

Study Guide

The Church on Mission

A Biblical Vision for Transformation among All People

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Introduction

Much in the way that a mission or purpose statement defines an organization, telling why the organization exists and what it is attempting to achieve, so too the Bible defines God's purpose and mission for his people, the church. One formulation of a mission statement for the church is that it exists *to glorify God by multiplying transformational churches among all people*.

The Church on Mission unpacks each aspect of that mission statement by examining key biblical texts, reflecting upon them theologically, and considering implications for the life and ministry of the church. The topics addressed provide a helpful stimulus for church leaders, ministry teams, and other discussion groups to consider how they might better understand their mission and more intentionally participate in God's purposes for them. Although the discussion questions in this study guide focus primarily on the ministry of a local church, ministry teams

and mission organizations can simply insert their ministry where the question refers to a church. Discussion leaders may also want to encourage participants to consider their own personal roles in helping the church fulfill its calling.

The discussion questions here are intended to stimulate practical application for each of the six chapters of the book. A concluding discussion session is also provided to help summarize implications. These sessions assume that the corresponding chapter has been read in advance by group participants in preparation for discussion. Page numbers refer to relevant locations in the book. Each discussion session includes more questions than can be adequately addressed in one meeting, so group leaders may want to focus on only the most relevant questions or else divide each chapter into two discussion sessions.

As group participants read each chapter, they are encouraged to note key insights, points of agreement or disagreement, and questions or issues that they would like to explore further. Each session begins with a Scripture reading and with participants sharing their thoughts.

Sessions should open and close with prayer, seeking God's guidance and insight. Christians who honor the Bible have varying opinions on some of the issues raised by these topics. Such disagreements can lead to fresh insights as long as participants dialogue in a spirit of respect, humility, and openness. We experience the transformative power of God's Word by allowing it to challenge our assumptions and to shape us in ways that are often uncomfortable or countercultural. Churches and other ministries that desire to be more effective in fulfilling their God-given mission must be willing, from time to time, to reevaluate their priorities in light of biblical teaching. This, too, can be a controversial, but refreshing and rewarding, exercise.

The church has been described as "the people of God called out of the world, placed in the world, and sent to the world" (p. 3). The church is God's missionary people: gathered to be

scattered, to grow and to go, called to be with Jesus that we might be sent out for Jesus (Mark 3:14; see pp. 3–5, 13–15). This study guide is offered in the hope that it will lead individuals, local churches, and ministry teams to a deeper appreciation of our calling and a more focused commitment to being God’s missionary people.

Chapter 1: Transformation to God’s Glory

Scripture reading: 2 Corinthians 3:12–18

After reading this chapter, consider the following:

- What new insights did you gain?
- Were there points with which you especially agreed or disagreed?
- What issues were raised that you would like to explore further or clarify?

This study will biblically expound the statement that God’s mission for the church is *to glorify God by multiplying transformational churches among all people*.

- Does your church or ministry organization have a mission statement?
 - If yes, what is it and how does it compare with the mission statement above?
 - If no, write one based on what you know about your church.

Second Corinthians 3:17–18 is a key New Testament passage for describing transformation (see pp. 8–13).

- How does contemplating the glory of the Lord lead practically to personal transformation? (Give a specific example from your own experience.)
- How is God glorified when we experience transformation?

The church is described as God's missionary people: gathered to be scattered, to grow and to go, called to be with Jesus that we might be sent out for Jesus (Mark 3:14; see pp. 3–5, 13–15).

- Describe how you understand the relationship between (1) the church's role to gather believers for worship, fellowship, and edification and (2) the church's role to send out believers as salt and light into the community and beyond.
- How do you evaluate your church's balance of growing and going?
- It has been said that the church not only sends missionaries but that the church is itself God's missionary. Do you agree? What are the implications of this statement?

This chapter argues that the glory of God is both the source and the goal of the church's mission.

- In what ways do you see worship as both the fuel and the goal of mission (p. 13)?
- How can aspects of the church's mission—such as evangelism, discipleship, compassion, and social action—contribute ultimately to glorifying God?
- Tell a personal story about how God's glory has motivated you to be involved in serving and glorifying him.

Chapter 2: Transformational Communities

Scripture reading: Ephesians 2:19–22

After reading this chapter, consider the following:

- What new insights did you gain?
- Were there points with which you especially agreed or disagreed?
- What issues were raised that you would like to explore further or clarify?

The church is described as a new-creation community because it is a community of people who have become a new creation in Christ (2 Cor. 5:17), born of the Holy Spirit (John 3:3–5; Titus 3:5), by the power of the gospel (Rom. 1:16; 1 Pet. 1:23). Thus evangelism is foundational to the very existence and ongoing life of a church (pp. 22–25).

