



Week 1 – THE CULTURAL MANDATE

Hey everyone,
Welcome to Week 1 of our small group discussions!

Today, let's dive into the fascinating topic of the Cultural Mandate.

Have you ever thought about how God's first instruction to humanity shapes our lives today?

In Genesis 1:27-28, we see God entrusting mankind with a profound responsibility: To be stewards of His creation. From building communities to nurturing nature, our

mandate is clear – we're called to partner with God in His work of shaping the world.

“So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. God blessed them and said to them, “Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground.”

Nancy Pearcey beautifully summarises this calling in her book, Total Truth, highlighting how we're tasked with cultivating society and harnessing the earth's resources.

This passage is sometimes called the "cultural mandate" because it tells us that our original purpose was to create cultures and build civilizations- nothing less.”

Now, let's ponder some thought-provoking questions:

A - Is culture truly neutral, or are there cultures that stand out as better or worse?

B - As Christians, do we have the power to influence and transform the culture around us – be it in our families, workplaces, or schools? How?

Moving on to the concept of Common Grace, let's reflect on how even amidst humanity's flaws, God showers His blessings upon all. From musicians to caregivers, each of us possesses unique gifts that can contribute to making the world a better place.

C - Do you know what your gifts are, and how do you think they can positively impact the world around you?

D - Lastly, what's one thing you'd love to change for the better in your world?

WEEK 2 - THE MISSION

Shall we kick off today with a question?

1 - When you hear the word "Missions," what springs to your mind?

(Remember, there's no wrong answer here; this is just friends chatting!)

For years, we've understood that God calls some to be "missionaries" or pastors, with special skills and training to fulfil Jesus' great commission. But what about everyone else? Teachers, musicians, engineers, nurses, salespeople, caregivers, cleaners, builders, business people. Are they all excluded from Jesus' mission?

Jesus certainly wasn't inviting those fishermen into a church job or an engaging hobby, as many of us might think of vocation in the Church today.

2 - What's your take on this statement below?

"Mission is what we do for God's global purposes.
Missional is how we live for God's global purposes."

3 - How do you incorporate God's purposes into your daily life?

Do you agree with this sentiment below?

"As the church gets older, it becomes harder to prioritize evangelism amidst competing issues."

What Does it Really Mean for a Church to Be "Missional"?

A missional church is a community of word, sacrament, and prayer where pastoral staff, officers, and members are united in their commitment to the Gospel-driven practice of the Great Commission of Jesus Christ in every area of ministry and life.

God will always be a missionary God.

His heart will always beat for the nations and church planting. He'll always be in the business of sending, redeeming, and discipling. Scripture clearly lays out His end vision—people from every tribe, tongue, language, and nation worshipping Him (Rev. 7:9). Whether we join Him in that work is up to us.

Week 3 – The Mapping:

The church's role is to share the gospel with everyone, everywhere.
But then comes the question:

How can we effectively and clearly communicate the gospel in our own setting?

It's an ongoing challenge for Christ's church in every era and cultural setting to bridge the gap from the context of Scripture to the context of its audience.
While this may seem straightforward, it's not always the case.

Many pastors are leading churches today that would have been wonderful if we lived in 1750.

Let's look at Paul's example in Athens (Acts 17):

The way the gospel was preached in Athens was similar to that in Lystra, in a completely pagan context with no connections to the Jewish religion. However, Athens' cultural and religious backdrop demanded a more sophisticated message to reach its people.

Athens was an urban, cosmopolitan, and pluralistic hub, the philosophical epicentre of the time. Paul meticulously mapped out the behaviour and culture of his audience.

When the church addresses questions that no one is asking, it becomes irrelevant

1 - What are your thoughts on this statement above?

Some churches, in their efforts to map culture and contextualise themselves, sometimes side-line biblical values.

2 - What do you think are appropriate levels of contextualisation? Who should have the authority to decide this?

3 - Do you believe your friends, neighbours, or colleagues would resonate with our local church or small group?

WEEK 4 – THE METHODS:

Today, our world is home to over 7 billion people.

Missiologists estimate that more than 2.8 billion of these individuals have limited or no access to the gospel. Essentially, billions are born, live their entire lives, and pass away without ever encountering the good news of Jesus Christ.

1 - How do you envision reaching the world with the gospel?

Throughout history, the church's expansion has been propelled by thousands of ordinary individuals. People who opened their doors to host small groups, local churches, and workplaces.

2 - Do you see yourself as a representative of God's kingdom, spreading the gospel in your social circles (family, friends, neighbours, etc.)?

3 - Would you be willing to compile a list of names and dedicate time to pray for them? Who knows, you might even invite them to your small group. How does that sound to you?

Churches can sometimes resemble garages in our homes.

Over time, we accumulate items we no longer use – toys, tools, clothes, etc. We store everything in the garage except the car. Similarly, in the church, we may uphold methods and ministries that were once effective but no longer serve their purpose. It's not that these methods are wrong; they've simply become outdated.

4- Do you believe we've become more attached to methods than to the mission?

5 - How receptive are we to changing methods in order to stay aligned with the mission?

Week 5 – The Model:

“Jesus went through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and sickness. When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.”

(Matthew 9.35,36)

- a) “Jesus went through” - The Greek verb means that what Christ did was not something rare, but something common, habitual in his life, that is, He was always doing it. Jesus' time was spent on the mission, it was his habit.
- b) “All the towns”. The second thing is that Jesus' field was everywhere. He didn't go just for some specific places.
- c) “The villages”. Villages at the time were towns that did not have “town status”, they were a place for poor people. Christ was there too. His work was without discrimination.

