points in PowerPoint):

- (1) I think our small groups need to become more intentional in connecting with non-church friends, with the intent of blessing them, and of encouraging faith where possible.
- (2) I think our small groups also need to become more intentional in encouraging our members to spend more time with their non-church friends, for the purpose of witness through deed and words/conversation. The only way to change the world is through engaging within it!

The change in thinking is this:

- Our church small groups do not exist only for our own encouragement and growth. They have a mission! (They therefore exist to help us in or outreach to our friends, community and families).
- To word this differently, 'multiplication' needs to be a genuine goal of all ('regular') church small groups – because outreach is!
 - o The challenge before us is this: How do we strengthen the purpose of outreach in our small groups *without overriding other good purposes that these groups already exist for.* (This series has an answer for that question – based in some simple habits we could embrace into the years ahead!)



What might that look like in practice?

Here are 3 very simple starting points that we will build upon as this series progresses

1. Identify and plan

- At the start of every year **identify** those your members would like to reach out to, and plan a few ways you can connect with them.
 - o 'If we fail to plan we plan to fail'
 - o In addition, list
 - (2) these friends' personal **interests**
 - (3) and any **hindrances** to faith you are aware of for them
 - 'Interests' are useful as connection points, and
 - 'Hindrances' are to be aware of for prayer, and as possible conversation topics with them.

2. Choose social activities based on interests we have in common with some of our non-Church friends

- ...and then invite your friends to join you.

I'm not saying these have to be outreaches with a speaker and a gospel message.

- Just spending time together and having fun is enough sometimes:
 - o The journey toward faith doesn't happen in a day.
 - o Most people will have more than a dozen interactions with a Christian along their path toward faith in Christ.
 - o Friendship can be forged.
 - o Trust can build.
 - o Some conversations will then naturally happen – e.g. while you sleep on a beach next to a fire on a 'fathers and sons' camping trip...
- In other words – THIS IS A LICENCE TO HAVE FUN TOGETHER – WITH OTHER FRIENDS JOINING!

3. Utilise church and other programs as a small group to connect with these same new friends

- When our church has a marriage course – use the opportunity intentionally (promote it at your small group – plan who you will invite, and work together to ensure they feel welcome)
 - o ...go out for a coffee or meal together before or after the course meetings.
 - o Etc.

In other words, we could become even more effective in outreach if we learnt to work intentionality in our small groups.

So, what about it?

To revise:

1. Identify and plan
2. Choose social activities based on interests we have in common with some of our non-Church friends
3. Utilise church and other programs as a small group to connect with these same new friends

And have fun. (Close in prayer)



Message 3. One step at a time

INTRODUCTION

Have you ever learnt something new, and it completely changed your opinion on a matter?

- Changing views is not easy
- Changes in thinking take time
 - o The journey toward faith is the same. It's not always easy or natural for people.
- Engle Scale illustrates (summarise a journey toward faith by reading top to bottom)

Engle Scale

- 12 Born with a God-Vacuum
- 11 Aware of higher Power or powers
- 10 Senses personal spiritual emptiness
- 9 Seeks to fill personal spiritual void
- 8 Vulnerable to false religious beliefs
- 7 Realises there is only one true God
- 6 Exposed to other Christian concepts
- 5 Interested in Jesus and the gospel
- 4 Understands some gospel concepts
- 3 Senses personal spiritual conviction
- 2 Confronted with a faith response
- 1 Counts cost of a faith response
- 0 Repents and trusts Jesus

Reflections on this for today

- 50 years ago, most Westerners were about a negative 4 to 6. (Most people believed a God existed).
- Today most are a negative 8 to 11
 - o Most believe in a God / Higher Power (46% / 31% in NZ) – but also believe that all roads lead to God.
 - I.e. Their idea of 'God' isn't yet of a the good, loving and knowable God we believe in as Christians. (Hence why I suggest 8 to 11 on Engle's scale, and not '7')

As a starting point today, there is more distance to travel as compared to a few decades ago in our culture.

- And this is why finding ways to engaging people in every day conversations about spiritual things is important.
- We can learn to do this individually – for our everyday conversations
- *but we can also be helped in this if we can learn how to work as relational teams with others from our community of faith!*



For example: Consider some of the key beliefs people consider on the journey toward faith: (Note to preacher – these are intended as simple opening illustrations of the thought-processes involved in a journey toward faith – not points to deliberate upon. 'Traverse' these points however works for you.)

