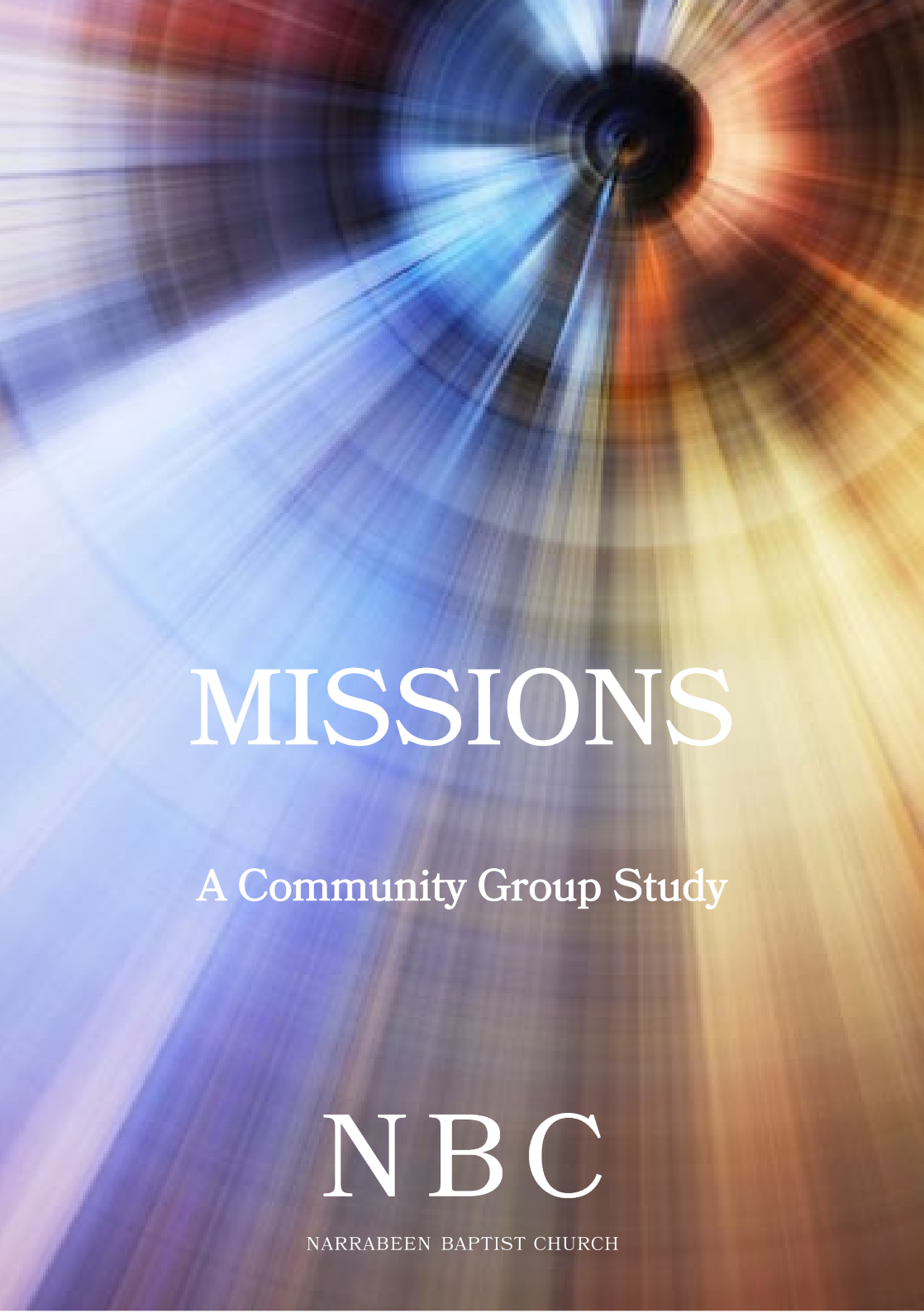

MISSIONS

A Community Group Study

NBC

NARRABEEN BAPTIST CHURCH

Introduction

Missions. We all have different responses to that word. For many of us "missions" is something somebody does who has a special calling and relationship to God. We believe it's a special responsibility for a special person who has a special closeness to Jesus...but it's not something "the rest of us" has to think about or deal with. Another way we often understand "missions" is the work done by these missionaries in foreign countries (often we picture them in the middle of the jungle in some mud hut reaching out to head hunters). Or we think "missions" is an activity our church is involved in from time to time, such as when we send a team out to a certain place (like "Beach Mission").

