

Why Missional Communities?

If we are to be a gospel-focused family living 'on mission' together and making disciples in the context of our everyday lives, we cannot do this in just a few hours each week. The typical commitment to conventional church, including attending and serving on Sundays and some form of midweek group, simply does not allow sufficient time to make disciples. A healthy family cannot do all the things that a healthy family does (e.g. talking, celebrating, resolving conflict, sharing stories, working, resting and playing together) in just a few hours a week. Indeed, Jesus spent almost all of his time with his disciples for a period of three years. To achieve this level of time commitment we have to stop trying to fit extra things into our busy daily lives, as if we are looking for gaps in our diaries where we can squeeze another meeting in. Instead, we need to see everyday life itself as the program and meet each other along the way, sharing our everyday lives together, for example, including some regular mealtimes. We have to eat anyway, so we may as well eat together. The same goes for exercise, movie watching and everything else - it's about a shared life together, with firm boundaries in place to ensure date nights for couples and family nights with the children, for instance. This way we can significantly increase the amount of contact time we have with each other, allowing more space for intentional gospel conversations and prayers that build one another up into knowing, believing and living out our true gospel identity. This everyday strategy also exposes us to many ordinary situations, which are themselves key discipleship opportunities, for example family arguments, family celebrations, family disappointments, and family reconciliations. Without sharing our lives together we would never be exposed to these situations and the opportunities they present for significant gospel conversations and prayers.

What is a Missional Community?

A Missional Community is a gospel-focused community that intentionally lives out the mission of God together by demonstrating the gospel in tangible forms and declaring the gospel to one another and to those around us. To clarify, a Missional Community is NOT primarily a small group, a bible study, a support group, a social action group, or just a weekly meeting. Instead, it is a missional 'family' group, with shared leadership, built on the foundation on the gospel, and that helps and encourages everyone to live their lives with gospel intentionality. To achieve this, each MC has a clearly-defined mission to display and declare the gospel. The plan is for multiplication growth by sowing the seeds of multiplication into everything (from the outset) to make disciples, create new leaders and birth new MCs, doing our part to fulfil the Great Commission (Matthew 18:18-20).

How does a Missional Community work?

The shared values of Gospel, Family, and Mission guide everything the Missional Community does. A Missional Community will typically comprise around 12-15 adults + children. There are three layers of relationship – a) Committed Core of Christians, who take responsibility for the life of the community, b) Young Christians, c) Not-Yet Christians. This usually means approximately 4-8 Core, 4-8 young Christians around the core, and 10-15 non-Christians that the Missional Community feels called to love and influence with the Gospel – this is their Mission Focus, not all of whom will regularly attend the group. When the group gets to the 12-14 adults in size, it's moving towards multiplying.

A normal week could have four or five points of contact between people, and a major part of the strategy is a regular pattern of Jesus-style meals and parties. Sometimes these could be

just a few people and sometimes many. A Missional Community is a shared life together, so it's going to mean many types of things, happening in many relational forms, at a wide variety of times and places, but would typically include a weekly or fortnightly DNA group (see below) to generate new leaders, and a diverse schedule of meals and parties and other gatherings as the relational context for mission in the everyday stuff of life (e.g. Matthew 9:10).

What are Discover, Nurture, Act (DNA) Groups

A "DNA group" is a small group of people – men with men, women with women - who meet together two-to-four times a month to care deeply for one another and to foster growth as disciples of Jesus (disciple = someone who is learning to apply the gospel to every part of their lives). The 'DNA' acronym stands for three key components of discipleship: Discover, Nurture, and Act. The goal is to help one another to discover Jesus in the Scriptures, nurture the truths of the gospel in our hearts, and faithfully act on what the Spirit calls us to do. Discipleship requires life-on-life interaction, and can only happen in community. We grow primarily through the experience of life in a Missional Community. A DNA group can be a key catalyst for growth and transformation in our lives. One of the main ways this happens is by giving each other regular reminders of the truth of the gospel (Hebrews 3:12-13). DNA groups foster discipleship relationships that help each person grow to become more like Jesus by the power of the Holy Spirit. The goal is not merely to hang out and have fun, or even to build friendships, though hopefully all of that will happen! The goal is to challenge one another to "grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ" (2 Peter 3:18). As disciples, we should experience transformation at every level, affecting our whole person: head, heart, and hands. The specific discipleship goals for a DNA group meeting can be understood by unpacking the acronym 'DNA':