1. Might a single creator God exist? (The question of religious truth)

- To say 'yes' a person needs to be willing to state that one religion is therefore plausibly correct (or more correct) – which by inference makes all the other religions incorrect by comparison.
- And to note it – all religions cannot be true, because they say contradictory things on the big issues like (a) whether God exists, (b) whether evil exists (and right and wrong) exist as objective realities (vs culturally defined preferences), and (c) what our primary purpose on earth is and (d) how we are 'saved' (the question of hope).
 - o If all religions are all true, they are therefore all false!

Consider: The idea that ONE might be true is actually one of the greatest of hopes on our planet - because it means an answer to the problem of evil and suffering might actually exist!

The inconvenience is that it means we can't just believe anything we want while expecting to receive the benefits of religion – like forgiveness of sin and heaven.

2. Do they believe that God is knowable?

- Christians believe not only that a God exists, but that this God has revealed himself to us through history and then through Jesus as in the Bible – *thus making God personally knowable*. This is a hope-filled idea.
- In contrast most in our culture who believe a God exists see that 'God' as being distant and unknowable (which is why following any religion will do / truth doesn't matter).

3. Can they trust that God has justifiable (morally sufficient) reasons for allowing evil and suffering to exist – and to allow it to currently continue?

- This is a big question! Most non-Christians struggle with it at some level, because the idea that a good God would stop suffering seems a simple logic.
 - o However, when life is going well, many aren't overly interest in discussing some of these points – because they are just some of many reasons why they may have chosen not to believe that a good and knowable God exists.
 - o But these questions are there none-the-less, as is sometimes discovered in conversation when they experience suffering or illness themselves.

These are the kinds of conversational topics we can be picking up on with people around us each day – without pushing anything. We can help people journey toward faith by addressing various possible hinderances through asking questions, sharing short stories, and giving small encouragements.

As an approach: Every day and in every way we help people take steps toward Jesus!

(A quote from David Geisler, co-author of 'Conversational Evangelism')



TEXT: Jesus at parties

Example 1: Jesus – eating with sinners

Jesus entered Jericho and was passing through. 2 A man was there by the name of Zacchaeus; he was a chief tax collector and was wealthy. 3 He wanted to see who Jesus was, but because he was short he could not see over the crowd. 4 So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore-fig tree to see him, since Jesus was coming that way. 5 When Jesus reached the spot, he looked up and said to him, "Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today." 6 So he came down at once and welcomed him gladly.

7 All the people saw this and began to mutter, "He has gone to be the guest of a sinner."

8 But Zacchaeus stood up and said to the Lord, "Look, Lord! Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount."

9 Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham. 10 For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost."

Luke 19:1-10

What happened?

In this passage Jesus engaged a meaningful conversation with Zacchaeus and others who were present. Through the dynamics of these interactions, and what they discussed, God convicted Zacchaeus of his need to turn from his wrongful ways, to follow God.

But in what context did that meaningful conversation take place?

Considering who was present at the table: Some, if not all of the disciples were present. Zacchaeus was there – and it's possible some of his family. Other invited other guests were also present.

- The context was therefore one of friendly hospitality
- They were getting to know each other through conversation, over food
- They were likely using their best people-skills also, giving grace and affirmation toward each other rather than criticising them for known wrongs
 - o Even though Zacchaeus was known as a 'sinner' the tone of the conversation doesn't seem to have been judgmental or condemning (as that would have been a conversation-stopper).
- We could guess that there might have been an amount of joking going on as a part of this also – enjoying each-others' company and the diversity of the personalities in the room.
 - o Through these good people skills, a level of trust was established.
 - o And on the basis of that trust, matters of the heart were able to be discussed.

My point is simple:

- In 'missiology' (the study of effective missions) one of the key principles for effective outreach is 'proximity'
- ***If we are not spending time 'in proximity to' unbelievers, we will not have opportunity to engage them in meaningful and real conversations through which they might be encouraged toward faith!***



Example 2: Jesus – eating with corrupted religious leaders

(Luke 7:36-50)

36 When one of the Pharisees invited Jesus to have dinner with him, he went to the Pharisee's house and reclined at the table. **37** A woman in that town who lived a sinful life learned that Jesus was eating at the Pharisee's house, so she came there with an alabaster jar of perfume...