We see Jesus himself going always and, in all places, and social classes. Later on, we see in the pages of New Testament Jesus sending his disciples. In Acts we see the apostles repeating this model and sending apostolic groups to plant churches with the “Antioch Church” (Acts 13)

From this we learn that:

Mission is not an option but the very essence of the church since the beginning.

In the traditional church model, the church sends missionaries while in the “missional church model” the church itself is sent.

1 - In your own words, what is a missional church?

2- What changes in your life when you know that the mission is not a department or ministry of the church, but rather the essence of each Christian.

3- What do you consider to be a healthy and appropriate model for sharing your faith? (There are no wrong answers)

4 - What is your biggest challenge/difficulty in sharing your faith with someone? Shall we pray for this?

5 - How about we pray for the list of names of people we want to see saved?

Week 6 – The Momentum

"...All over the world this gospel is bearing fruit and growing, just as it has been doing among you since the day you heard it and understood God's grace in all its truth."

(Col. 1.6)

Have you ever paused to ponder the remarkable journey of our faith, conveyed to us through delicate letters?

Consider the tireless messengers tasked with delivering Paul's letters, traversing challenging terrain by horseback, enduring rain, heat, and traversing both land and sea. How many times did the devil attempt to thwart their mission?

Our Christian faith is nothing short of miraculous, and the church, a testament to divine intervention. Across the centuries, the Holy Spirit has breathed life into the church, propelling it forward against all odds.

In Colossians 1:6, Paul marvels at how the gospel not only reached the Colossians but also bore fruit and flourished throughout the world. While he employs hyperbole to convey the extent of its reach, when he refers to "the whole world," he is actually alluding to the known world at the time. In fact, when the apostle was in Rome, the good news of Christ was already being announced in every part of the known world, preached everywhere in the Roman Empire. Well the underlying truth remains: the Word of God spread far and wide, even amidst persecution.

Now, let's delve into some questions for reflection:

1. Imagine for a moment you're receiving £500 for each person brought to faith. Do you think this would motivate us more for evangelise?
2. In your opinion, what modern challenges threaten the Christian faith today?
3. Do you believe contemporary Christians are quick to abandon spreading the message?
4. From your perspective, what is needed for the advancement of the modern church?
5. What can you, in your small world, do to advance the mission of Jesus?

Let's explore these questions together with open hearts and minds.

Week 7 – The Mess

So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off.

(Acts 13.3)

To embark on a mission, or to be sent forth?

Within our Christian world, there exists a myriad of church planters eager to forge their path independently, free from the guidance and accountability of a local church. Conversely, some churches remain hesitant or disinterested in participating in the vital process of church planting.

Yet, the Bible underscores the significance of being sent forth on a mission, a divine calling that necessitates the collaboration of both the church and the called individuals.

However, this calling often comes with its own set of challenges.

Let's reflect on the following statement together:

"Self-centred churches have little consideration for others outside their circle and are largely focused on their own growth or advancement."

1 - What are your thoughts on this statement above?

In Acts 13, we witness the Antioch church fervently praying and fasting, attuned to the voice of the Holy Spirit. They obediently laid hands on Paul and Barnabas, commissioning them to spread the gospel among the Gentiles, in alignment with God's will.

Let's engage in a thoughtful discussion and explore these questions together.

- 1- How would your local church respond if presented with a similar scenario? Would there be hesitancy in releasing individuals to serve elsewhere?
- 2- Despite knowing that your local church may lose a valued leader, would you extend your wholehearted support to their new mission in another location? If so, how would you demonstrate this support?
- 3- Let's delve into self-reflection: Is it possible that we condemn self-centredness in others while justifying it within ourselves? What are your thoughts on this?

Week 8 – The Moment:

Don't you have a saying, 'It's still four months until harvest'? I tell you, open your eyes and look at the fields! They are ripe for harvest.

John 4.35

“Open your eyes and look at the fields”.

When was the last time you lifted your eyes and truly beheld the fields?

It's imperative that our vision extends beyond our immediate surroundings to encompass a global perspective.

Consider the latest census findings:

- Christians are now a minority in the UK.
- There's been a 44% growth in the Muslim population over the last decade.
- The Christian population has dipped below the 50% mark.
- For the first time ever, the Christian population in England and Wales is less than 50%.
- One in every three people identifies as having no religion.

If we simply open our eyes, we'll witness the profound lostness of the world. From the educated to the unlearned, from the religious to the secular, humanity at large is adrift. Without Christ, individuals are severed from God, from one another, from themselves, and from the very essence of nature.

When John Kennedy was assassinated in Dallas, 12 hours later, half the world already knew. Currently, almost half of the world still does not know about the cross of Christ.

Jesus says the time is now. It's harvest time.

Since 1981, Islam has surpassed even Roman Catholicism.

11,227 ethnicities in the world. 6,214 have less than 2% evangelicals.

1.51 billion people, who speak 6661 languages, do not have a complete Bible in their first language.

Check this number below, 145 million people, speaking 1892 languages, still need translation work.

- Africa - 558 languages, 16 million people
- Americas - 119 languages; 2.4 million people
- Asia - 751 languages, 124 million people
- Europe - 59 languages; 2.3 million people
- Pacific – 405 languages; 0.43 million people

Questions:

1. How do these statistics make you feel?
2. How can we contribute to missions work and the establishment of new churches in light of these findings?
3. If financial constraints were not an issue, what would you envision yourself doing to further Jesus' mission?
4. Would you and your small group be willing to pray together specifically for these statistics throughout the week?
5. Is our local church currently engaged in any church planting initiatives globally? Try to get information.