

ON A MISSION

section 2



THE MISSION COMMUNITY

In the first section of this series we asked some big questions: where are we in the world? Where is God? And what difference does Jesus make to it all? We were left with the idea that, although there are good things happening in the world, essentially things are in a fundamentally fatal mess. However, God is passionately and energetically concerned about this, and Jesus was sent to earth as God's response to our plight. This Jesus broke into life and out of death in a way never seen before, and in doing so, he re-wrote the rule books. Nothing is the same. Everything has changed. Jesus brought hope out of despair, belonging out of loneliness, forgiveness out of guilt, new beginnings out of dead ends...Jesus has made *all* the difference and we now live in miracle territory.

This is the lot for those who follow Jesus.

But an important part of following means that we too need to carry his invitation of real life to those in our world. The question is: how are we going to do this? Or more particularly: how are we going to **WORK TOGETHER** to do this? What we are exploring here is what true Christian community looks like and how it functions.

1. **The mission community: what does it look like?**
2. **The mission community: what does it feel like?**
3. **The mission community: going together**

On A Mission - study four

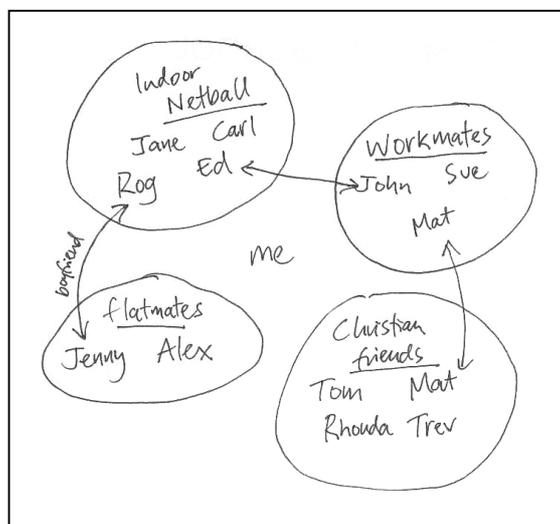
THE MISSION COMMUNITY: **WHAT DOES IT LOOK LIKE?**

God is on a mission. We need to pray, we need to take inspiration from the bible and, with the Spirit's help, we need to get out there, engaging with people in our world. But how do we do this in a way that doesn't knock us out in the first 5 minutes? After all, this mission-life is more like a marathon than a 100m sprint. In this study we will look at the important roles that need to be played for a sustained movement of the good news to the world.

Exercise 1: Our World, Our Relational Map

Let's get concrete! In the first three studies we thought of 2 or 3 friends to think about and pray for. Now let's expand this to include more of the people in our world. A good way to see where God has placed you is to draw a relational map. In the space below write (or diagrammatically draw) the names of people in your world. We will come back to this again later in the series, possibly making changes/additions as we go, so don't worry about making the picture exhaustive. As you think about who to include in your map, place the emphasis on people who for one reason or another are important to you, and people you see most frequently (eg flatmates/neighbours, work colleagues, sports team-mates, Christian friends, family...)

Here's an example →



Exercise 2: The New Testament world

What sort of 'relational maps' did the first followers of Jesus have? In particular how were they relating to their fellow believers?

What we see is a VARIETY of important relationships and interactions. We see individual Christians living as Insiders in their neighbourhoods and workplaces, we see mobile 'apostolic' people moving from place to place, and we see local communities of believers trying to live out their new-found faith together. We also see some interaction between the local believing communities in different cities. In all of these interactions, there are two major underlying themes or priorities: helping believers digest and live out the good news for themselves; and working with God to see this good news take hold in new lives, communities, cities and nations throughout the world.

A MISSION DRAMA: THESSALONICA

One example where this went on in the New Testament is Thessalonica. Paul and his mobile 'apostolic' friends visited there on his 2nd missionary trip, as recorded in Acts 17...