All of these definitions of missions are not entirely incorrect but they are extremely limited and unhelpful. Missions is more than a once-in-a-while activity. It's more than a job a "super holy" Jesus follower engages in. It's more than just work done overseas.

You might be surprised that missions, as it is defined biblically, is something ALL who believe in Jesus are called to participate in. Scripture makes it relatively clear: if you have been brought into the family of God through believing in Jesus, then missions is the response to this incredible love. It's not optional. It's not for someone else. We each are invited and called by Jesus to share his Good News to the world around us.

This study is going give us a biblical perspective on missions – how the whole story of God points to missions being central to the life of a believer. From Genesis to Revelation and everywhere in between, you and I are active participants in the ongoing story of God and His love for the world. The greatest part about missions is that it's not actually scary or difficult. When you live out a missional life, you get to experience incredible joy and live with indescribable purpose. It is our prayer through the sermons, studies, events and resources made available over this next month, that you will not only have a biblical understanding of missions, but come to see yourself as a missionary wherever you find yourself.

You may be surprised to hear that missions is found anywhere in the Old Testament. Usually we think missions begin at Jesus' ministry (like when he sends out his followers to the surrounding countryside) or in the book of Acts where we see the church grow and spread around the world. But to properly understand the bigger picture of God's mission to rescue the world, we need to start at the very beginning...

Read Genesis 1:26-28

What do these verses have to do with God's mission?

How does being made in the image of God relate to being fruitful and filling the earth?

In ancient times "images" were all over the place. You could see a king's image on a coin or in art. Many people had images of stone or carved wood of their culture's gods and goddesses. These images were symbols that pointed back to an unseen person or god's presence and power. They were visible reminders of invisible forces. But something unique happens in Genesis 1. God doesn't put His image on a canvas or in a statue – He creates people to be His image-bearers. That humans were to be the visible reminders of an unseen God. That the way they lived and talked and interacted and took care of each other and the world around them was to point back to what God is like. So God's command for His image-bearers (humans) to fill the earth was to fill the entire earth with the glory and knowledge of God. This is the beginning of "missions".

But there was (and is) a problem. We don't get very far into the story until humans fail at their responsibility to be God's image-bearers to the world (see Genesis 3). Fast forward a few more chapters and we read in Genesis 6:5-6, "The LORD saw how great the wickedness of the human race had become on the earth, and that every inclination of the thoughts of the human heart was only evil all the time. The LORD regretted that He had made human beings on the earth, and His heart was deeply troubled."

Instead of humans responding to the love of God and spreading that love throughout the earth, the opposite happened (and still happens). The result of this, as Paul tells us in Romans 1, is that our hearts are darkened and we have lost what it means not only to know God but to be fully human as He created us to be.

Despite humanity's brokenness and rejection of God, God is not done. His mission continues.

Read Genesis 12:1-4

What is happening in this passage? Who is this Abram guy (quick answer: nobody) and what is God's plan with him?

John Stott, a famous theologian and pastor, once wrote of this passage – "These are perhaps the most unifying verses in the Bible; the whole of God's purpose is encapsulated here."

Why do you think that is? What does God end up doing to and through the family of Abraham?

Let's fast-forward again. Abraham's family has grown...to the extent they are no longer a small family, but an entire people group, called Israel. One of Israel's defining events as a people happens at a place called Mount Sinai after God had delivered them from their oppression. At the foot of this mountain, God instructs them again on who they are and what it means for them to experience and live out His love.

At the heart of this we find *Exodus 19:4-6*.

What is this passage about? What does it say about God's perspective on the world? How are the people to respond to God's rescuing love?

What is the function of a priest? What then does it mean for God's people to be a "kingdom of priests" to the world?

This thought continues on in *Isaiah 42:1-7*.

Who, do you think, Isaiah is talking about in verses 1-4? How will this "servant" produce "mission"?

Verses 5-7 are then the response of God's people to this servant who He has sent. What is God calling the people to do/be?