- How central is evangelism to the life and ministry of your church?
- In what ways is your church actively involved in evangelism?
- What are some new, creative ways in which your church might engage the community evangelistically?

The church represents a new spiritual temple of God (pp. 27–31).

- Describe the relationship of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit to the church as expressed in Ephesians 2:19–22. How does this enrich your understanding of the church?
- How does (or should) your church manifest God’s presence in congregational life?
- How might your church manifest God’s presence in your neighborhood?

The church has been described as a kingdom community: a *sign*, an *instrument*, and a *foretaste* of the kingdom of God (pp. 31–33).

- If the kingdom of God is not a physical place as much as it is the sphere of God’s rule as King, what does it mean for the church to be an instrument of the kingdom?
- Give an example of how the life of your church might be a foretaste of God’s kingdom.

Consider where you’ve come so far as a result of this study:

- How has your understanding of the church been enriched?

- What difference might that make in your relationship to the church?

Chapter 3: Transformation and the Word of God

Scripture reading: John 8:31–38

After reading this chapter, consider the following:

- What new insights did you gain?
- Were there points with which you especially agreed or disagreed?
- What issues were raised that you would like to explore further or clarify?

Jesus describes the liberating and transforming power of his teaching in John 8:31–38. Read a few different Bible translations of John 8:31.

- What does it practically mean to “abide” in the word of Jesus?

Romans 12:1–2 speaks of transformation through the renewing of our minds.

- Describe some ways that being transformed is different from being conformed to the world (this passing age)?
- Give an example of how reading the Bible has “renewed your mind” and helped you discern God’s will?
- Which teachings of the Bible are most challenging for you or most difficult to apply personally?
 - What might help you to experience transformation in that area of your life?

Kevin Vanhoozer says, “The church is to be a Living Bible, yes, but not by staging literal repetitions (copies) of biblical scenes . . . but rather by continuing to follow Jesus into the present in ways that are both faithful and (necessarily) creative” (p. 54).

- Explain what it might mean to follow Jesus in ways that are both biblically faithful *and* creative?
- How important is in-depth Bible study and teaching in your church? Do you believe that there should be more or less emphasis in these areas? Why?
- Describe your own personal commitment to Bible reading and Bible study.

Chapter 4: Transformational Influence

Scripture reading: Matthew 5:1–15

After reading this chapter, consider the following:

- What new insights did you gain?
- Were there points with which you especially agreed or disagreed?
- What issues were raised that you would like to explore further or clarify?

In the Sermon on the Mount, just before proclaiming that his followers are the salt of the earth and the light of the world (Matt. 5:13–15), Jesus gives the Beatitudes (Matt. 5:1–12).

- How do the character qualities described in the Beatitudes relate to our ability to be salt and light?
- How is it possible for followers of Jesus to influence the world as salt and light if they are slandered and persecuted?
- To what extent are we ready and willing to *gladly* face opposition due to our commitment to Christ?
- What should our attitude be toward those who would persecute Christians or marginalize Christian influence in society? (See also Rom. 12:14; 1 Cor. 4:12; and Matt. 5:39, 43–44.)

- How should this inform the way Christians engage with social issues in the public square?

In chapter 3 we discussed evangelism as an aspect of our being the light of the world. Here we consider various ways that we might be the salt of the earth, hindering evil and promoting good.

- In what ways are you or others in your church presently acting as salt in the community?
- Brainstorm other specific ways that you and your church might act as salt of the earth.
- What are the implications of Proverbs 31:8–9 and Psalm 82:3–4 for how believers and churches are to be the salt of the earth? Give practical examples.
- How can or should “salt” ministries (consisting of deeds) also be “light” ministries (consisting of words that witness to the gospel)?

Chapter 5: Transformation for All Peoples

Scripture reading: Revelation 5:1–10

After reading this chapter, consider the following:

- What new insights did you gain?
- Were there points with which you especially agreed or disagreed?
- What issues were raised that you would like to explore further or clarify?

This chapter describes two dimensions of multiplying transformational churches among all people: reaching all people and embracing all people.

Reaching All People

Jesus calls us to make disciples of all nations (Matt. 28:19–20), both locally and in the farthest corners of the world (Acts 1:8).

- How would you describe your church’s commitment to sending missionaries and supporting efforts to make disciples among all people, especially among those who have not heard the gospel?
- What ethnic groups or subcultures live in your community who need to be reached with the gospel?
- What barriers might be holding your church back from reaching out to local ethnic groups or unreached segments of the population?
- How can the vision and commitment to reach all people be strengthened in your church?

Embracing All People

Ephesians 2:11–22 describes the remarkable work of Christ: breaking down barriers and reconciling estranged or even hostile people, creating one new humanity.

