

Pastor's and Leader's Guide: Vibrant Communities

KEY THEMES

With eyes of faith, what do we see?

Vibrant Communities...

1. Following Jesus in their own distinctive ways
2. Sharing God's love
3. Humbly contextualising the Good News
4. Partnering together

This guide has been written as a launching pad for pastors and leaders to use in exploring the key themes with churches and small groups.

Each theme has an **exploration** of the theme and scripture/s, **takeaways**, mission **stories** to use as illustrations and **questions** for small groups.

This guide can be used as a four week series or as standalone sessions.

Explore more resources:
www.globalinteraction.org.au

Theme One: Vibrant Communities... Following Jesus in their own distinctive ways

SCRIPTURE

¹ A few days later, when Jesus again entered Capernaum, the people heard that he had come home. ² They gathered in such large numbers that there was no room left, not even outside the door, and he preached the word to them. ³ Some men came, bringing to him a paralyzed man, carried by four of them. ⁴ Since they could not get him to Jesus because of the crowd, they made an opening in the roof above Jesus by digging through it and then lowered the mat the man was lying on. ⁵ When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralyzed man, “Son, your sins are forgiven.”

⁶ Now some teachers of the law were sitting there, thinking to themselves, ⁷ “Why does this fellow talk like that? He’s blaspheming! Who can forgive sins but God alone?”

⁸ Immediately Jesus knew in his spirit that this was what they were thinking in their hearts, and he said to them, “Why are you thinking these things? ⁹ Which is easier: to say to this paralyzed man, ‘Your sins are forgiven,’ or to say, ‘Get up, take your mat and walk’? ¹⁰ But I want you to know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins.” So he said to the man, ¹¹ “I tell you, get up, take your mat and go home.” ¹² He got up, took his mat and walked out in full view of them all. This amazed everyone and they praised God, saying, “We have never seen anything like this!”

Mark 2:1-12

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EXPLORE

This story recounted by Mark is a special one. It’s a powerful metaphor for all of us as we think about mission locally and globally. What’s the heart of this story? Getting people to Jesus. Taking away the barriers – breaking through them if need be! – to help get our friends to Jesus.

Let’s look at the story. The man and his friends have heard about Jesus. They know He has power and they know what they have to do. The group carries their friend in a stretcher with the intention of getting him to Jesus, but they hit a barrier. The entrance is blocked. Mark paints the picture of a crowd squeezed inside, a house full of people who are motivated to see Jesus for different reasons.

The men know why they are there and they know they have to get in. So what do they do? They make a new entrance! They believe that if they can just get their friend to Jesus, then his life will be transformed. And so, creatively, and somewhat riskily, they make a way through the roof. They remove the barrier and their friend gets to Jesus.

It’s a powerful metaphor for our mission today. It certainly speaks to the work of Global Interaction’s teams around the world. The reality is that 40% of people around the globe still haven’t heard the Good News in a way that makes sense to them. In a way they can understand in their cultural context and language. That’s injustice.

This exploration is based off sermon 1 of Scott Pilgrim’s sermon series. Scott is Global Interaction’s Executive Director.

You can find the video and audio of these sermons and others here:
www.globalinteraction.org.au/MMMresources

Theme One:

Vibrant Communities... Following Jesus in their own distinctive ways

Global Interaction's vision is to see *vibrant faith communities following Jesus in their own distinctive ways*. But how are we going to see this vision become a reality? We are only going to see it when people are able to hear and understand the Good News in their culture and community. And this is what our intercultural teams passionately seek to facilitate every day by humbly, respectfully, lovingly - but boldly - removing the barriers hindering their local friends from hearing the Good News.

Sometimes the cultural, religious and political barriers seem more obvious in the contexts our teams serve than in our local settings. But what is true across the world is true in our Australian neighbourhoods as well. In our increasingly secular and multicultural communities, there are growing barriers that people in our local neighbourhoods face before they can get to Jesus. **What are they? And how can we creatively break down these barriers so our communities can be transformed by encountering Jesus right where they are?**

Whether we are in North Manly or Northern Thailand, South East Asia or South Australia, a small country town in Outback Australia or a dusty road of Malawi... God is at work. His gracious invitation for us is to partner with Him, to see people come to know Jesus in ways that makes sense to them.