"After Paul and his friends had travelled through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they went on to Thessalonica. A Jewish meeting place was in that city. So as usual, Paul went there to worship, and on three Sabbaths he spoke to the people. He used the Scriptures to show them that the Messiah had to suffer, but that he would rise from death. Paul also told them that Jesus is the Messiah he was preaching about. Some of them believed what Paul had said, and they became followers with Paul and Silas. Some Gentiles and many important women also believed the message. The Jewish leaders were jealous and got some worthless bums who hung around the marketplace to start a riot in the city. They wanted to drag Paul and Silas out to the mob, and so they went straight to Jason's home. But when they did not find them there, they dragged out Jason and some of the Lord's followers. They took them to the city authorities and shouted, "Paul and Silas have been upsetting things everywhere. Now they have come here, and Jason has welcomed them into his home. All of them break the laws of the Roman Emperor by claiming that someone named Jesus is king." The officials and the people were upset when they heard this. So they made Jason and the other followers pay bail before letting them go. That same night the Lord's followers sent Paul and Silas on to Berea, and after they arrived, they went to the Jewish meeting place. The people in Berea were much nicer than those in Thessalonica, and they gladly accepted the message. Day after day they studied the Scriptures to see if these things were true. Many of them put their faith in the Lord, including some important Greek women and several men. When the Jewish leaders in Thessalonica heard that Paul had been preaching God's message in Berea, they went there and caused trouble by turning the crowds against Paul."

As you can see, it was a trip full of drama! Sometime not long after this visit, Paul wrote the letter *1Thessalonians* to these new believers in that city. This letter is a good example of some of the inter-relationships that went on in the New Testament, and as such, we'll be using it here in our study.

SO...to start with, **read the book of *1Thessalonians***. (It's not actually as bad as it sounds...the letter is only about 3 pages long 😊).

THE MAIN CHARACTERS IN THE ONGOING DRAMA: INSIDERS

Acts 17 follows the adventures of Paul to Thessalonica, but this was merely the *beginning* of things in that city. The *ongoing* drama (which is not recorded in Acts) was carried along by the central characters – the *Insiders*. An *Insider* is a 'local'. He or she is a Christian who is a message-bearer to their unique group of friends and acquaintances. The Good News is passed from life to life as Insiders share their words, their actions, their lives in the midst of everyday life. The role of the *Insider* is crucially important and yet is arguably the most undervalued role in mission.

Read 1Thes 1:6-9

- Paul tells the Thessalonians that 'the Lord's message rang out from them' and their 'faith in God has become known everywhere' (v8). **In practical terms, what type of things do you think would they have to be doing for news of their faith to become known everywhere (ie by people who the Thessalonians themselves don't know)? How can you imagine this news actually spreading?**

Read 1Thes 4:1-12 and 5:12-22

- In these passages Paul gives a list of instructions for the Thessalonians. It's interesting to note that nowhere does he ask them to preach as he had done in town squares & synagogues. **So what type of things does he ask them to do?**

Bringing it home to our world...

- The message 'rang out' from the Thessalonian believers in 1st century Macedonia. What do you think we would have to do for the message of Jesus to 'ring out' from us in 21st century NZ? In particular, **what do you think we would have to be doing for our friends to sit up and take notice of the good news within us?**

- Living out the good news everyday as an *Insider* is tough! **What are the biggest struggles and barriers you face in your attempt to be an effective Insider?**
As a group, brainstorm ways to help each other find ways forward with these issues.

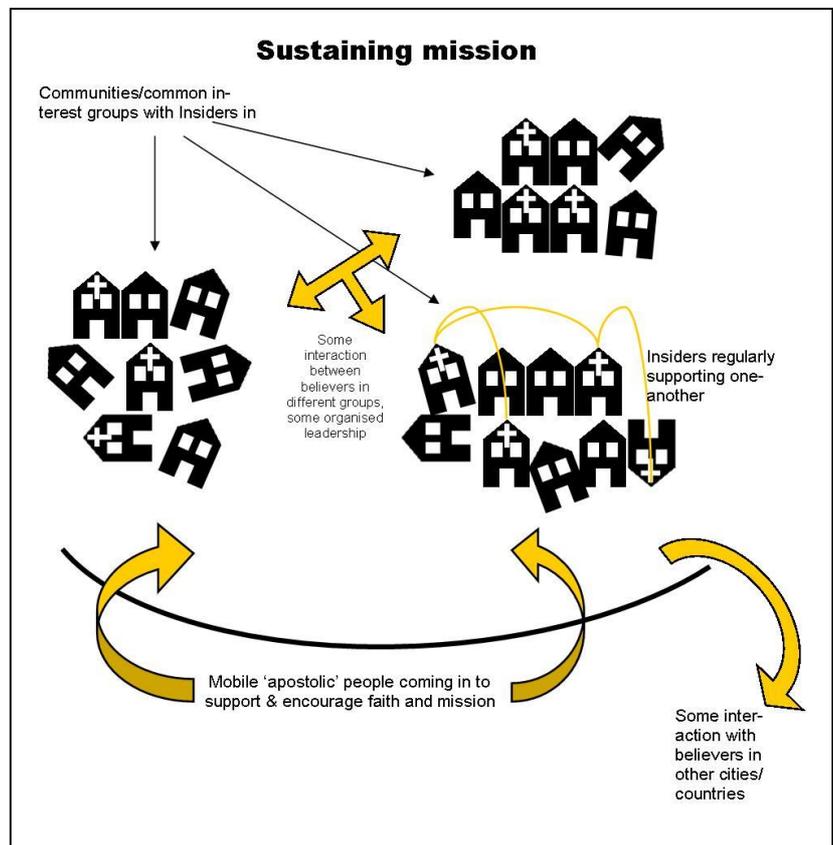
THE SUPPORT ROLES IN THE ONGOING DRAMA:

