

SESSION 5

SMALL GROUP GUIDE

OVERVIEW AND GOAL

The goal of this session is to explore more fully the importance of being global disciples in our world today, and to root our discipleship in the examples provided in scripture. You will be reminded of the challenges that face God's people in the world today, and be invited to join with people and partnerships that are bearing fruit for the Kingdom of God.

KEY BIBLICAL PASSAGES

Luke 10:25-37; Acts 15:1-35; 21:17-26; 1 Corinthians 9:19-27; 2 Corinthians 8:8-15

BACKGROUND

Ethnic and racial conflict. Economic inequality and crippling poverty. Religious violence and ethical confusion. The world of the New Testament was strikingly similar to ours today, and the challenges facing the early followers of Christ required creativity, generosity and courage, and dependence on the Holy Spirit to be faithful to the Kingdom purposes of God. The scriptures provide early examples of mutual ministry and partnership that can inspire and instruct us today.

BRIEF THEME SUMMARY

Followers of Christ today find themselves participating in an exciting and dynamic movement of the Spirit worldwide. With the expansion of the church to every corner of our world, and the opportunity for creative partnerships, there is unprecedented possibility for those of us who are committed to living as God's Kingdom people. The challenge comes on two fronts: first, the forces of evil remain active and evident in the violence, poverty and pain experienced daily around the world; second, it takes intentional and prayerful effort to work cooperatively with others, because it requires patience and love.

In this session we will set the challenges of our day next to scriptural examples that provide examples of partnership in the teaching of Jesus and the example of the early church leaders such as James and Paul. Along with modern examples and opportunities for mutual ministry, these can guide us into new and deeper partnerships in our own lives as individuals, groups, and churches.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

As you read the overview for this week have each person in the group briefly share what is important or inspiring.

What was it in the working relationship between Paul and James that was crucial to an effective partnership in mission? What did each have to “give up” in order for God’s love to be shared?

Discuss which of the following needs in the world trouble or concern you most:

- A child dies every six seconds from hunger or hunger-related causes (and there is enough food in our world for everyone)
- Seventy-four people die every hour from AIDS
- Half the children in our world live in poverty, which means inadequate shelter, unsafe water, or lack of access to education and health care
- Religious-based violence is evident across all major religions in the world, including Christianity
- Almost one in six people in the world entered this millennium unable to read or write

Take some time to study the Good Samaritan passage in Luke 10:25-37:

What were the spiritual and physical risks that the Samaritan took in reaching out to the beaten up man? Why is the man’s age, ethnicity or religion not

mentioned? Describe the partnership between the Samaritan and the innkeeper – how does this compare to the partnerships your church is involved in at the present time in reaching our world with the love of God?

In 2 Corinthians, Paul encourages the Corinthian church to give generously to people suffering from famine in Jerusalem. This was an early example of global discipleship. What are some global needs that God is placing on your heart to address?

SERMON CONNECTION

The Preaching Guide has offered your pastor notes for a sermon based on Acts 15:1-35. You may want to invite your pastor to offer you a summary of this complex passage, or invite him/her to join you in conversation.

GROUP REFLECTION: The key meeting at Jerusalem involved listening and learning from other churches in other parts of the world In order to support and promote the spreading of the good news of Jesus Christ. In discussing a crucial issue that was effecting the well-being of a church in Syria (the Antioch church), the Christians in Jerusalem made decisions to offer encouragement and support – both personally and with practical advice.

GROUP DISCUSSION: As a small group what issues are you or your church presently wrestling with that affects the ministry of churches in other parts of the world? How are you helping them? What are you learning from the global church that is helping you live your Christian life more wisely?

The decision of James (the leader of the first church in Jerusalem) showed the wisdom and humility of being able to make adjustments so that Christians of a different cultural background could fellowship together with mutual respect. What are the experiences you have had in cross-cultural friendship with other Christians? What have been some of the challenges you face in bridging cultural preferences? What are some of the joys or insights you experienced?

SMALL GROUP GUIDE

GROUP APPLICATION: Arrange for a local politician or community leader to speak to your small group about the needs in your neighbourhood or community and explore with him or her the ways that your small group can partner to support people in need locally.

Take some time to discuss and then plan how your small group could begin or deepen an existing partnership with CBM's Global Field Staff and church partners around the world. It could mean inviting a Field Staff to come to speak to your church when they are in Canada. It could also mean regular conversations with one of them through email.

Begin a small group collection that will be used for supporting a partnership ministry for those in need (in the same way that Paul encouraged the Corinthian church).

GROUP PRAYER: Begin or establish a prayer schedule in your small group that includes Global Field Staff or church partners. Do research on the type of ministries they are involved in and specifically pray for God to continue blessing them.