TAKEAWAYS TO APPLY

» Authentic Relationships

The men have a genuine friendship and from this foundation comes a desire to respond to their friend's physical needs. In the context of an authentic relationship, we want to journey with our friends in all aspects of life and see them experience the hope of Jesus that we've experienced.

» Teamwork

The friends work together. They collaborate. Right through the Australian Baptist mission story, partnership has been key. From the first Aussie Baptist workers who were sent in 1882, global mission has been part of our DNA and it can't happen without the partnership of churches and individuals who pray, give and advocate. We genuinely can only do it together!

» Innovation

The men arrive to the house and there's a challenge. There's a barrier. But they face it with creative, solution-focused thinking. They could have just turned around and gone home, but they said, "No, we're going to look for a way. We're going to do something different." And they did, so that their friend could get to Jesus. For the 40% of the world yet to hear the message of Jesus in a way that makes sense to them, we're going to have to do mission differently.

» Courage to Take Risks

The group of friends took a big risk! They could have failed. We're invited to step out and be part of God's mission, but we've got to give ourselves permission to fail and to get back up and try again.

» Intentionality

The five men knew what they had to do. They knew that they had to get to Jesus to give their friend who was paralysed the best chance of transformation. They didn't know what would happen, but they knew the part that they could play. God invites us to be part of His mission. To get people to Jesus, to break down barriers and to share God's love while He brings about the transformation.

Theme One:

Vibrant Communities... Following Jesus in their own distinctive ways

THEMATIC STORIES AND RESOURCES

Use these as sermon illustrations, discussion starters for small groups or standalone resources.

1. Your stories!

What local mission stories can you share that speak to this theme or passage?

2. VIDEO story of vibrant faith communities in Thailand:

<https://vimeo.com/519316060>

3. VIDEO story of leaders being empowered in Malawi:

<https://vimeo.com/522672311>

4. PODCAST episode 10 - Sowing and Reaping (Ben, Silk Road Area):

www.globalinteraction.org.au/Missioning

5. Story of Ben in the Silk Road Area

Ben serves as an Intercultural Worker among the K people. Historically, there have been many barriers for the K people to see and understand the Good News.

Ben is learning the K culture and language, humbly seeking to understand the people around him so that he can build relationships and share the Good News in relevant ways. In the K culture, shame and honour and very influential cultural values. People are bound up in shame culture.

Ben knows the what the cross means to him, but in taking the context he is in seriously, Ben is humbly, graciously and creatively re-framing the way He communicates the Gospel. **He's not changing it, but he is embracing a new way of presenting the story of Jesus so that it makes sense to his K friends.**

There Ben sits with a young K man sharing the scriptures, in his language and in a way he understands. **Suddenly the lights come on and this young man says, "Jesus takes away my shame and places me in a place of honour."** We start to see this man understanding the Good News, in his own distinctive way.

6. Story of Sally in Mozambique

Sally, an Intercultural Worker, is friends with an older Yawo Muslim woman in Mozambique. One day the woman comes to Sally's house to tell her that her cousin is in labour and had gone to the hospital. **Sally sits down with her friend and prays for the woman in labour and the baby in Jesus' name.**

The following morning Sally and her friend go to visit her cousin in hospital and are delighted to discover that she has given birth to twins! Sally's friend can't contain her excitement and begins to share with all present, that God heard their prayers and blessed their family with two beautiful babies.

Later that day, they bring the twins home and the family agree that Sally can pray and thank God for His provision. Just as they begin to pray, two highly respected chiefs walked into the room, curious to see the babies for themselves.

Theme One:

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To Sally's surprise, her friend boldly asks the chiefs to join them in their prayer to Jesus, and to her utter amazement they agree! This is truly amazing as it's very uncommon for a woman in Mozambique to lead prayers for men, let alone pray in the name of Jesus. Together they pray and thank Jesus, not as a prophet but as the Son of God.

Sally continues to spend time with her friend, reading stories of Jesus in the Bible. Her friend is excited to discover the wonderful messages of hope found in the Gospel. Recently she shared that Jesus has even visited her in her dreams - something very meaningful in Yawo culture.

7. Story of Megan in Melbourne

Megan lives in Melbourne and works as a nurse. An asylum seeker family recently moved into her neighbourhood. They have lived through the trauma of offshore detention and they are trying to work out how to live life in Melbourne. It's a very different place to where they've come from.

