

Straight Street for Church Planters
Unit 5 – Focus Group

Scripture Helps:

Desired outcome from this unit: For participants to understand how God has gifted them, and how He might use their giftedness, uniqueness, background, and life experiences to reach a specific focus group of people.

Desired outcome from the Basic Training unit on Focus

Group: For the church planting team to develop an understanding of the persons and their needs and to profile a typical household within their ministry focus group.

I. What is God saying to me in His Word?

“To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law), so as to win those under the law. To those not having the law I became like one not having the law (though I am not free from God’s law but am under Christ’s law), so as to win those not having the law. To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some. I do all this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings” (1 Cor. 9:20-23, NIV).

Reflection and Thoughts

NOTE: The following is taken from Unit 5: Focus Group of the Basic Training for Church Planters Presenter’s Manual.

“As one begins this unit of study, it is important to keep in mind that the contextual environment and ministry focus group represent two different perspectives. The contextual environment takes into account a geographic area that may have many potential ministry focus groups. In a church multiplication movement, both the contextual environment and the ministry focus group must be considered so that awareness and a strategy to reach all people will be a part of the up-front planning process. Although every contextual environment differs and no two-ministry focus groups are the same, there are consistent principles for understanding the environment and the focus group. In church planting, contextualization refers to developing and/or adapting a strategy determined by the specific context (area and people). In other words, the way we approach worship style or evangelism is impacted by the context—the place where you are working and the people you are seeking to reach. The apostle Paul contextualized his approach to presenting the gospel wherever he went. His whole

approach can be summed up in 1 Cor. 9:22, “To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some”(NIV).

Activity: Contextualization

What is your understanding of contextualization or contextual environment?

Describe a moment of contextualization in your life. For instance, “ I became _____ so that I might win some to the Lord or have opportunity to share the gospel with someone.” Fill in the blank and describe the situation.

Two paths come together for this section of Straight Street. In developing an understanding of the Ministry Focus Group (the atmosphere or climate in which a church is planted), the church planter needs to carefully explore each path. One church-planting leader frequently says, “Many church planters miss the will of God for their church planting experience by 4 miles.” The location problems arise because the planting team members do not understand who they are and who God has called and equipped them to reach. Observe these issues from a different metaphor. It can be said that every church’s personality is encoded from two sources; the first is the church planter or planting team, and the second source is the core group. The new church’s personality determines the type of persons it will reach and retain. There is truth in the book title, *One Size Does Not Fit All*.

Now, go back over the answers to the previous questions and list the common denominators that you find.

Notice the three phrases and some implications:

Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought.

Church planters tend to be persons described as having a strong sense of calling and self worth—sometimes that is called ego strength. There is a difference in egotistical and ego strength. Egotism is often manifested in pride and arrogance—both are described as negative character traits in the Bible. In *Good to Great*, a Level 5 leader is described as one “who blends extreme personal humility with intense professional will . . . Level 5 leaders channel their ego needs away from themselves and into the larger goal of building a great company. It’s not that Level 5 leaders have no ego or self-interest. Indeed, they are incredibly ambitious—but *their ambition is first and foremost for the institution, not themselves*” (p. 21).

Think of yourself with sober judgment. Sober judgment refers to an honest understanding of self—both strengths and weaknesses. The members of the planting team recognize that each has strengths that will be needed by the team and each has weaknesses that will be compensated for by other team members. Part of the picture here is that of an honest appraisal of gifts, strengths, and talents.

We have different gifts, according to the grace given us.

Through the Holy Spirit, the Father has distributed gifts as He has chosen for the benefit of the church. No one person has all the gifts needed for an apostolic/missionary team. Gifts are to be exercised in harmony and concert. Recognize the value of your gift(s) and the gift(s) of those around you.

In this electronic age, George Thomasson, North American Mission Board, SBC suggests an acrostic that connects with many persons. One of the greatest responsibilities of church planters is to develop their own leadership and to build leaders and to plug them

into specific places of ministry. Paul said it this way: we are “to prepare God's people for works of service” (Eph. 4:12, NIV). A vital element of this is to help Christians find out how God has “wired” them. By “wired” George means:

Who are you? This refers to one’s disposition or personality and recognizes that God has created each of us as very different people.

Involvevements. This focus is on life’s experiences that impact direction in life.

Resources. In this arena, the challenge is to help persons affirm their unique abilities or natural talents.

Endowments. The challenge here is to assist people in discovering, developing, and deploying their spiritual gifts.

Desires. This refers to what motivates and drives people, what it is that excites them and what makes them feel fulfilled when they do it.

And how have these equipped/prepared you for church planting?

