



THE BIG FOUR



FOUR STUDIES ON INVITING, GROWING,
LOVING & SENDING IN OUR CITY

THE BIG FOUR

It takes a whole lot more than four simple words to describe what a church should be. In fact, the New Testament is brimming with advice and instruction from Jesus and his apostles on how to live as ‘the Kingdom of God’ on planet earth. It’s a life-consuming challenge.

On the other hand, it’s helpful to try to figure out the basic building blocks of living together for Jesus... and to keep a simple checklist close at hand to make sure the big issues are always being covered. So welcome to “The Big Four”: an introduction to the Big Four concepts - **Invite, Grow, Love and Send** - that have shaped and will continue to shape the structures of our church.

In 2017, a group of members from across all our congregations developed a vision statement and set of values which we adopted as a church. It expressed a number of key commitments, which can be grouped neatly under our Big Four words. We’ve trimmed the words a bit, but the goals remain the same.

Our MISSION is "Growing Followers of Jesus".

Our VISION is to be a vibrant gathering of all kinds of people committed to growing as followers of Jesus, and growing new followers of Jesus.



INVITE

Inviting others
to follow Jesus
with us



GROW

Growing more
like Jesus



LOVE

Loving with a
servant heart



SEND

Sending and
supporting
ambassadors for
Jesus

Underlying all of these, we agreed that “we will **pray for our mission**, demonstrating our dependance on God’s grace, mercy and provision.”

Colin Marshall and Tony Payne's book *The Trellis and the Vine* makes a distinction between the systems and patterns that a church sets up (the 'trellis'), and the 'vine' of spiritual growth that under God's hand springs up around it. Our Big Four are simply a summary of 'the trellis' that we hope will help define and shape our ministry together at MPC.

In these studies we're going to look at the biblical basis for our choice of words. We'll start by looking at the teaching of Jesus himself, and then some reflection from the epistles of Paul as these four concepts play out in the life of the church. Hopefully, as you think about your own part in serving in our church family, you'll be able to see where it fits in the process of inviting, growing, loving and sending, as we grow followers of Jesus together.

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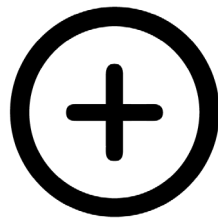
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STUDY 1

INVITE

INVITING OTHERS TO FOLLOW JESUS WITH US



“You’re invited!” They’re great words, aren’t they - especially if it’s to a Royal Wedding, or a fun dinner party with friends. In the gospels, Jesus likens the kingdom of God to a banquet, and when the original (Jewish) guests decline the invitation, it’s thrown open to everyone (Luke 14).

That’s why INVITE is the first of our Big Four words. We’re talking about what’s often called ‘evangelism’ - but bad models and bad experiences have maybe left you feeling sceptical about the prospect of ramming unpopular beliefs on unwilling listeners. Let’s rethink. There’s a party coming; Jesus offers the prospect of life both now and in the future; and we’re here to *invite others to follow Jesus with us!*

Let’s take a look at how it plays out at the start of the ministry of Jesus...

COME AND SEE JESUS

John 1:35-46

³⁵ The next day John was there again with two of his disciples. ³⁶ When he saw Jesus passing by, he said, “Look, the Lamb of God!” ³⁷ When the two disciples heard him say this, they followed Jesus. ³⁸ Turning around, Jesus saw them following and asked, “What do you want?” They said, “Rabbi” (which means “Teacher”), “where are you staying?” ³⁹ “Come,” he replied, “and you will see.”

So they went and saw where he was staying, and they spent that day with him. It was about four in the afternoon.

⁴⁰ Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother, was one of the two who heard what John had said and who had followed Jesus. ⁴¹ The first thing Andrew did was to find his brother Simon and tell him, “We have found the Messiah” (that is, the Christ). ⁴² And he brought him to Jesus. Jesus looked at him and said, “You are Simon son of John. You will be called Cephas” (which, when translated, is Peter).

⁴³ The next day Jesus decided to leave for Galilee. Finding Philip, he said to him, “Follow me.”

⁴⁴ Philip, like Andrew and Peter, was from the town of Bethsaida. ⁴⁵ Philip found Nathanael and told him, “We have found the one Moses wrote about in the Law, and about whom the prophets also wrote—Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.”

⁴⁶ “Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?” Nathanael asked. “Come and see,” said Philip.

Read John 1:35-46.

John tells us in detail about the day Andrew and a friend started following Jesus along the road. “Teacher,” they said, “Where are you staying?” ...

1. What does Jesus say in reply (John 1:39)?
2. Andrew swings into action in verses 40 to 42. What’s the first thing he does? (v41)

Reflect on this for a minute. How “mature in his faith” was Andrew at this point? How advanced in your own faith would you have to be to follow his example?

In verses 43 to 46 the cycle is repeated.

3. What’s Philip’s first action after Jesus calls him to follow? (v45)

What’s his simple response after Nathanael raises an objection? (v46)

4. Compare Philip's words (v46) with the words of Jesus in verse 39. How might this be the model for 'inviting'?

What would "come and see" mean in your context?