What are they looking for? Acceptance, belonging and friendship. So Megan invites them to sit with her in her home and with her family. She invites them to share food, and through broken conversation, to laugh and do life together. Megan is seeking to build authentic relationships and break down barriers so that they might see the love that God has for them, and for all of us, as broken people on a healing journey.

QUESTIONS FOR SMALL GROUPS

- » What barriers did you experience before encountering Jesus in a way that made sense to you? If significant barriers hindered you, how did you 'get' to Jesus? If few or no barriers hindered you, reflect on how this makes you feel.
- » What barriers to hearing the Good News are present in your neighbourhood? How do you know what these are? How can you break them down?
- » How do you respond to the risky actions of the men in this story? Does Jesus' response surprise you?
- » What do you personally take away from this story?
- » What are the distinctive ways in which you and your faith community follow Jesus? Have you ever found the ways other people worship or follow Jesus confronting? Reflect on that experience and your response.
- » Read, watch or listen to one or two of the above thematic stories. What excites you? How can you see God at work? What mission practices can you see the workers doing that you could do in your own neighbourhood?

Theme Two: Vibrant Communities... Sharing God's love

SCRIPTURES

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

John 3:16

The Word became flesh and blood, and moved into the neighbourhood.

We saw the glory with our own eyes, the one-of-a-kind glory, like Father, like Son,
Generous inside and out, true from start to finish.

John 1:14 (The Message)

EXPLORE

“For God so loved the world...” The extraordinary truth of this is sometimes lost in our familiarity of the verse, but let's be captivated by it again.

In John 3:16 we see that it starts with love. It starts with God's love for the world and for us, just as we are. But it doesn't stop there. We then see God's action overflowing from His love, “For God so loved the world that he gave his only son...” God's missional response is to open a way for humanity to experience life in right relationship with Him. To open a way for us to experience His love.

It's an incredible reminder that mission doesn't start with us.

It's not something that Global interaction or your Baptist church can put a trademark on. **No, mission begins in the very heart of God. Mission is birthed through a God of love, compassion and grace. And at its heart, mission is a response to God's overflowing love for the world.**

In 2020, Global Interaction sought God's leading in establishing our 2021 - 2025 Strategic Roadmap. As we looked at the big picture of our ministry priorities and strategies for the next season, we also stripped it all back to determine what our underpinning 'why' is. Why do we do what we do? The simple statement we articulated to answer that important question is, *because nothing matters more than sharing God's love for the world.*

This is incredibly meaningful for us at Global Interaction - our intercultural teams are motivated by this every day - but it's also beautifully universal. It's the foundation that underpins all vibrant faith communities, locally and globally.

Wherever we are, God's gracious invitation to us is to be His hands and feet. To partner with Him in sharing His love through word and deed. At Global Interaction, we have discerned to accept God's invitation by working in difficult places. In communities where entrenched barriers hinder people's opportunity to hear and accept the Gospel. Why these communities? Because 40% of the world is still yet to hear the Good News in their language and culture. And only 2% (or less!) of Christian resources are allocated to this significant missional need.

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Theme Two: Vibrant Communities... Sharing God's love

Together, as part of the Australian Baptist movement and *only* with your partnership, we are being God's hands and feet in these Gospel-poor communities. It's a matter of justice. And ultimately, it's a matter of love.

Earlier in the Gospel of John, the grand narrative of the incarnation is captured in one verse. In the Message translation, we read that Jesus became flesh and blood and moved into the human neighbourhood. What a powerful picture! What a beautiful statement - the God of the universe breaks into human history with love and grace.

This is a key verse for us at Global Interaction, and it speaks to all faith communities. It reminds us of the importance of Jesus' incarnation and gives us a model to follow as a mission community.

TAKEAWAYS TO APPLY

» Love Now

God loves the world right now. John 3:16 doesn't say, for God was so disappointed in the world, or that He loved the few religiously faithful people of the world. No, His love comes without pre-condition. This is a challenging missional example for us to follow. In accepting God's grace-filled love for us, let's extend the same love to our neighbours by meeting them where they are and sharing God's love in a way they understand.

» Good Neighbours

Jesus enters into the neighbourhood and engages with the people in that community. In whichever community God has placed us, He calls us to live as good and loving neighbours. To be present in that place. For our intercultural workers, this means embracing the culture, language and way of life in that community. It means participating in the everyday community activities and practices that are already happening. That's where it begins. And for people in Australia? Being a good neighbour means exactly the same thing! It's parents being present in the school community and building relationships with other parents, and it's people doing life with their actual neighbours.