39 When the Pharisee who had invited him saw this, he said to himself, "If this man were a prophet, he would know who is touching him and what kind of woman she is—that she is a sinner."

40 Jesus answered him, "Simon, I have something to tell you."
"Tell me, teacher," he said.

Jesus then told Simon-Peter a story – with the intended audience being the others listening at the table

41 "Two people owed money to a certain moneylender. One owed him five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. **42** Neither of them had the money to pay him back, so he forgave the debts of both. Now which of them will love him more?"

43 Simon replied, "I suppose the one who had the bigger debt forgiven."
"You have judged correctly," Jesus said.

Jesus was then able to explain his actions (v44-50) – although he did so this time in an environment that was probably a little tense because of the strange actions of this woman, and the reaction this caused in the Pharisees.

What is my point here?

Where do we find Jesus and his disciples? They were eating at the table with people some might have thought to be his greatest enemies! (They were certainly his greatest critics).

Where were they?

- At a table having dinner together
- With a group of people including Jesus disciples and a number of Pharisees
- No doubt being polite and positive toward each other (good people-skills)
- ...engaging in small conversational banter, to build relationship and trust
- ...enjoying a few jokes together, and the diversity of personalities in the room again.
- **And only then, in this context of relationship and friendship does something happen that turns the conversations**
- (1) With expert skills – being aware that the Pharisees were talking among themselves about him, Jesus spoke to Simon rather than the Pharisees – but in a way that everyone could hear.
 - o This probably avoided turning it too quickly into a confrontational situation.
- (2) Only then, after illustrating, did he directly explain his view on the awkward situation they were in, and (3) then respond with complete grace toward this woman – who was known sinner, declaring her sins forgiven.



Proximity! If we don't spend time amongst people, we won't have opportunities to engage the kind of conversations that might help them to discover what God is really like, to place faith in him and to follow him.

And – do you think this kind of socialising and conversation is easier by yourself – or with a few other believers who have the same heart and thoughts as you?

John 13:35 says 'by this will all people know you are my disciples; by your love for one another.'

- But how can they ever see our love if they don't see us together?

The point is this: God's plan for us wasn't that we build Christian communities in which we enjoy God's blessings *while hiding away from the world*.

On the contrary – God has called us to be *in the world* - because we're supposed to reach it!

- We're just not supposed to be of it! (Romans 12:2)

We're going to be better-able to sustain our witness by being amongst others if we harness the power teamwork – because we are stronger together, and also because one thing the Church really does do well (on a comparative scale) is showing care and love for one another!

- (Despite all of our faults, our faith obliges us to keep working at being selfless and patient, kind, caring and generous... This hopefully produces an 'above average' caring environment! At least – that's what God is hoping for from us ;-)

By working together, it is possible to become more effective in outreach almost without trying – because

(1) [Modeling] - the context of our 'fellowship' demonstrates our message, while

(2) [Context for conversation] - the trusting relationships that result provide a platform for meaningful conversation and

(3) [Teamwork] – the different skills and interests of our team enable us to better engage with a wide variety of people and topics

Application: Be aware that the social dynamic of a loving small group is *highly attractive*, and can be catalytic for meaningful two-way conversations

Re attractiveness: There is a lot of hurt in this world – and a lot of people craving environments that can provide meaningful and loving relationships. Everyone is looking for caring friendship.

1 Corinthians 12:17-20

"If the whole body were an eye, where would the sense of hearing be? If the whole body were an ear, where would the sense of smell be? But in fact God has placed the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be. If they were all one part, where would the body be? As it is, there are many parts, but one body."



Re the dynamics of a group environment: Consider that in most groups there is

- a joker,
- a talker - and a quiet person
- someone who likes a serious conversation
- ...and someone distracted/looking at their phone
- one is motivated to meet people and encourage them
- ...while another is happy to be in the background taking care of practical things like cups of tea
 - o **Put together – this group can be a team**
 - o **They can relate to and accept a wide range of people**
 - o **They can engage a wide range of conversations together**
 - o **And it can even be fun!**

TO DO: So, why not plan to have fun together as a small group?