Sometimes, inviting can be as simple as saying "come and have a look." Your friend says, "What's church all about?". Use this opportunity to invite them to "come and see!" for themselves. Your neighbour says, "I don't really understand what you Christians are on about." Invite them to "come and see!" Your colleague says, "The church is terrible. Look at all the things that have happened." Reply by saying, "Yes it breaks my heart to hear stories like that. But that's the opposite of what Jesus is on about. Why not come over and read John's gospel with me over coffee? Come and see!" You don't need to be particularly smart or experienced as a Christian - just willing to share anything good you've found in your experience of following Jesus and being part of his church.

OUTSIDERS WELCOME

In the first section of each of these studies we're looking at Jesus and the gospels. In the second section we'll be looking at the way his teaching was reflected in the later church, and especially from the letters of Paul. Inviting others to follow Jesus wasn't just something Jesus' *first* followers focussed on - it's something for every generation of Christians to be doing.

Take a look at these instructions from Paul to the **Colossians in the sidebar**.

5. What's Paul's goal, and how does that reflect in the way we are told to act towards outsiders?

Colossians 4:4-6

⁴ Pray that I may proclaim [the mystery of Christ] clearly, as I should. ⁵ Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity. ⁶ Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone.

6. To follow Paul's teaching, what kind of conversations can we have, and how does this help in the process of inviting others to follow Jesus? (Note that Paul says we should always know *how* to answer everyone, even if sometimes you don't know *what* to answer everyone.)

Now take a look at Paul's tips for the times when an outsider (who you've been constantly answering with salty words of grace, even when you didn't have all the answers!) actually turns up at church. We're picking up in his first letter to the Corinthians, where those who thought they were "spiritual" insisted on speaking in "tongues" that nobody else could understand. Look what he says in the **sidebar**.

1 Corinthians 14:1-5; 23-25

¹ Follow the way of love and eagerly desire gifts of the Spirit, especially prophecy. ² For anyone who speaks in a tongue does not speak to people but to God. Indeed, no one understands them; they utter mysteries by the Spirit. ³ But the one who prophesies speaks to people for their strengthening, encouraging and comfort. ⁴ Anyone who speaks in a tongue edifies themselves, but the one who prophesies edifies the church. ⁵ I would like every one of you to speak in tongues, but I would rather have you prophesy...

²³ So if the whole church comes together and everyone speaks in tongues, and inquirers or unbelievers come in, will they not say that you are out of your mind? ²⁴ But if an unbeliever or an inquirer comes in while everyone is prophesying, they are convicted of sin and are brought under judgment by all, ²⁵ as the secrets of their hearts are laid bare. So they will fall down and worship God, exclaiming, "God is really among you!"

7. Which is better in church, tongues or prophesying i.e. "uttering mysteries by the Spirit" (v2) or "speaking to people for their strengthening, encouragement and comfort" (v3)? Why?
8. Who should Christians be particularly concerned for in church? How can we demonstrate this concern through our words and actions?
9. How will it affect 'outsiders' if they don't understand what's going on in church? How about if they do?

It's up to all of us who are involved in leading and speaking when we gather for church to always have one eye on the 'outsider' - the unbeliever or enquirer who is with us for the first time. It may seem odd, but for Paul, it's essential that everything we do in church makes sense to **everyone**. For him, that's why 'speaking in tongues' was not to be prioritised. Instead, he says, "it's better to speak five words that can be understood" (1 Cor 14:19).

There are all kinds of other ways we need to take care that we're speaking to be understood; our use of technical theological words, assuming knowledge, speaking publicly about insider events or people as if everyone knows who they are... it's a challenge! But if we're going to be an inviting and welcoming church, it's something we need to keep working on.

INVITING TOGETHER

We're building teams to help us INVITE better. So far there are teams working on INVITE events, like our annual Food For Thought Dinner... and teams working to make our church more welcoming to Sunday guests.

Imagine you're part of the Food For Thought Dinner team. If your focus was **inviting others to follow Jesus with us**, how might it impact the way you planned and organised the following:

- Selection of speaker
- Catering and costs
- Venue set-up
- Advertising and ticketing
- Recruiting hosts and helpers
- Cleanup and packup

10. Think about how each of these areas can either help or hinder the goal of inviting outsiders.

Are there ways your gifts could help in this?

*Our Big Four focus words are **Invite, Grow, Love and Send**. And yet we recognise that the fruit of all these things depends on God, who extends the invitation and gives the growth and moves us to love by His Spirit and sends us on mission. Spend some time praying that God would make good use of our invitations to extend His **invitation to follow Jesus with us**.*

OTHER INVITE TEAMS

Welcoming

Goal: To identify and appropriately welcome newcomers and guide them to next steps (newcomer lunch, *Start Up* Course) to make sure they know clearly what comes next as we invite them to follow Jesus with us.

Roles: Co-ordinate welcome material (booklet, slides, posters etc), organise weekly 'on-duty welcomers', engage with newcomers, introduce newcomers to others, arrange follow up contact, invite to newcomer lunch, invite to *Start Up* course, hand on to a pre-arranged growth group leader.



Goal: Our *Start Up* Course runs over three Monday nights, and follows from a Newcomer Lunch. The goal of the StartUp Course is to invite people to follow Jesus with us by taking a closer look at Jesus, our church and themselves. We want everyone to understand what it means to follow Jesus, what it means to be part of our church, and how they might serve the body with their distinctive gifts and abilities. If you're interested in being involved or finding out more contact Doug (doug@mpc.org.au)