» Alongside

Being good neighbours means journeying alongside people, sharing God's love and inviting them to meet Jesus where they are. Because on earth, that's where He met people! He met them in *their* culture, language and context.

For our Global Interaction intercultural teams, 'alongside' means humbly listening, learning and building authentic relationships. It means breaking down the barriers that are hindering people from getting to Jesus by communicating the Good News in ways that makes sense to them. It's not about calling people into church communities that look like ours. But about coming alongside people and inviting them to meet a Jesus who speaks their language.

» Respond

Experiencing God's love in our own lives demands a response. How will we be Jesus' hands and feet in our neighbourhoods? How will we partner with God's mission globally and in our own backyards? Incredibly, God uses us - in all our weakness - as part of His redemptive plan. His gracious invitation to partner with Him in His activity around the world is a genuine invitation. Let's accept it!

Theme Two: Vibrant Communities... Sharing God's love

THEMATIC STORIES AND RESOURCES

Use these as sermon illustrations, discussion starters for small groups or standalone resources.

1. Your stories!

What local mission stories can you share that speak to this theme or passage?

2. VIDEO story of the team sharing God's love in South East Asia:

<https://vimeo.com/525874998> (contact Global Interaction for the password)

3. VIDEO story of a missional social enterprise in Warrandyte, VIC:

<https://vimeo.com/527099916>

4. PODCAST episode 6 - Good Neighbours (Scott Pilgrim, Executive Director):

www.globalinteraction.org.au/Missioning

5. Story of Alice, local believer in South East Asia

Alice is a single mum, who has tragically lost her husband, and takes care of two young boys. She struggles to make ends meet. Alice could be your neighbour in Australia, a person who is just trying to get through each day the best she can. We could easily walk past her, and miss the promptings of the Holy Spirit to share God's love with her.

In reality, Alice lives in South East Asia, but she could have just as easily lived right next door to you or me. However, unlike most of us, Alice was born into one of the largest Muslim least-reached people groups in the world. It just so happens that Global Interaction workers have been living in her neighbourhood for over twenty years, and they've become friends.

Over the course of many years, various intercultural workers in Alice's neighbourhood have been getting alongside her, reading the Bible and sharing Jesus with her in ways she can understand. When she is in need, she turns to them. Like when her son falls sick. Or when she is involved in a serious accident, and she experiences God's miraculous healing.

Global Interaction workers Dave and Caz have the privilege of journeying with Alice and being there as she is baptised. Flash forward and Alice receives training and becomes the first employee of the Education Foundation established by Dave and Caz. Now, she is one of the lead language nurturers in the institute and she's a disciple maker. **What a beautiful story of God's love and transforming power, which all starts with people deciding to be good neighbours.**

6. Story of Eliza and David in the Silk Road Area

David and Eliza are Global Interaction workers from Australia. They live among the K people on the Silk Road along with their family of three beautiful children. God is at work through their faithfulness, as they do life with their neighbours and share the Good News with the people around them.

David and Eliza are friends with a K woman, Anna, a mum who suffers from domestic violence, even while being pregnant with her sixth child. Living so close to the poverty line, David and Eliza often have to find her and her children places to sleep, including in their home.

Theme Two: Vibrant Communities... Sharing God's love

In the midst of Anna's struggles, Eliza is dressing wounds, both physical and emotional ones. She travels to the hospital with Anna and prays with her. Eliza is being a loving neighbour to her friend, being Jesus' hands and feet in action.

Then in January Anna's baby is born. Eliza is asked to be the baby's godmother, a beautiful sign of a blossoming friendship, a blessing of God's love.

Our workers hold hope for these children who might otherwise never hear the Good News. David and Eliza pray for the baby boy, that he might grow up to know the love and hope of Jesus. They pray that he might become a leader in his community, and in turn lead others in his community to follow Jesus.

God's transforming work starts with one life at a time. One day at a time. It starts as each of us embrace God's gracious invitation to mission in our backyard. Where is the Holy Spirit prompting you? Who are the neighbours God has placed into your world?