- Firstly, it is healthy for your group
 - o Families that play together, stay together. It's the same with our small groups.
- But, secondly, we can invite other friends to join us (not to preach to them, but simply to share the love, knowing that meaningful conversations can result as trust and friendship develops).

[For any with a theological concern regarding the focus of our 'evangelism': In the past, the journey toward faith in our culture could be described as **'believing before belonging'**

- People would choose to follow Christ – and only then would start attending a church

Today the pattern has reversed. Typically, it is now **'belonging before believing'**

- People are engaging with Christian communities before choosing to follow Christ – so as to observe the community while considering what might they might accept as true. These days, the journey toward faith in our culture is taking longer!
- In application – this means that creating safe contexts within which people can participate with our faith-community is an important part of the picture – and what I'm saying here today is that our church small groups are a great place for this to happen from. This isn't a compromise of the gospel. The intent is still to give them every opportunity to hear and understand the gospel. The point is that we are wise to create environments within which relationship and trust can be developed – so we can then have those kinds of spiritual conversations, just like Jesus did by socializing with Zacchaeus, as also with some of the Pharisees]

And every small group member doesn't have to be involved in every social activity (Aka - we can work in smaller groups within our small groups too)

- E.g. If a couple of people in your small group love riding motorcycles, why not arrange a ride and invite other friends to join you
- This can apply to craft work / and card making,
- ...golf, or cycling or fishing
- ...to tramping, climbing or skiing trips



- Then you might invite them to a parenting course, or a marriage course
- Then you maybe give them a book to read of an article on the web, or invite them to Alpha... (Like in the teamwork example at the conclusion of Message #1 in this series).
- Through a team approach we thus ...*help people every day, and in every way, to take steps toward Jesus!*

To summarise:

Small group outreach is about creating relational environments into which friends can be invited, and in which our differences as people can become strengths for the cause of the gospel.

So - to summarise:

1. Who would you like to encourage toward faith?
2. What are their interests? (Connection points)
3. What might hinder them? (For prayer and conversation)

How could you spend more time with them in things you already do or love doing – individually, and as small groups?

I believe that, with this approach, it is possible for us to become even more effective in outreach than we are!



Message 4. Only teamwork can make this dream work!

INTRODUCTION (revision)

As covered in the previous message, small groups were an integral part of the early church. They met in the synagogue, and from house to house.

- And these groups are essential to Christian 'fellowship'. There are, for example, more than 50 'one another' statements in the New Testament that we cannot really fulfill in this large group. The care described needs the relational environment of the church small group to be applied.
- So, God has always intended that we would be hanging out together in small groups
- ...and that we'd be working as a team in smaller groups also – because this is an important dynamic if we are to achieve the mission Jesus gave us!

Through working from a small group base, we can be more effective,

- 1. We have different abilities, strengths, experiences, interests
 - o So we can relate well to different kinds of people
- 2. Small groups are naturally relational - so new friends can quickly feel at home. Playful banter and conversation can take place. Trust can be built. And the possibility of more meaningful conversations taking place then becomes possible
 - o ...like with the way Jesus spent time eating meals both corrupted religious leaders as well as known sinners. This positioned him to get to know them, for trust to develop, and for meaningful conversations to take place as a result.

But small groups can achieve more than this in terms of their role in outreach.

TODAY'S TOPIC: The necessity of a team approach if we are to sustain our individual focus and readiness to be a witness for Jesus

TEXT:

*"Then Jesus went around teaching from village to village. **7**Calling the Twelve to him, he began to send them out two by two and gave them authority over impure spirits.*

***8**These were his instructions: "Take nothing for the journey except a staff—no bread, no bag, no money in your belts. **9**Wear sandals but not an extra shirt. **10**Whenever you enter a house, stay there until you leave that town. **11**And if any place will not welcome you or listen to you, leave that place and shake the dust off your feet as a testimony against them."*

***12**They went out and preached that people should repent. **13**They drove out many demons and anointed many sick people with oil and healed them.*

Mark 6:6-13



Some simple reflections:

1. The mission Jesus has given requires us to go

- The scope of Jesus' ministry was to Israel. Following the coming of the Holy Spirit (Acts 1) that scope was enlarged to all humanity.
- Going to the towns and villages would likely have been out of the comfort zone of many of the disciples
- In the same way, willingness to do things that are a little out of our comfort zones may be required of us too
- And willingness to do this is important! While we are discussing here about what we could do in our small groups to reach out to the various people we each know, it remains that there are many, many times more people than this who are needing to hear of Jesus in our own town/city/nation – let countless millions more overseas
 - o *So our perspective is clear: New innovation and initiative is needed that goes well beyond anything we're discussing in this series. (We are discussing here the very least we could do).*
 - o However, we have to start somewhere 😊

2. Jesus' training of the disciples included new hands-on experiences

- Jesus had been **teaching** them for a while about himself, and his mission and purpose.
 - o And he had been **modeling** the way he wanted them to life and talk and minister.
- But he didn't want them to only know about it in their heads
- ...he wanted them to really know it – which means they had to experience it
- ...so he **sent them out for some hands-on learning!**
 - o For us, when it comes to outreach, it's important that we don't hide from experiences that might challenge us.
 - o These experiences would have broadened the disciples' perspectives, skills and faith.
 - o Could it be that some of us would benefit from having some new experiences in outreach – whether it be going out to do some street interviews, or to help someone in a ministry of some kind for a while, or to go on a mission trip?
 - o It is easy to get into a 'rut' in life – while according to our beliefs those without Christ are going to an eternity without Christ!

3. Jesus sent them in twos

- Why? Because he knew something that we need to understand well. Two really are better than one!
- ILLUSTRATE: [Give a personal illustration where you may not have had courage or ability to persevere by yourself, but did because you were part of a team]
- And this is exactly what it is like for most of us when it comes to achieving our mission.
 - o How many here feel that you are able to sustain a proactive focus on *outreach in your everyday life* all by yourself?



TWO MORE VERSES:

When they returned from their trip...

"The apostles gathered around Jesus and reported to him all they had done and taught."

Mark 6:30

4. Jesus debriefed them on their experiences

- to check that they were learning all they could from it,

Next...

5. Jesus then sent them out again!

After this the Lord appointed seventy-two others and sent them two by two ahead of him to every town and place where he was about to go.

Luke 10:1

and then...

6. Jesus then commissioned them for the rest of their lives!

Matthew 28:18-20, and Acts 1:8

Where is the 'home base' for evangelism?

- **[Congregation?]** Some might think the congregation. We can run outreach programmes, community programmes, and gospel service.
- But what about the idea the 100 mobilised members could achieve more than a talented pastor running all those programmes? (Eph 4 – mobilising the saints / the 'priesthood of all believers') **[I.e. Individual?]**
- **[Small group!]** But – how many can sustain that focus themselves? While I agree that mobilising individual efforts is the most important focus, it remains that most of us will not remain mobilised for long if we don't get some personal encouragement right?
 - o And this is why I suggest to you today that the church small group is a kind of 'home base' for evangelism. Only in this kind of small group context can support, encouragement, accountability and help exist in a *personal* way.
 - For the contrast: In a large group people can be 'invisible'. I could equip you, and you might nod and smile while I talk– but how am I to know you aren't actually thinking about what you'll have for lunch?
 - In the small group it's not like this! Our engagement is more two-ways, and more real and impacting as a result!

So here is today's big idea:

Having a focus on outreach encouragement, equipping and effort that is based in the church small group might be the ONLY way to actually see more believers becoming sustainably mobilised in their individual (and small group) outreaching efforts.

- ...just like Jesus modeled with his 12 disciples.



Application:

So, to finish this series, what are some *other* things we could do in our small groups that we haven't mentioned yet, to strengthen outreach through our small groups?

1. Make a monthly habit of encouraging your outreaching focus through testimony

- Once or twice a month (as habit) ask if anyone had a change to engage an unbelieving friend in a natural spiritual conversation
- This would add fuel to the fire!

1b. ...and then Intentionally remind each other of one of the things we've learnt together about outreach – because repetition is a key to true learning!

This would help things we learn (like '3 questions to turn a conversation') go into long-term memory, and application!