- ✓ If you have completed the Discovery Tool, review that resource and identify your gift(s) and personality style.
- ✓ If you have not, go to www.churchplantingvillage.net and complete the instrument.
- ✓ Have each member of the team complete Discovery Tool.
- ✓ Discuss the results. As you know one another, do the results of the tool agree with your assessment of other members?
- ✓ Are there gifts needed on the team that are missing?
- ✓ How much similarity or diversity of personality types make up team members? Is that a strength or a weakness for the team?
- ✓ Do some team members with a different personality need to be enlisted to give greater balance to the team?*

My spiritual gifts are: (If you do not know what your spiritual gifts are, visit www.elmertowns.com/spiritual_gifts_test/ for a spiritual gift inventory.

- ✓ Aspiration, to what level of education, income and social standing do I aspire?

9 Socioeconomic Subgroups (see chart at end of unit)

1. Upper-Upper
2. Middle-Upper
3. Lower -Upper
4. Upper-Middle
5. Middle-Middle
6. Lower-Middle
7. Upper-Lower
8. Middle-Lower
9. Lower-Lower

Church planters tend to be more effective in reaching persons from their actual socioeconomic background. This reflects their heart and experiences from their most formative years.

It is easy to recognize limitations in reaching across ethnic, language, and racial barriers. It must be understood that cultural differences are not limited to ethnic, language, or racial areas.

Within the same racial, language groups there are socioeconomic barriers that need to be taken into consideration. Most pastors and church planters cannot reach as far as they imagine. Physically, the average person's reach is three feet. Socially, the average person's reach is three of the nine socioeconomic subgroups (see above list). Most persons function better with groups that represent their actual background, that is their formative years between ages 3 and 12, than their current levels of educational or income attainment or their levels of aspiration.

Some persons are gifted cross-culturally, are more adaptable socially, and are able to reach more effectively across cultural barriers.

Activity: Think through the following questions.

In what socioeconomic group did I grow up, especially from 3-12 years of age?

With what groups of persons do I feel most comfortable?

With what groups of persons do I feel most uncomfortable?

How comfortable am I in dealing with persons from different backgrounds—racial, ethnic, economic, educational?

What is it that I am supposed to be doing?

The second path for this unit is that the church planter needs to know the community that is the focus of the church plant.

Three steps need to go into learning about the community. First, the planting team needs to research the community. There are a variety of resources for research. Local resources are the best place to begin and should not be overlooked. Some of these sources are governmental or economic in nature. Local sources can include city or county planning commissions, Chambers of Commerce, real estate groups, or school superintendent's offices. Many colleges, regional (multiple county) governing authorities and state demographers are broader based resources. Some associations, state conventions and national agencies (seminaries or NAMB) can provide resources. Look for demographics, lifestyle, social, cultural, or religious issues. Also look for current numbers and how they have changed in the last ten years and what trends are anticipated in the next five and ten years. In many rural communities and small towns, the diversity is minimal and the distance between groups is limited. In urban areas, the diversity is normally more pronounced and the potential ministry focus groups multiplied.

(You can obtain a free set of demographics and an ACORN profile on your focus community by calling Research at NAMB, 770-410-6385.)

What research has been done in the area that you will plant in?

Who can you enlist to read and clip articles from newspapers or Web sites that give insight to the community facts and trends where you are planting?

Have you met the editor of the local newspaper or the editor of the religious section, providing the newspaper has one?

_____ Yes _____ No

What have you learned about facts and trends in terms of your focus group and the community that they live in? What are the implications for your church plant?

The third step is to relate to individuals in the community. Often from the articles in a local paper or business magazine, the key decision makers and the organizations that they participate in can be identified. Different members of the church planting planning team can begin to contact, interview, and develop relations with some of these community leaders. Not only do leaders need to be heard concerning the community but persons who are part of the proposed ministry focus group also need to be listened to as the team seeks to understand the particular community where the church plant is being considered.

Who are the community leaders that you have met?

Who are the community leaders that you need to meet?

What facts or trends have other churches discovered about the community that you will plant in? Have you talked with attendees from other churches or visited their Web sites?

Activity: Community. Think through the following questions.

What are the different socioeconomic, ethnic, languages and racial groups in the community/area of your church plant that need to be reached?

What is the degree of match between the church planter/church planting team and the community or the various ministry focus groups?

Activity: Reflection Questions

I know what my spiritual gifts are.

_____ Yes _____ No

I have been assessed as a church planter.

_____ Yes _____ No (if you answered “no,”
inquire of your SDOM or program person about church
planter assessment for your state convention)

I know where God wants me to plant a church.

_____ Yes _____ No

I know the ministry focus group for the new church plant.

_____ Yes _____ No

I can describe my ministry focus group.

_____ Yes _____ No

I am a good match for my ministry focus group.

_____ Yes _____ No