QUESTIONS FOR SMALL GROUPS

- » How have you witnessed people sharing God's love? What's been the impact?
- » What's personally challenging for you in these verses? (John 3:16 and John 1:14)
- » Why does it change for you if it starts with love? And how does this impact the way you engage with people?
- » Do you find it harder to accept God's grace-filled love or to give it? Reflect on the cultural values or life experiences that have shaped your response.
- » What do you take away from Jesus' model of mission? How does it translate to your context?
- » Read, watch or listen to one or two of the above thematic stories. What excites you? How can you see God at work? What mission practices can you see the workers doing that you could do in your own neighbourhood?

Theme Three: Vibrant Communities... Humbly contextualising the Good News

SCRIPTURE

⁷ After much discussion, Peter got up and addressed them: “Brothers, you know that some time ago God made a choice among you that the Gentiles might hear from my lips the message of the gospel and believe. ⁸ God, who knows the heart, showed that he accepted them by giving the Holy Spirit to them, just as he did to us. ⁹ He did not discriminate between us and them, for he purified their hearts by faith. ¹⁰ Now then, why do you try to test God by putting on the necks of Gentiles a yoke that neither we nor our ancestors have been able to bear? ¹¹ No! We believe it is through the grace of our Lord Jesus that we are saved, just as they are.”

... “¹⁹ It is my judgment, therefore, that we should not make it difficult for the Gentiles who are turning to God.”

Acts 15 (full text not recorded above)

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EXPLORE

When the truth of the Gospel is planted in soil, the tree that grows is influenced by the environment it's in. It's watered and shaped by the culture, language and customs of the community's soil that it is growing it. The flowers that bloom and the leaves that emerge are products of the seed, yes, but also the soil.

So when the truth of the Gospel is planted somewhere else, will the same plant grow? *Should* the same plant grow?

These are the questions that the early church is grappling with in Acts 15. The church has been birthed and the Good News is moving beyond the Jewish community. It is spreading from one culture to another and suddenly there are new questions to answer. For the Jewish believers, their expression of faith in Jesus is born out of their culture and community. But how does this translate to the Gentile believers? Do the Gentile believers need to be like them - adopting the same rules, rituals and regulations - in order to follow Jesus?

James stands up before the Jerusalem council and says, “**It is my judgment, therefore, that we should not make it difficult for the Gentiles who are turning to God.**” They are powerful words that would have been radical at the time. They are also incredibly poignant for faith communities in Australia and our intercultural teams around the world. How can we not make it difficult for our neighbours to experience the truth of God's Word? What are the practices or traditions that work for me, that are comfortable for me, but actually hinder others from coming to know Jesus in a way that makes sense to them?

These questions are at the heart of how our Global Interaction teams operate. With humility, they live as good neighbours, develop authentic relationships, learn the local language, listen, immerse themselves in the culture and ask questions. Why? So that when they do have the opportunity to share the Gospel, they can communicate it in a way that is understandable in that context.

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Theme Three:

Vibrant Communities...

Humbly contextualising the Good News

It's not about changing the Gospel, but about stripping away the layers of cultural baggage that we can so easily package the Gospel in.

What are the core truths of the Gospel that we are called to share, and what does it look like to journey with others as they discern how to follow Jesus in their own distinctive ways?

TAKEAWAYS TO APPLY

» Openness

Reading Acts 15, you can feel the tension in the room. They are encountering big theological issues. But there's also an openness to God's Spirit. An openness to ask, "What is God doing here? Where is God in this?" They're critical questions for all of us to ask as we engage with our friends.

For Petra on the Silk Road, she finds that her friend Mrs K is interested in reading the scriptures with her. But Petra and Ben wonder, in this context, which book do they read from? Their holy book or Mrs K's holy book? They are open to what God is doing and they discern that they should alternate between reading from each of the books. This quiet statement of humility and respect opens up wonderful discussions. Through it all, God's Spirit is at work, revealing Jesus to Mrs K. She sees Him jump out of the pages and professes trust in Him as God's son.

» Uncomfortable-ness

We can only imagine that some of the early believers were uncomfortable with the Gentiles not adopting the rules and regulations of the Jewish believers. That's ok! It's a good thing to live with tension and to ask questions. It's a good thing to grapple with the messiness of mission. There are core beliefs and values that we need to hold onto as we share the Good News with others... but our comfort isn't one! Are there things that you are holding onto that are comfortable for you, but that are actually making it more difficult for others to meet Jesus?

» Humility

Global Interaction workers enter communities with a posture of humility. Yes, they come with bold faith, but they also come humbly. They learn language, they listen, they ask questions, they become good neighbours and build authentic relationships. And with this foundation, they share the Good News. It's a model for all of us, wherever we are. Humbly coming alongside people, listening, knowing that we don't have all the answers but that we do have the Good News to share.