2. Make a monthly habit of praying for the people you want to encourage toward faith

- A couple of weeks ago we talked about making a list in our small groups at the start of each year of people we wanted to encourage toward faith
- What we can then do is pray for them each month
- This (1) brings God's leading and power into our efforts
- and (2) helps the vision of encouraging our friends to consider spiritual things to stay alive

3. Make annual habits of revising the most important outreaching skills and perspectives in the lead up to Christmas and Easter

- When lessons are taught in the pulpit – we want small groups to reinforce them *like you are doing by using the small group studies that come with this message*, because this will help us all to apply what we're looking at together
- But also, in the 6 weeks leading up to Christmas and Easter, we want all small groups to develop a habit of revising key lessons – because this can help some really important things to remain fresh in our memories – **and that could end up making an eternal difference for someone we know!**
 - o E.g. Revise: What questions can open a spiritual conversation?
 - o What are some keys to enabling non-threatening two-way spiritual conversations?
 - E.g. Knowing how to disagree without ever saying you disagree – and how to open conversations with questions, etc.
 - E.g. How do I engage and turn a conversation when others affirm their belief in spiritual things like tarot cards, astrology, or belief the paranormal in a way that I actually disagree with?
 - o What is the gospel?
 - How do I share it concisely?
 - o What is my testimony (shared convincingly / authentically within 2 minutes)?
 - o What 3 questions can return the onus of proof to others when they criticise or ask loaded questions, thus diffusing tension and letting us off the hook?

(These things are all in the equipping videos or sermon outlines found at www.AllTogether.co.nz)



If we all revised a few things each year like this – can you imagine the difference that could make to our personal readiness for our everyday conversations and witness?

The vision for us as a whole church team:

I'd love it if we could become a community of believers who are more intentional in the way we encourage each other to remain focused and ready in our daily witness – because our witness is such an important part of what we are here for.

- Early results could be an increase in testimonies from amongst us of opportunities we've had to encourage faith...
- We might also see more new friends being invited to our various small group social and other activities that our groups choose to run
- ...and maybe a slight increase in the numbers coming along to our church programmes like marriage courses, Alpha, gospel/special weekend services too.
- But the end goal is clear: In as much as we can help it happen, we desire to see more people coming to know Christ!

Summary conclusion

We are God's hands and feet on planet earth

We are his mouthpieces

We must tell others

- But most of us cannot sustain that focus alone
- *And this is why our church small groups are so important*

If we would embrace some simple habits in our small groups, I believe this could make a meaningful difference to our witness as a local church

Let's now summarise the six simple habits we've covered in this series:

- 1. Setting goal setting time at the start of the year**
(listing people we'd like to encourage toward faith)
- 2. 4 to 6 small group activities planned – to which new friends can be invited**
...connecting through shared points of interest, just to make friends, and to allow others to see the love we have for one another (John 13:35)
- 3. Annual equipping through the pulpit and small group**
...(like we've been doing this month) to encourage our focus and equip our hands for our most important role on this planet – our service to our mission
- 4. Monthly prayer for those we're wanting to represent Christ to (e.g. first week of the month)**
...so we are asking for God's help – while also reminding ourselves to make the most of every opportunity
- 5. Monthly testimony (e.g. third week of the month)**
...to encourage, and from which to remind us of lessons learnt
- 6. And annual brief revision of key outreaching skills in the 6 weeks leading up to Easter and Christmas.**

I pray you enjoy your small group discussion

Small group leaders — we'll discuss these things again when we next meet.
Let's pray.



Pastor:

The small group discussions for this series conclude by asking the small group leaders to consider the above 6 habits.

If you want these things applied, we encourage that you plan when you might revise the above six points with your small group leaders – with a view to doing so two or three times annually. Only through *intentionality* like this will these simple things eventually become your actual habits, producing a different level of focus on your members personal outreach efforts, and on their teamwork in this also.

Leadership team workshop / training videos:

There are four approx. 15-minute videos for church leadership teams including how to build 'outreaching culture' in a church as a whole – then how to achieve the same in the small groups at www.AllTogether.co.nz/ATConsulting

These would be relevant to your church board/elders as well as your small group leaders, and could help you to get the thinking of all these leaders aligned, so you can lead your congregation toward greater intentionality in outreach together, from a small group base.

Also, two short 5-minute teachings on the same 6 principles mentioned this series can also be found in videos #4 and 5 in the youth 'outreach leadership' video series found at Godtalk.nz/leadership

Showing and discussing all these with your leaders would aid ongoing application.