Read Zechariah 8:13, 20-23

What is going on here? How does Zechariah connect the idea of being a blessing (which we saw all the way back in Genesis 12) to people from all nations coming to know God?

What do all these passages say about God? What kind of God do these passages portray (especially as it involves people far from Him)?

What do these passages reveal about who God's people are meant to be and what they are meant to do? Is there any indication that Israel were to keep the knowledge of God to themselves?

What is God's plan for humanity from the very beginning? What is God's plan for His people from the very beginning?

Fast-forward one more time to today.

In Jesus, YOU are now one of God's people. He has put His Spirit in YOU. YOU are His image bearer to the world. Are YOU living as if those statements are true of you? Are you now, like the people of God were meant to back then, bringing God's light and truth to a dark and unbelieving world?

If God's intention from the beginning of time was to use His people to display His glory and love, why do we (you) often not live like this is the case?

Out of all the subjects Jesus spoke about there is one that he spoke of more often than any of the others. And no, it's not love. Or holiness. Or faith. Or hell. The thing Jesus talked about most was the kingdom of God. Most Christians have been trained to think that the kingdom of God is the same thing as heaven (which we interpret as a place we go after death). However, the kingdom of God is bigger, fuller, more encompassing than that. When Jesus spoke about God's Kingdom, what he essentially is talking about is life under the rule and reign of God as King. The world as it was always meant to be. How life works best. And this kingdom isn't just far off when we breathe our final breath. In Jesus, it is somehow mysteriously present now... especially when people who belong to Jesus gather, pray, serve and go.

Read Luke 17:20-21, Luke 9:27, Mark 1:14-15, Matthew 5:3

What do these verses tell us about the "when" and "where" of God's kingdom? Do they indicate the kingdom of God (or kingdom of heaven in Matthew's Gospel) is some far-off future location in some other plane of existence?

If this kingdom of God/heaven is not the same thing as a future life of eternal bliss somewhere else after death, then what is it? To answer that question, read *Luke 1:29-33*. According to this passage, what is this kingdom like? Who rules it? When?

If Jesus is King over this kingdom and it is present now and forever, the next logical question to ask is: What is this kingdom like? In order to gain an understanding of God's kingdom, read through and discuss the following passages:

◊ *Matthew 13:31-33*

◊ *Matthew 13:44-45*

◊ *Matthew 18:1-5*

◊ *Matthew 20:1-16*

◊ *Matthew 25:31-46*

◊ *Luke 4:14-30*

◊ *Luke 10:25-37*

◊ *Luke 14:15-24*

◊ *Luke 15:1-10*

From these passages, how is God's kingdom described? Who is it for? What happens in this kingdom? How do these stories challenge your current understanding of heaven? How are you to respond to these words?

It seems clear from these passages (which represent just a small portion of Jesus' kingdom teaching), that God's kingdom flips the world's values upside down and challenges our notion of "when" and "who" and "what". The kingdom, according to Jesus, is where the lost are found, where the forgotten are made family, where the powerful are humbled, where the sinner and saint are brought together, where the least are lifted up, where those on the out are now included (and those that thought they were in are actually out).

And the thing is, if this kingdom is not just in the future after death but a present reality, then it stands to reason that as citizens of this kingdom, we should be living out these values NOW.

Read Luke 9:1-6, 57-62

What are these verses saying about our role in the kingdom right now?

Read Matthew 28:18-20 and Acts 1:4-8

What do you think Jesus means when he instructs his followers (that includes you) to "go into all the world and make disciples" and to "be my witnesses... to the ends of the earth"?

How do the values of the kingdom of God (the poor being taken care of, refugees taken in, the lost found, the foreigner welcomed in, etc.) relate to the call to make disciples and be Jesus' witnesses?

Do you live now like you're a citizen and ambassador for the kingdom of God? If so, how is that apparent to the world around you? If not, why do you struggle to do so? What needs to change for you to live these teachings out right now?

Which of the kingdom values you've studied today do you find the hardest to put into practice?

How can you, both individually and with your community group, deliberately live out Jesus' command to proclaim the kingdom in word and action?

Read Acts 1:1-11

What is happening in this passage? What does this passage have to tell us about God's mission?

