

## MULTIPLICATION VALUES SMALL GROUP STUDY GUIDE

#2 CULTURAL RELEVANCE: More than preserving the status quo.

### **Introduction:**

No church can be all things to all people. Some have suggested that today, a congregation can have up to 7 different generations under one roof at one time. Little wonder we don't always get along with one another! Compound that with the world of underserved people outside our sanctuary doors and their diverse expectations and it becomes easier to see how difficult it is for a church to be "relevant" to everyone at once. Think of your congregation, what generation, ethnic and economic group would most comfortably fit in if they were to be invited? Who would probably be turned off?

Becoming "self aware" is a huge step forward for most of us as we develop and grow. This is also true for churches. To know who it is that you serve best, who it is that you are most able to reach and who you will probably never be able to connect with is important information. With this awareness you can move ahead with new possibilities including sponsoring a new church start that may target those your congregation will never be able to reach. Some have suggested that nearly 60% of those unreached in north America will never connect to our existing congregations due to social, economic, political or ethnic barriers. They have written the church off as irrelevant to their lives. They will need to be reached through a ministry that is very different in style and approach yet faithful to the gospel.

The Bible is full of examples where culture becomes an issue in the advance of the gospel. As the advance of the message moved from the Jewish people to the Gentiles new forms and structures were needed (Acts 15). The same is true today. Whether your congregation is traditional or contemporary in style, the facts are that our world continues to change as new ethnic groups and generations spring up. Church planting is a way to continually pour the new wine of the gospel into new wineskins...to provide new structures and forms for the fresh gospel message as it comes to a new opportunity!

**Read Scripture:** Matthew 9:14-17; I Corinthians 9:19-23; Acts 11:19-23

### **Discussion Questions:**

What experience have you had with cultural or generational expressions of Christian faith that are different from your own?

When in your development as a Christian did you need a gospel presence that was relevant to your personal circumstances?

What is changing in your social context? What new people group is in need of a church? Can your church accommodate their needs and preferences or do they need a church that is unique to who they are?

### **Dig In:**

1. In Matthew 9:14-17 Jesus uses imagery to show how his new message cannot be put into an older form and structure (Judaism). How have you seen that structures have needed to change for the sake of the message of the gospel?
2. In I Corinthians 9:19-23 Paul expresses his commitment to adapt himself to those he is seeking to reach. In what sense do you think he thinks of himself as “free” and in what sense does he think of himself as a “slave”?
3. In I Corinthians 9:22 Paul describes the ends to which he will go to “win some”. What would that kind of approach look like today in a new church plant?
4. Acts 11:19-23 describes the significant change some men from Cyprus and Cyrene made in their gospel witness. What was the change they made and what was the result? What kind of impact do you think this change made with Jewish leaders? Does cultural relevance always create tension or conflict?
5. The church in Antioch was a church plant borne out of necessity. What would a proactive approach to church planting look like in your community versus a plant borne out of necessity?

### **Wrap Up:**

What can you celebrate and learn from in your experience in this area? How has your church taken steps to reach out and stretch beyond their comfort level?

Cultural relevance does not always make ministry easier, it often makes it more difficult as witnessed by Paul. What would it take for your congregation to significantly reach those who will never come into your Sunday services? What will be most difficult?

Resistance to change is often part of being culturally relevant. What is the resistance to change in your context that keeps you from connecting with people who are distant from your ministry?

### **Prayer:**

What do you need to pray about in this area of being more relevant to those you are not reaching? Pray about church planting as a possible answer to this need.

Take time to name and pray for those who are near your ministry but not being reached. What are their needs? What does the world look like from their perspective? Pray for insight.

Ben Ingebretson, *Multiplication Moves 2012*