- Discover: led by the Holy Spirit, the group will Study the Bible and Ask the Four Questions (Who is God is? What has he done for us in Christ Jesus? Who are we as a result? How should we live out of our new identity?) The goal is to teach the head.
- Nurture: led by the Holy Spirit, the group will Repent and Believe in the gospel. The goal is to shepherd the heart.
- Act: led by the Holy Spirit, the group will Listen and Obey, as he calls us to bear fruit in keeping with repentance. The goal is to empower the hands (as well as the feet, the tongue and every other part of our body).

These meetings consist of sharing personal stories and struggles, asking questions, listening to each other, reading scripture, praying, speaking the truth in love, repenting and confessing sin, listening to the Holy Spirit, and submitting to one another. Beyond the weekly meeting, however, DNA groups should seek to build trusting relationships by sharing everyday life together in their Missional Community.

What is the core teaching in DNA groups?

At its core, the DNA material builds us up in our trinitarian identity, to the extent that we not only know in our heads (Discover), but also believe in our hearts (Nurture) and live out in our daily lives (Act) who we are as a result of Christ's finished work on our behalf.

Father, Son and Holy Spirit have been in relationship with one another for all eternity, and God cannot really be described other than in deeply relational terms (*John 10:30; 14:9; 15:26; 16:15; Acts 2:33; Galatians 4:6; Ephesians 1:17; 2:18*). In one sense, God *is* His relationships. God the Father is the Father because he is the Father of the Son. God the Son is the Son because he is the Son of the Father. The Father is not just the origin of the Trinity in some impersonal way, but is eternally the Father in an eternal personal relationship with the Son. In the same way, the Holy Spirit is a person who *is* the love that exists between the Father and the Son. The Holy Spirit has a divine will of his own and an identity of his own and is not just the spiritual union of the Father and the Son.

Although God did not need to create at all, out of His unending love and mercy and generosity He chose to, as if the 'big idea' of the Universe was 'Wouldn't it be good to share what we have with others'. What we are being drawn into is this deep relationality within the family of God.

And so, it should not surprise us to discover that we find our true identity within the eternal Trinity of the Godhead. Naturally, there are three elements to this...

Firstly, we have been adopted into the Father's household as his sons and daughters. There is really nothing deeper than this. We were objects of wrath, deserving of death, and yet we have been made co-heirs of the Universe. The difference between these two extremes *is* the Good News, the Gospel of Jesus Christ. We have been shown extraordinary hospitality by the Father - we were strangers, but we have been 'taken in'. As our adoption *is* our identity now, we should also welcome strangers and show them extraordinary hospitality, because family is who we *are* now. Realising this deep truth of our identity means that once we understand this in our heads, and much more importantly, actually believe this in our hearts, we will not be able to help ourselves but live it out with our hands, our feet and our mouths, as it is our very identity, and we cannot help but be ourselves. Showing hospitality to strangers because it's what the Bible tells us to do, or because we believe it will be an effective strategy, or because we think it will make people like us, or any other lesser motive feels like filthy religion compared to the reality of it being our very identity.

Secondly, we are servants of our Servant King Jesus, who came to serve, not to be served. And so, our identity is also to be like Him – we are servants of the last, the least and the lost. So, we demonstrate the Good News by serving others with acts of kindness and service just as Jesus served us, putting others' needs before His own. This is who we *are* now – servants of the most high God. We serve others because He served us first. 'Whatever you do for the least of these..., you do for me...'

Thirdly, we are missionaries, as the Holy Spirit, who is the true and better Missionary - always proceeding from the Father and first on the scene long before we arrive - is the Sent One of God. So, we declare the Good News by listening to people's stories and earning the right to speak the Good News into their context, sharing our story, and sharing His story - The Story - as the Spirit leads us out from our safety and comfort, and leads us to descend into the darkness of people's lives with the light of the gospel. We do this because as messengers of the Good News that is who we *are* now.

In essence, discipleship is simply our need to understand our trinitarian identity in our heads, believe it in our hearts and live it out in our daily lives? This is what DNA groups are all about.