This scene in Acts 1 is "the next chapter" of the overarching story of God's mission in the Bible. If Chapter One is God's mission to rescue the world through a redeemed people (from the calling of Abraham to the people of Israel) and Chapter Two is the mission of God's kingdom victory in the life, teachings, death and resurrection of Jesus, what do you think Chapter Three is (when Jesus suddenly leaves the scene in Acts 1:9)? How is God continuing his rescue mission in this episode?

Read Acts 2:1-21, 36-40

How does God's mission unfold in these verses? What (or rather Who) is the catalyst for mission?

What do we know about Peter (the main speaker here) prior to this scene? Is he some extraordinary superhuman follower of Jesus?

Read Acts 2:41-47

How do you see mission being lived out here? Who is living this out? Just the pastors and chosen missionaries within the church?

How are the kingdom values we looked at last week being lived out here?

Read Acts 4:8-13

What is the defining characteristic of these ordinary everyday missionaries (hint: re-read the end of verse 13)?

Read Acts 4:31-37

There are nine actions the church put into practice in these verses as to how they chose to live out God's mission around them. What are the nine actions and how many of them do you do regularly (hint: look at all the verbs in this passage)?

Read Acts 7:55-8:8

Up until this point, God's mission had not extended beyond Jerusalem. The other locations Jesus mentions in Acts 1:8 had not even come into play until now. What event prompted the spread of the gospel and the growth of God's family in the world?

We are told in Acts 1:15 that after Jesus' resurrection, there were around 120 people who followed Jesus. Scholars believe that there were approximately 1 million Christians only 70 years later (at 100 AD).

What explanation do you have as to why Christianity exploded so quickly in such a short amount of time? How does the mission of the early church and its persecution account for these numbers?

Read 2 Corinthians 5:11-20

Who is Paul talking to here? Just church leaders?

What is he encouraging us to be (see verse 20)? How are you actually doing this in your neighbourhood (Jerusalem), country (Judea and Samaria) and world (ends of the earth)?

Recent research has discovered that Christianity around the world is in decline (in 1910, 35% of the global population considered themselves Christian...in 2010, those numbers dropped to 32%). In the West, there is a very sharp decline (in Europe alone Christianity dropped from 66% of the population in 1910 to 26% of the population in 2008).

How do you account for these numbers?

In contrast, Christianity is exploding in Africa, South America and Asia, especially in places of extreme persecution. What is happening in these churches that may not be happening in Western churches?

Something that the church in the West has been accused of is that we have lost our core identity as Jesus' people empowered by His Spirit to engage in His mission to make disciples. Do you agree or disagree with that statement?

How can we live out this mission of God better in our church? How can YOU live it out more boldly?

Acts 28 ends with Paul in Rome (considered the "centre" of the world at that period of time) "proclaiming the kingdom of God" and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ "with all boldness and without hindrance!" The mission of God has spread to many parts of the world by this stage but not to the entire "ends of the earth" yet. Many scholars believe the book of Acts is left open-ended on purpose so that you and I might continue the mission. To continue writing the story. Nowhere in Acts or anywhere else in the Bible are we told to sit and wait until we die to experience heaven, but that heaven has arrived (in part) already and we are called in word and deed to be missionaries, kingdom proclaimers to the world.

How is the Spirit challenging you to do this?

Taking the nine attributes of the church on mission from Acts 4, how can you commit to growing in each one this year (see below)?

- ◊ *Prayer*
- ◊ *Being filled with the Spirit*
- ◊ *Speaking the word of God boldly*
- ◊ *Being of one heart and mind with other believers*
- ◊ *Not claiming any possession as your own*
- ◊ *Sharing everything you have with others*
- ◊ *Testifying to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus*
- ◊ *Using your resources for the work of the church's mission*
- ◊ *Giving to anyone who has need*

How can we pray and support one another as we strive to grow in God's mission as His family to reach the world around us?

Many churches are on about addition. They think, "If we can just add more people... if we can just get more people to serve... if more people would attend our services...." Addition is a certainly a great thing when it happens. We see after Peter's sermon in Acts 2, God "added" to the church those who were being saved. However, Scripture has always had a greater emphasis on multiplication over addition.