» Whole Communities

What would have happened if the Gentile believers were told they had to follow the law in the same way as the Jewish believers? Could they have remained as part of their community, or would their newly adopted practices separate them?

Global Interaction's vision is for whole communities. Not just one or two people. Not individuals extracted from their community, saved but now separated. No, we see *whole communities* following Jesus. And this is critical to contextualisation. Because if we are going to see local faith communities multiplying and reaching out to their own people, then they need to be following Jesus in ways that are born out of their culture and make sense in *that* place.

Theme Three: Vibrant Communities...

Humbly contextualising the Good News

THEMATIC STORIES AND RESOURCES

Use these as sermon illustrations, discussion starters for small groups or standalone resources.

1. Your stories!

What local mission stories can you share that speak to this theme or passage?

2. VIDEO story of the team building relationships in Thailand:

<https://vimeo.com/521682806>

3. VIDEO story of God's Word being shared in Mozambique:

<https://vimeo.com/521165514>

4. VIDEO reflection on Jesus' model of mission

<https://vimeo.com/521186763>

5. PODCAST episode 5 - Building Authentic Relationships (Pete, Central Asia):

www.globalinteraction.org.au/Missioning

6. Story of an Ethnic Thai faith community

Picture this. You are a young Aussie follower of Jesus and you are on your first mission exposure trip. Maybe it's one of your first times out of Australia. You're in Thailand, sitting on the floor in a room with Ethnic Thai believers and Global Interaction workers. In the middle of the room is a mat and a large bowl with rice in it, there's also some flowers and a cross. Jesus at the centre.

While you're sitting there, the Ethnic Thai believers begin chanting. It's unfamiliar to you and you're not sure what to think of it. You wonder what they are saying. Then it's time to pray and one of the group members passes string around the room. The believers tie string to their finger, then to the cross. **How do you respond? Are you comfortable with what you see?**

As the worship gathering finishes, you and the group of young Australians sit with one of the Global Interaction intercultural workers. Together you unpack what you have just witnessed. The chanting? That was the Ethnic Thai believers speaking the Apostles Creed. They were speaking scriptural truths in way that made sense to them.

And the string tying? In the Buddhist temples, people tie string to their waist or hand and then to Buddha. When they leave, they take the string with them. **But this group of followers of Jesus, they tie string from their hand to the cross and then leave the string at the cross. They have taken something meaningful from their cultural context and modified it to reflect their new freedom and faith in Jesus.** They leave their burdens at the cross. They surrender themselves at the cross. They walk out into the world as a people of the Good News, living in freedom, hope and peace.

Theme Three: Vibrant Communities... Humbly contextualising the Good News

7. Story of neighbourhood mission in Australia

Pete lives in the northern suburbs of Melbourne and goes to a local Baptist church. It's 2020, which for Melbourne, means a year of lockdown.

Something is stirring inside Pete to step out more and be more bold in his faith. He has a growing desire to share the hope of Jesus, but in the midst of that is fear. So, he gets back to basics. He looks for opportunities to be a good neighbour. And in 2020 in Melbourne, this means his actual neighbour, Mark.

Mark is a young Vietnamese man who has just recently moved in to the neighbourhood. They start to build a friendship and Pete takes opportunities to reach out to Mark. Simple, practical actions. Mark doesn't have a lawn mower so Pete mows his lawn. They start to chat over the fence. They exchange food. **Pete tries to cook some Vietnamese recipes and learns more about Buddhism. He demonstrates that he cares about Mark as a person. And one humble step at a time, an authentic relationship develops.**

There's an opportunity out of lockdown to share meals together, and so Pete invites some Vietnamese friends from his church around to join them. **As time goes on, trust grows and they are regularly reading the Bible together.** Mark has lots of questions and he's engaging with the stories. Pete is bringing to life the Good News in a way that makes sense to his friend. What does this look like your setting?