In 1Thessalonians a number of different types of people are mentioned, and they all have important roles in supporting and encouraging the Thessalonians' faith and mission...

<p>The Mobile Apostles</p>	<p>2:1-4 My friends, you know that our time with you wasn't wasted...God gave us the courage to tell you the good news about him, even though many people caused us trouble... God was pleased to trust us with his message.</p> <p>2:11-13 You also know we did everything for you that parents would do for their own children. We begged, encouraged, and urged each of you to live in a way that would honour God. He is the one who chose you to share in his own kingdom and glory. We always thank God that you believed the message we preached. It came from him, and it isn't something made up by humans. You accepted it as God's message, and now he is working in you.</p> <p>3:1-6 Finally, we couldn't stand it any longer. We decided to stay in Athens by ourselves and send our friend Timothy to you. He works with us as God's servant and preaches the good news about Christ. We wanted him to make you strong in your faith and to encourage you...Timothy has come back from his visit with you and has told us about your faith and love...</p>
<p>The Local Believing community</p>	<p>5:11-13 That's why you must encourage and help each other, just as you are already doing. My friends, we ask you to be thoughtful of your leaders who work hard and tell you how to live for the Lord. Show them great respect and love because of their work. Try to get along with each other.</p>
<p>The Broader Believing Network</p>	<p>1:7 'You (Thessalonians) became an example for all the Lord's followers in Macedonia and Achaia.'</p> <p>2:14 My friends, you did just like God's churches in Judea and like the other followers of Christ Jesus there. And so, you were mistreated by your own people, in the same way they were mistreated by their people.</p>

Paul's letter was written to the Thessalonian believers as a whole, so we don't really know the more detailed shape of how this looked. However, in a very simplified form, perhaps their support structures looked something like this →

- Specifically, how do you think each of the different support roles mentioned above would contribute to the Thessalonians in their faith and mission?



Bringing it home to our world...

For some Christians, they believe that as long as you attend a 'church' (ie a denominational group that meets predominantly on a Sunday) you are fine. This, however, totally misses the point. As we can see from the Thessalonians situation, there were a number of important roles that worked towards helping the believers strengthen their own faith and carry the mission into their own backyard. So, the real question is:

- For you, **what support structures do you think you need in order to keep you going for God?**

- In what ways do you think you could be part of the support structure for other believers that you know?**

Wrap Up

Return to your **relational map** from exercise one.

Insiders

- As you look at your relational map, are you happy with the relative proportions of people in your world who are Christians and those who are not? If not, what can you (and what *will* you) do about it?

- As you think about the people in your world, what one thing could you change that would significantly help you be a more effective insider?



“God intends us to penetrate the world. Christian salt has no business to remain snugly in elegant little ecclesiastical salt cellars; our place is to be rubbed into the secular community, as salt is rubbed into meat, to stop it going bad. And when society does go bad, we Christians tend to throw up our hands in pious horror and reproach the non-Christian world; but should we not rather reproach ourselves? One can hardly blame unsalted meat for going bad. It cannot do anything else. The real question to ask is: where is the salt?”

John Stott

Support to sustain mission

- Over the page you identified the support structures you feel you need to sustain mission. On your relational map, note down or **add in the people who perform these essential support roles for you**. Do these people know that, in your mind, they have this role for you? If you're not sure, you need to talk!

End of study 4