We all remember basic mathematics from primary school (hopefully!). Multiplication is a much more streamlined way to get somewhere than repetitive addition. And the church is called to do multiplication. Think of it this way. Let's say you (by the power of God's Spirit, of course) are able to help one thousand other people follow Jesus every single day (let's dream big). In a year, you will have seen 365,000 come to know Jesus (a pretty awesome reward). At the end of 25 years, 9,125,000 people will have come into the family of God. Not too shabby.

Let's say however, you see someone you've helped come to know Jesus go out and make one other disciple in a year...so by the end of that year now two people have come to faith (directly and indirectly through you). But each of those two disciples reaches out and trains one person each as a disciple the following year. If you repeat that pattern, you will have seen 33,554,432 people come to follow Jesus at the end of 25 years!

Read Matthew 28:1-20

Try and place yourself in the disciples' shoes as they have witnessed these things and heard these words from Jesus, who had just conquered death. How do you think they would have reacted? If you saw someone you believed to be God's Son defeat death and then send you out to the world to tell others about him, what would you do?

Reading through the New Testament, it's not surprising to read that Jesus' followers were focused on making disciples – it makes sense in light of Jesus' ministry and the Great Commission. The surprise comes when we look at our churches today in light of Jesus' command to make disciples.

Why is it that we see so little disciple making taking place in the church today? Do we really believe that Jesus told his early followers to make disciples but wants the 21st century church to do something different?

In Isaiah 6, the prophet Isaiah walks into the Temple, probably expecting to have an ordinary experience there. Instead of encountering a priest, however, he sees God Himself in all His glory. Isaiah falls down on his face and cries out, believing himself, a sinful man, to die in the presence of a holy God. But instead of Isaiah's sin tainting God's holiness, the opposite happens. God's holiness and grace reaches in and infects Isaiah, removing his guilt and shame. This, in and of itself, is an astonishing scene. However, what happens next is even more powerful. God then asks a question.

Read Isaiah 6:8

What is happening here? Why do you think Isaiah reacts the way he does? What does this response say about what our response to God's love might look like?

Are you, like Isaiah, like Jesus' first followers, ready to commit yourself to studying the Scriptures and investing in the people around you? Why or why not?

Read Ephesians 3:7-11

Paul saw the church as a community of redeemed people in which each person is actively involved in doing the work of ministry. The pastor is not the minister – at least not in the way we typically think of a minister. The pastor is the equipper, and every member of the church is a minister. The implications of this are huge. Most Christians can give a number of reasons why they cannot or should not disciple other people: "I don't feel called to minister." "I just have too much on my plate right now; I don't have time to invest in other people." "I don't know enough." "I have too many issues of my own. I'll start once I get my life in order."

Are any of these excuses actually valid? What excuses tend to keep YOU from following Jesus' command to make disciples? What do you need to do in order to move past these excuses?

Being a disciple maker means that you will begin to look at the people in your life differently. Every person in your life is created in the image of God, and Jesus commands every one of them to follow Him. God has placed these people in your life so that you will do everything you can to influence them. Following Jesus means that you will be teaching other people to follow Jesus.

Who has God placed in your life right now that you can begin making into a disciple of Jesus?

Spend some time praying that God will make you into a committed and effective disciple maker. Confess any feelings of unpreparedness and insecurity. Ask Him to empower you for the ministry He is calling you to. Ask Him to lead you to the right people to partner with and the right people to begin discipling.

What do you think would happen if you helped lead one person to Christ and that person became a disciple maker themselves? What would your church look like? What would your world look like?

How can you help your church make disciples and multiply?

What first steps (or new steps) can you take to begin making disciples this month?

How can you help your church to dream and pray about planting new disciple-making communities – in schools, neighbourhoods, workplaces?

Evangelism & the Sovereignty of God — *J.I.Packer*

Exiles—Living Missionally in a Post-Christian Culture – *Michael Frost*

Gospel Fluency — *Jeff Vanderstelt*

The Great Omission — *Dallas Willard*

How to be a World-Class Christian — *Paul Borthwick*

Just Walk Across the Room — *Bill Hybels*

Let the Nations be Glad! — *John Piper*

Multiply — *Francis Chan*

Promoting the Gospel — *John Dickson*

Saturate — *Jeff Vanderstelt*

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Presenting Christ to Everyone
Presenting Everyone Mature in Christ