QUESTIONS FOR SMALL GROUPS

- » Can you think of a time where you have seen contextualisation in practice? Is there anything about contextualisation that makes you uncomfortable? Reflect on this. Where does this feeling come from?
- » How are you personally challenged by this passage or theme?
- » Reflect on your own expression of faith. What are aspects of your culture that you have accepted, modified or rejected as you follow Jesus? If you were an outsider looking in, would you identify the same or different things?
- » In your own experience, when have you encountered the greatest openness to conversations of faith? When have you got it wrong? Are there common threads across the group?
- » Read, watch or listen to one or two of the above thematic stories. What excites you? How can you see God at work? What mission practices can you see the workers doing that you could do in your own neighbourhood?

Theme Four: Vibrant Communities... Partnering together

SCRIPTURES

¹ I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a deacon of the church in Cenchreae. ² I ask you to receive her in the Lord in a way worthy of his people and to give her any help she may need from you, for she has been the benefactor of many people, including me.

³ Greet Priscilla and Aquila, my co-workers in Christ Jesus. ⁴ They risked their lives for me. Not only I but all the churches of the Gentiles are grateful to them.

⁵ Greet also the church that meets at their house. Greet my dear friend Epenetus, who was the first convert to Christ in the province of Asia.

⁶ Greet Mary, who worked very hard for you.

Romans 16 (full text not recorded above)

⁹ God, whom I serve in my spirit in preaching the gospel of his Son, is my witness how constantly I remember you ¹⁰ in my prayers at all times; and I pray that now at last by God's will the way may be opened for me to come to you.

Romans 1:9-10

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EXPLORE

The book of Romans is a grand, lofty letter from Paul to the early Roman church. It's full of great redemptive theology, describing who God is and unpacking big, foundational concepts grace and salvation.

And then we get to Romans 16. The final chapter of this grand book and... it's a little less grand! We get a list of names, almost as a postscript to the letter. We meet some of the people mentioned elsewhere in the Bible but for many, this is the only time we hear about them.

Following the bigness of what has come before it, it's not as clear to see how the final chapter is relevant to us today. **And yet, when we do dig into this chapter, we can find valuable and universal truths about partnership with each other in Kingdom work.**

In this chapter, Paul identifies 27 people by name. These are people who have supported him in his ministry in practical and spiritual ways. They are people who are excited by his Kingdom vision and want to be part of the team. And as he names people, he is celebrating the power of partnership. **He is celebrating the way each of them is playing their part in God's mission in that time and place, and that through this, the Kingdom is being advanced. He's celebrating how none of them can do it alone.**

That's the Australian Baptist mission story too. The first Aussie Baptist workers – bold young women – were sent out in 1882. They knew it wasn't about them. They knew that they were accepting God's gracious invitation to be part of His mission and part of what He was already doing in India.

This exploration is based off sermon 4 of Scott Pilgrim's sermon series. Scott is Global Interaction's Executive Director.

You can find the video and audio of these sermons and others here:
www.globalinteraction.org.au/MMMresources

Theme Four: Vibrant Communities... Partnering together

But they also knew that they *couldn't go* without the partnership of individuals, families and churches who would sacrificially give and faithfully pray. Partners back in Australia who were also accepting God's invitation to be part of His mission.

One thing that Paul's postscript at the end of his letter to the Romans teaches us, is that there is not shame but power in needing each other.

For nearly 140 years Global Interaction has been sending **people**. And it's because of your partnership that we have been able to see vibrant faith communities emerge. When you give, when you pray, when you share the stories and advocate... YOU are right there with our teams. You are in the bustling Cambodian market as Catherine builds relationships with the sellers, you are in the Silk Road Area as Petra reads the Bible with a K friend and you are in a village in Malawi as Tim witnesses a young man lead his first Bible study with a group of Yawo believers around him.

Together, we are partnering with what God is doing around the world. And as you partner with our teams, we are cheering you on in your church's local mission. How can we support you?

Let's explore what we can draw from Romans 16.

TAKEAWAYS TO APPLY

» Kingdom Purpose

Paul is united with this group of people because they are all working towards a common goal. They are co-workers called to advance the spread of the Gospel. For each of us, as followers of Jesus, the most important thing we can do is to live with Kingdom purpose. Serving Jesus, being His hands and feet and partnering together as co-workers for the advancement of the Kingdom.

» Relationship

In Romans 16 we get 27 names. 27 real people, real names, real relationships. When you invest in partnership with Global Interaction, you're not buying into a project or an initiative, as important as they are, you're investing in people. You are investing in people that God has called to share the Good News around the world. And as you partner with these workers, there's mutual encouragement. Together, you journey through the highs and lows of ministry and learn from each other.