- What are some of the deep divisions between groups of people in our society?
 - How can these groups be reconciled through Christ?
 - How might churches become peacemakers (Matt. 5:9)?
- How does the story of the Ethiopian Eunuch (Acts 8:28–40) influence your attitude toward the marginalized of society?
- To what extent would you say that your church is welcoming to people of different backgrounds (educational, racial, ethnic, or class)? What attitudes may need to be overcome?

- How important is it for the membership of a church to reflect the social and ethnic diversity of its community? Does your church reflect such diversity?
- What personal fears or prejudices might you have that make you reluctant to reach out to or welcome people different from you? How might these be overcome?

Describe how God is glorified when all kinds of people are reached with the gospel and embraced and represented in the church.

Chapter 6: Transformation through Multiplication

Scripture reading: Luke 8:4–15

After reading this chapter, consider the following:

- What new insights did you gain?
- Were there points with which you especially agreed or disagreed?
- What issues were raised that you would like to explore further or clarify?

Because the mission of the church is *to glorify God by multiplying transformational churches among all people*, a church simply *being* transformational—reaching and embracing—is not enough; it must also *reproduce* such churches among all people. In the Old Testament we read of multiplication as both a mandate and a promise from God.

- God commands Adam and Eve to “be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it” (Gen. 1:28). How would God be glorified by keeping this command?
- As fallen humanity multiplied, what was the earth filled with (Gen. 6:5, 11, 13)?
- Why do you think that God’s promise to Abraham and Israel included fruitfulness and multiplication (Gen. 12:1–3; Lev. 26:3–4, 9)?

- How does the multiplication of God’s people relate to the earth being filled with the glory of the Lord (Num. 14:21; Ps. 72:19; Jer. 3:15–17)?
- How does Galatians 3:7–9 describe the fulfilment of the Abrahamic promise?

The spread of the Word of God, the multiplication of disciples, and the growth of the church comprise together a major theme in Luke’s Gospel and his companion volume, Acts.

- Read the parable of the soils in Luke 8:4–15. How might this parable foreshadow the multiplication of disciples and the growth of churches in the Book of Acts?
 - What is the “seed” that precipitates such remarkable growth? (See also Acts 6:7; 12:24; 13:49; and 19:20.)
- Biblical texts report that churches were not only planted; they also reproduced and evangelized entire regions (see pp. 111–14). Some argue that today it is better to grow existing churches than to plant new ones, because there are enough churches already. Do you agree or disagree? Explain your answer.
- It has been said that a missional church is more focused on its sending capacity than its seating capacity. What is your church’s commitment to sending members to establish new churches—whether locally, regionally, or internationally?
 - What might be done to increase this commitment?

Multiplication of transformational churches can only happen where there is also multiplication of transformational leaders. Ephesians 4:11–13 says that God gave leaders to the church “to equip the saints for the work of ministry.” Paul elsewhere exhorts Timothy, “What you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men, who will be able to teach others also” (2 Tim. 2:2).

- What steps can your church take to more intentionally raise up future workers, pastors, and missionaries?
- How can your church develop a model of ministry in which *every* worker or volunteer is involved in training another person?
- In what ways are you reproducing spiritual life and equipping others for service?

Conclusion

Scripture reading: 1 Peter 2:4–12

After engaging with the readings and discussions throughout this study, consider the following:

- What insights stand out as most important for you and your church? Why those?
- What topics do you remain uncertain or uncomfortable about? Why those?
- What questions or topics would you like to explore further or clarify?

In light of this study and the church's mission *to glorify God by multiplying transformational churches among all people*, answer the following questions:

- To what extent is your church transformational in the following areas?
 - the personal lives of believers
 - the relationships among believers
 - the broader community that yearns for salt and light
 - the reaching of all people
 - the embracing of all people
- Which of the above areas of transformation has your church engaged effectively? That is, which transformational strengths should your church be celebrating?
 - What might be done to maintain these strengths?

- Which of the above areas of transformation has your church engaged less effectively?
That is, which transformational weaknesses does your church need to address?
- What might be done to address these weaknesses?

If you are part of a leadership team for a church or other ministry, consider taking these next steps:

- In prayer, and in light of this study, identify two or three priorities that would help your ministry more effectively fulfill its mission.
- Spell out several specific action steps to be taken in implementing these priorities.

In concluding this study, take a few moments to prayerfully consider these questions:

- Because we must experience personal transformation if our church is to be a transformational church, in what ways do *I* need to experience greater personal transformation?
 - What will I do to pursue such transformation in my life?
- What spiritual gifts, talents, or passions do I have that can help my church become more transformational?
- What specific steps will I commit to taking to help my church fulfill its mission *to glorify God by multiplying transformational churches among all people?*