

Life Groups Vision Document Oct 2016

During the Life Group Leaders' Training breakfast on 1st October 2016 we began to explore some core areas of vision and strategy for how we will proceed. At this point the 3 sections cover the theory and as we move through this Term we will be in conversation with all leaders about how these principles can best be outworked in practice (what from the current set up is good and needs to be kept? What from the current set up doesn't work with the below principles and needs to be changed?)

1) 2 BASIC QUESTIONS OF DISCIPLESHIP (Matthew 28:18-20)

The Hierarchical Model: In many churches the approach to how church is structured is hierarchical (even in a Baptist church where we disperse authority 'downwards' to the church meeting, the approach is still 'up or down' in the mindsets of most churches. Below is one example of how this structure might look (with the different role titles being given different levels on the hierarchical scale depending on the church (or with the triangle being turned upside down to emphasise the congregational nature of church even!))



Fig 1.1 – The Hierarchical Model

The downside of the hierarchical model is at least two fold.

Firstly, it is static and the church is meant to be mobile: the first word of the Great Commission is 'Go'!

Secondly, the bottom of the triangle is closed and the entry point to the life of the church is to join the 'congregation'. This excludes a stage which is necessary in our culture today if we are going to see people saved. It is the stage of 'sojourner' (temporary resident) who can observe the Christian life in community without having any obligation to come to services or follow Jesus whilst they are asking questions, observing, processing what the Christian life might mean for them.

So what happens if we tip the triangle over?

The Missional Model: The Missional Model was developed by Hugh Halter and explained in his book 'The Tangible Kingdom' (pages 107-121, Chapter entitled "Tip it Over").

Notice two key things that have changed.

- 1) *The triangle is pointing sideways towards **Culture***, which implies movement. God/Jesus is now no longer at the top for us to climb to, He is out in front for us to follow. This fundamentally shifts the

way we think about life. No longer to we 'climb' in worship services and then go to work, home, friends, family hoping that we performed well enough in worship for God to follow us along the way. Instead, God is already there at work, in our homes, with our friends and family and going to them is an excitement to see what god is already up to, expectant that we will encounter Jesus as much (more?) outside of church services as within them. The word 'Culture' in the diagram is where the 'Missional People' (us) are going.

- 2) *The bottom of the triangle is open* and there is a space for 'Sojourners'. There are times when the missional people will exist in the moving triangle without sojourners, and times when the lives of sojourners and missional people overlap – part of Life Group will involve creating spaces where this can happen. Notice also that there is a gap between the missional people circle and the sides of the triangle. This is the space where, as Halter defines them, you get 'pew-sitters'. These are people who are in the structures of church but have chosen not to pursue Jesus as one of his missional people (I have often referred to this group as 'Churchians' – they worship the traditions of church rather than Jesus).

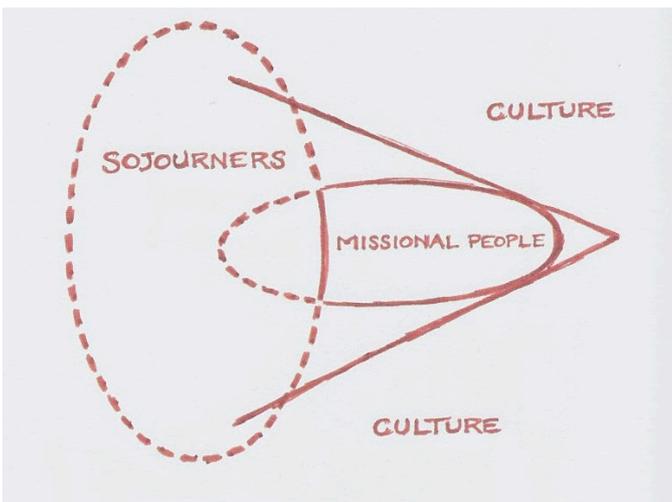


Fig 1.2 – The Missional Model

The Great Commission, and this model imply **two primary questions of discipleship – Content and Context.**

What is the content of your discipleship? In other words 'what is Jesus asking you to do right now?' or **'what are you and Jesus working on right now?'**

This question can be posed in many different ways, but in essence it is a way of responding to Jesus' command to teach/learn 'everything I have commanded' (Matthew 28:20).

The context of discipleship question is a response to Jesus' command to 'Go' to 'all nations' (or the particular group within 'all nations' that he has particularly laid on your heart). We might phrase the question 'where is Jesus going?' or

'who is Jesus calling you to love?'

Posing these two questions regularly to one another will be a powerful tool for discipling one another!

2) 5-FOLD MINISTRY & CREATING TEAM (Ephesians 4:11-16)

We gave feedback on what we understood the 5 different ministries/skill sets/personality types of Christians as outlined in Ephesians 4, noting that it is possible for an individual to be more than one of these, or even to change over their lifetime. It is also true that though you may have a strength in one particular area, you are also meant to humbly listen to and learn from those who are strong in other areas so that even if you are not an 'evangelist' naturally you can still learn to share Jesus, even if you are not naturally an encourager/listener you can learn from the 'pastors' about how to do these things etc. Finally, it is healthy in a church to identify these different areas of gifting and enable them to work together – having only apostles leading might mean there's lots of movement but there's also lots left behind or feeling a bit bruised. Having only pastors leading might mean that people feel very cared for, but the community won't be getting served, people won't be hearing the gospel etc. A TEAM APPROACH is what is needed in the church today – each person thanking God for their strengths, whilst also humbly recognizing their weaknesses and need to serve alongside those who are different from themselves (we are the body of Christ with many different parts after all!) There are many more ways than this to look at differences between people from spiritual gift lists, to modern personality type tests, but the 5-fold is a good and simple place to start.