» Prayer

One of our alumni, Dr Stuart Robinson writes that nothing of consequence happens without prayer. In Romans 1:9, Paul writes that he prays day and night for the needs of the community of believers. One of the most powerful and consequential things that you can do this year to partner with Global Interaction's ministry is to pray. Individually, upfront and as a church community, can you commit to regularly lifting up Global Interaction's teams and ministry in prayer?

» Practical Action

In Romans 16 we see a group of people partnering with each other in practical ways. There's hospitality and the sharing of meals. There's generosity and the sharing of finances. It's a genuine ministry partnership that manifests in practical and sacrificial ways. The reality is that Global Interaction workers can only do what they do with the generous support of partners across Australia. Thank you!

Theme Four:

Vibrant Communities... Partnering together

THEMATIC STORIES AND RESOURCES

Use these as sermon illustrations, discussion starters for small groups or standalone resources.

1. Your stories!

What local mission stories can you share that speak to this theme or passage?

2. VIDEO reflection from a candidate about partnership:

<https://vimeo.com/521723586> (contact Global Interaction for the password)

3. VIDEO conversation about the power of partnership:

<https://vimeo.com/525921676>

4. PODCAST episode 9 - The Power of Prayer (Liz, Thailand):

www.globalinteraction.org.au/Missioning

5. Story of a long-term prayer partner

A letter comes to the Global Interaction office for Scott Pilgrim, the Executive Director. Scott doesn't know it yet, but the letter comes with pain and grief, but it also comes with love and gratitude. It comes with a desire for a loved one's story to be heard and honoured. Bob writes that his wife Margaret of 60 years has passed away. **In his sadness, he shares about their lasting relationship and about her absolute commitment to Global Interaction. She raised funds, she shared the stories and was on their church's mission committee. She had given generously despite their humble means.**

As Scott reads the letter, some lines jump off the page. Bob writes that for every day of their married life Margaret prayed for a Global Interaction worker. 60 years of covering our workers in prayer each day.

Here is a woman who accepted God's gracious invitation to be part of His mission around the world.

A woman who knew what it meant to genuinely partner with called, sent workers. She wasn't on the ground with them physically, but through her prayers and partnership, she was.

The reality is that unless we - the Australian Baptist movement - send workers, many will never hear the Good News in their own culture, their own language and within their own community.

But long-term workers need long-term partners. Will you commit, like Margaret, to faithfully praying, giving and advocating so that vibrant communities of faith can be established around the world?

6. Story of Tim and Melanie in Malawi

Tim and Melanie, and their sons have been on the ground in Malawi, serving among the Yawo, for more than 12 years. It's exciting to hear stories from them. **God is breaking through and we are seeing our vision of vibrant faith communities coming to fruition.**

Following years of relationship building and discipleship, building upon the foundations of earlier team members, local leaders are being raised up. Doabu is a young, Yawo man. In the previous years, he has heard about Jesus and been baptised.

Now he is ready to lead his first Bible study. It's a milestone moment and he's nervous! But here he is, sitting next to his wife, surrounded by Yawo believers and seekers, ready to share from God's Word in his own language and community.

Theme Four: Vibrant Communities... Partnering together

Tim shares that it's in moments like this that he can see the vision being realised. Here is a vibrant faith community, growing, flourishing and following Jesus in their own distinctive ways.

And what else to we see? The power of partnership! Without the backing of Australian churches, workers like Melanie and Tim can't be on the ground, sharing God's love. Northreach Baptist Church is one of their partner churches. And it's beautiful to see how this manifests in practical ways. While on Home Assignment, Tim and Melanie need a place to stay and the church community makes it happen! They mow the lawn, clean the house and make sure it's ready for the family to enjoy. They roll up their sleeves in a Romans 16 kind of way.

We can only do it together!

QUESTIONS FOR SMALL GROUPS

- » What's been your personal experience of partnership in ministry? What have been the joys and challenges?
- » What do you see as the difference between support and partnership? Is this an important distinction for you?
- » What stands out to you in Romans 16?
- » If you partner with an intercultural worker, do you feel like you are part of God's mission in that place? Reflect on why you do or don't. If not, what would make you feel like you were?
- » What does accepting God's invitation to partner with Him in His mission mean in your life?
- » Read, watch or listen to one or two of the above thematic stories. What excites you? How can you see God at work? What mission practices can you see the workers doing that you could do in your own neighbourhood?

