

Getting Your Group off the Myth and On Mission by Ryan Brymer

The Myth

There's an unspoken myth in the church. It goes like this... There are really only four ways to serve God: be a preacher, work at the church, be a missionary (slide projector and all), or be Billy Graham. Although we'd never admit this myth to be the reality, I'm sure we've all seen its effects. How many well-meaning Christians have you seen go to seminary or Bible college only to end up in a ministry job that is a bad fit? Or they end up quitting the pursuit, feeling like they just weren't built to serve God? This is a sad reality. The good news is, however, that you – the small group leader – have the opportunity (if not the obligation) to prove this myth false.

Your Call – Their Call

I'll admit that I bought into the myth for some time and actually used part of what I'm about to show you to justify my thinking. Praise God that He revealed to me the power of reading in context and showed me a verse that has driven my ministry for the last few years.

It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. – Ephesians 4:11-13 (NIV)

This passage beautifully lays out the role of Christian leaders and the body of Christ. Verse 11 may very well be the source of the myth, but verses 12-13 open up a proliferation of service opportunities for the body to fulfill, each as unique as the one carrying it out.

Group Members on Mission

There are a number of great tools for helping people figure out how God uniquely designed them from spiritual gifts surveys, to strength analyses, and personality assessments. These are wonderful tools, but they still fail to plug people in or overcome the myth. So, I'd like to offer a simple equation for helping group members tap into God's mission for their life:

(Gifts + Passions) Engaged for God's Glory

The assessment tools listed above are great for helping people discover their gifts, but the fact is most people know how God has wired them. Second, most people have something they're passionate about. (Note: Some might think that their passions are not the makings of ministry. That's ok, just naming them will help get the process moving.) Once group members have identified those two pieces, you can help them figure out how to engage that for God's glory.

At this point, it is important for you to avoid the myth at all costs. It will be easy for someone to say (Playing Guitar + Performing Music) Engaged for God's Glory, "I should play in the band at church!" While this is the perfect fit for some, it is important to help them think through other options, for instance: teaching free guitar lessons in an after school program.

Everyone has been gifted by God. He's also placed passions within each person. And there are few things more exciting than helping folks figure out how they can be engaged for God's glory.

Putting it Into Action

It's one thing to find a good place to fit, it is entirely another to actually put it into action. This

is where the small group leader becomes the cheerleader and challenger, because at the end of the day it is totally up to the group member himself to get "on mission." There are several ways, however, that you can encourage group members to action:

- Let them know that no service is bigger or smaller than another. We're all part of the same mission of making God known to the world around us.
- Remind them that no service is more or less holy than another. Some people are made to teach children's Sunday school. Some are made to administer computer systems.
- Encourage them with the fact that the only way they'll ever know if it really is their place of mission is by doing it.

On Mission Examples

Many of us (even if we know better) have the mental image of the missionary with photos from the "mission field" teaching us how to say "hello" in the language of their country. ("Jambo" is Swahili for "hello.") So, to break that mold, here are a couple of examples of folks on mission.

A married couple from my church returned home from a year in India. They weren't trained missionaries and they didn't go there to start a church. What did they do? They engaged their skills in business and their passion for the people of India for God's glory by helping a group of women start a business making gift cards and wrapping paper. This couple loved God and poured into these women by taking a risk. Now, these women have a stable source of income.

Or maybe you've heard of Gary Haugen, founder of International Justice Mission, who is using his education and law degree coupled with his passion for the oppressed to make a difference worldwide. Gary and his team face down injustice in the darkest corners of the world every day.

The truth is that your group members don't have to travel around the world or even across the country. But, if they will seek to engage their gifts and passions for God's glory, there's no telling where He will take them.

Learning to Be Jesus to Others by Brandy Bruce

To be honest, I was a little nervous.

My hand rested on my five-month pregnant belly as I listened to the instructions given at the Denver Rescue Mission. I stood with the other ten members of our small group, waiting to serve the evening meal at the shelter. Just minutes before, I'd seen a line of people gathering outside the small mission in downtown Denver.

We were assigned our individual responsibilities and took our places. As I stood at my post behind the salad bowl, my mind thought back to the conversation among our group just a few weeks before. Meeting together and studying Scripture is great, Jason, our leader, had said. But we should find ways to serve our community, to show God's heart for people through our actions. Serving meals at a shelter had been just one of the ideas mentioned that night.

And so there I was: pregnant, standing behind a long table with tongs in my hand, the first in line to serve the salad. My heart was pounding as the doors opened and people began filing in. But as person after person walked through the line, my anxiety disappeared and I only felt more and more thankful for the opportunity to be a part of what we were doing. A man walked

by wearing layers of clothing to protect him from the bitter cold in Colorado; a woman with her son; two college-aged, clean-cut men with old suitcases; a few people who couldn't speak English; young people, old people, alone and together, some with shy smiles, others lowering their eyes in shame—all hungry, needing someone to care enough to help.

After the doors finally closed, we swept floors and wiped tables. I found myself working by a young woman who was a regular volunteer. "Lunch time can be a bit harder," she told me. "We get more women and children then. It can break your heart." I thought about her words long after we left that night. And I realized that I needed my heart to break for these people. We all did. We needed to feel enough compassion and concern to get involved—to take us out of our comfort zone and into the places where Jesus would want to go.

The mood among our group was different as we left. We were smiling and excited, talking about different people we'd met or how we felt about the experience. And I realized that doing acts of service together actually helped us grow as a small group. Studying Scripture together is just one way for people to grow in their faith and their sense of community. Rolling up your sleeves and participating in some sort of activity meant to benefit others is another, powerful way to grow in faith and community.

Acts of service come in all shapes and sizes. One weekend our group took time to help paint the house of one of our members. Another time one of the guys from our group came up with the idea to organize a flag football game for our church. We encouraged people to participate and bring monetary donations if possible. After the game, the money was donated to Compassion International. Sometimes living in community looks like a small group bringing meals to a family with a newborn. Other times it might be donating clothes or personal items to a shelter for abused women. Take time to brainstorm with your group and come up with ways you can help each other and others in need. And consider the verse below:

If you've gotten anything at all out of following Christ, if his love has made any difference in your life, if being in a community of the Spirit means anything to you, if you have a heart, if you care— then do me a favor: Agree with each other, love each other, be deep-spirited friends. . . . Forget yourselves long enough to lend a helping hand. (Philippians 2:1-4, The Message)

Incorporating service into our small group taught us the importance of being Jesus to other people. But what surprised me most was the fact that we began to have a better understanding of the privilege and responsibility of consistently being Jesus to each other. If your small group wants to get involved in your community, below are just a few ideas to get you started:

- Serve meals at a soup kitchen
- Help clean the sanctuary, bathrooms, and kitchen at your church one afternoon
- Provide a meal for a youth group get-together
- Visit a nursing home
- Help a family with home repairs
- Donate used items to the Salvation Army
- Pool together resources to support a Compassion International child for a year
- Host a food drive through your church and donate what's collected to your local food bank