Here's a summary of the feedback from the Life Group leaders about what each word meant:

APOSTLE: Sent, Pioneer, Church Planter, Vision for the whole, Missionary, Servant (although it was recognized that this probably applies to all ministries). Apostles also often have a passion for prayer ministry (i.e. seeing spiritual breakthrough, miracles and other supernatural manifestations of God's Kingdom coming).

PROPHET: Speak the 'Now' word of God – speaking words from God directly into a situation. Prophets build up the true church, but also confront error in those who are straying from a righteous path. They also speak against injustice (in the church and beyond) and have a passion for the people of God to be holy and value justice. Prophets will often have a particular passion for serving the poor/powerless/voiceless and they will often be quite frank/blunt in nature (they need to be in order to be able to offer rebuke when it is necessary).

EVANGELIST: Want to 'get the message out'. See God convert/save people. Passion for the Gospel of salvation. Evangelists can be introverts (against the stereotype) and be particularly good at sharing the gospel one-to-one and with friends/family. An evangelist will draw new people to faith, defending and commending the gospel.

PASTOR: Pastors create a sense of BELONGING. Cares, serves, listens, encourages, feeds, nurtures, takes action. Passionate about reconciliation and shepherding. Pastors are not 'soft' however, if they are listening to someone who is 'downward spiraling' in negativity, for example, pastors will want to learn how to gently

confront these thought patterns and use questions etc. to redirect someone into more positive 'upward spiraling' thought processes.

TEACHER: Make the word of God plain (make complicated things simple, not simple things complicated!). Communicator (not necessarily in preaching, sometimes in leading small groups or one-to-one bible study). Passion for growth, especially in knowledge of the 'whole counsel of God's Word'. Equip the Church. Knowledgeable. Will often think of solutions to problems as being 'we need to do some more teaching about that'.

Application: Know which of the five-fold you are. If you are not a teacher, you might want to ask someone else to lead most of the bible studies. If you are not a pastor you might want to find someone who is to take on some of the practical care needs of the group. If you are not an evangelist you might want to ask someone who is to take a lead on arranging those weeks where you want to do events where Saints and sojourners can spend time together. If you are not a prophet, delegate organization of volunteering opportunities to someone who is. If you want your group to get out there and pray for people on the streets or start new projects/events or new expressions of church then find an apostle you can partner with to help you do that.

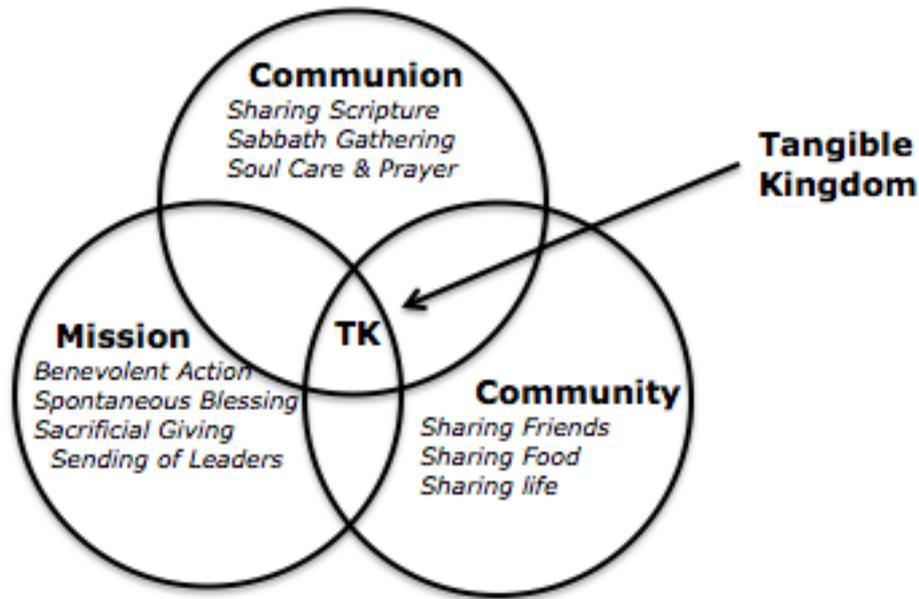
3) 3 DIMENSIONS OF LIFE TOGETHER (Mark 12:30-31)

Love God. Love Others.

Loving God (**Communion** with him and His presence).

Loving Others can be split into two general categories: (i) loving those who we know, saints and sojourners, in the context of **Community**: sharing food, sharing friends, sharing life. (ii) loving those who we don't yet know in acts of benevolent action, spontaneous blessing, sacrificial giving, sending leaders on **Mission**.

This leads us to 3 spheres of how we do life together as a community (model is taken from Tangible Kingdom by Hugh Halter pages 147-179).



Where we get the right balance between the three different spheres of the Christian life, the Kingdom of God becomes Tangible and we start to see real transformation.

As you plan what your weeks will look like together think of these 3 circles. Perhaps begin with 2 as 'communion', 1 as 'community' (all together or in sub groups with different neighbours/networks of friends), 1 as 'mission' (if you can't do mission on your usual week night, find a different space where you might be able to do that – it might be that you can't do this together e.g. some of you it will be spontaneously blessing your neighbours, others benevolent action to your work colleagues, other will be giving to friends and these actions won't fall into any planned schedule – that's okay! Instead, in your group time ask what 'mission' people have been doing and give time to feedback pray and value those actions.

Note that these '3 spheres' are what we are inviting people into, but that there is also a set of disciplines for how we 'move out' – following Jesus' pattern of the Incarnation – to go to people with the love of God before they become curious enough to want to be 'invited in'. We didn't have enough time to cover this at the breakfast, but will pick it up at some point. Halter lists 4 'incarnational' disciplines: 'Leaving', 'Listening', 'Living Among' and 'Loving Without Strings'.