

QUESTIONING MISSION

4 Bible studies to help your
small group grapple with tough
questions about mission

PARTICIPANTS'S GUIDE



What's it all about?

Welcome to *Questioning Mission!* This set of four Bible studies has been designed to help your church grapple with some of the common - but difficult - questions people have about world mission.

In the first study we think about the eternal fate of people that have not heard about Jesus. We see that our understanding of this issue affects how we see God and the whole world. In the second study we will look around us at our changing neighbourhoods and think about the nature of mission. With so much need around us in the UK, why send gospel workers abroad? Don't we need gospel workers here in Britain? In the third study we grapple with the interplay between practically sharing the love of Christ through our actions and sharing the good news with words. Finally, in the fourth study we will think about God's will for our lives. We dive into God's Word and explore how both God's leading and the abundant life he offers come when we give up everything to follow Christ and 'seek first his kingdom'.

We hope that these studies will encourage you and your small group to follow harder after Jesus - and to help you to find your place in God's grand plan of salvation for the whole world.

Contents

Study 1

The destiny of the lost

3

Study 2

Why go overseas?

7

Study 3

Faith and love

10

Study 4

The question of calling

13



1. The destiny of the lost

...and what the Bible teaches about those who have not heard the gospel.

What we think about the destiny of the lost can affect what we think about God – particularly if we listen to what our culture says. We might wonder if God really is good, is he really faithful and true. Isn't it unfair of God to send innocent people to hell when they've never had the chance to hear the gospel? In this study we will dive into God's Word to discover what it says about God's character, the nature of sin, humankind and hell.



Getting started: Imagine a desert island with swaying palm trees, beautiful white beaches, blue skies and turquoise seas - a pristine 'paradise' untouched by 21st century civilisation. The desert island is inhabited by a people that know nothing of the outside world; they have their own language, customs and history as well as their own gods, beliefs and religious traditions. Due to their seclusion the local people have never heard about Jesus. Yes, they have their own beliefs, but they have never had the chance to hear that the Creator of the whole world has made a way for all humankind to be saved and know him personally. Discuss these questions with your group:

- Is it right for outsiders to visit this secluded island to share with them about Jesus?
- What are some of the objections that people might have to this?
- What do you think the Bible has to say about it?

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1. Read Genesis 3:1-7, Romans 5:12 and Romans 1:21-23. In order to get a biblical understanding of the destiny of the lost we actually need to start with our understanding of 'sin'.

- What was going on in the garden between God and Adam and Eve? How would you define sin from Genesis 3?
- Was it just Adam and Eve that now had a problem? What affect did this have on humankind?



Now the serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God really say, 'You must not eat from any tree in the garden'?" The woman said to the serpent, "We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden, but God did say, 'You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die.'" "You will not certainly die," the serpent said to the woman. "For God knows that when you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it. Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and

they realized they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves. **(Genesis 3:1-7)**

Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned. **(Romans 5:12)**

For although they knew God, they did not honour him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Claiming to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things. **(Romans 1:21-23)**

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2. Read Romans 6:23 and James 1:15. What does the Bible say is the result of this sin in our lives?



*For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. **(Romans 6:23)***

*Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death. **(James 1:15)***

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3. Read John 3:18, 2 Thessalonians 1:8-9 and Revelation 14:10-11. Where is humanity continuing to sail towards, unless they 'jump ship'? The Bible uses lots of picture language to describe the destination. How does it describe hell?



*Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because they have not believed in the name of God's one and only Son. **(John 3:18)***

He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might...

(2 Thessalonians 1:8-9)

*They, too, will drink the wine of God's fury, which has been poured full strength into the cup of his wrath. They will be tormented with burning sulphur in the presence of the holy angels and of the Lamb. And the smoke of their torment will rise for ever and ever. There will be no rest day or night for those who worship the beast and its image, or for anyone who receives the mark of its name. **(Revelation 14:10-11)***

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4. John 3:16 is probably the most famous verse in the Bible. **Read verses 16-17.** Was it really necessary for Jesus to die? Are there any other ways that humankind might be saved? Do we really believe that there are no other ways for someone to become friends with God?



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. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.
(John 3:16-17)

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5. If we think back to our desert island again, some people will argue that as ‘God is love’ and wants ‘none to perish’, he will save the islanders who are good – even though they don’t know the name of Jesus. (That understanding is called inclusivism). What does the Bible say about that? **Compare Romans 1:18-20 and Romans 2:6-8 with Romans 3:22-25.**



The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of people, who suppress the truth by their wickedness, since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. For since the creation of the world God’s invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that people are without excuse.
(Romans 1:18-20)

*God ‘will repay each person according to what they have done.’ To those who by persistence in doing good seek glory, honour and immortality, he will give eternal life. But for those who are self-seeking and who reject the truth and follow evil, there will be wrath and anger. **(Romans 2:6-8)***

This righteousness is given through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference between Jew and Gentile, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and all are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. God presented Christ as a sacrifice of atonement, through the shedding of his blood—to be received by faith.
(Romans 3:22-25)

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6. What will happen to those who have never heard the name of Jesus? What verses should we build our overall understanding upon? **(John 3:16, Romans 3:22, 2 Thessalonians 1:8-9, Ephesians 2:8, Romans 6:23, and Romans 10:9)**

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Making it real: *The unreached Indian Ocean Island people live on numerous islands scattered across the Indian Ocean. Their culture has been influenced by Africa, Asia, and the Islamic merchants, who for almost one thousand years brought tradeable goods and Islam. Island life can be quite different to life on the mainland - living on an island means that there is little chance to move in search of economic opportunities and almost everyone knows everyone else. One result of this is that if an Islander chooses to follow Jesus, the whole community will know about it very quickly and tough opposition will inevitably rise. Pray that the few Island*

people who follow Jesus would know very deeply God's grace and love. Pray that they would have the courage they need to stand for Christ and pray that they would, in turn, share their hope with their families and communities.

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Bringing it home: Let's return back to our tropical island and it's inhabitants who have never had the chance to hear about Jesus. From what we have read from God's Word...

- What have we learnt (or been reaffirmed in our understanding) about the character and person of God?
- What messages do we often hear in Britain about sharing about our faith? Have you ever been told never to discuss religion and politics? Is this idea contrary to the Bible? Should we actually change the way we think, speak or act?
- What is your reaction to knowing about about the 3 billion people around the world who have no churches, very few Christians among them and only 3% of the world missionary force?

For resources to help you think more about God's heart to reach the lost, visit eu.aimint.org.

2. Why go overseas?

Taking the gospel locally and globally

The UK is now a multicultural, varied place, and, despite our heritage, 'post-Christian'; the number of followers of Christ seems at an all-time low. The rest of the world has changed too; the centre of gravity of the global church is no longer in Europe or North America but is in the southern hemisphere. Today we will start by considering God's view of foreigners or aliens, then we will think about whether there is still a place for the British/Western church to send gospel workers abroad.



Getting started: Share examples of how your community, neighbourhood, or area has changed over the past twenty years. Do you agree that British society and culture has changed? In what ways?

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1. Over the last eighty years the UK has seen a huge influx of non-British nationals come to the UK. **Read Acts 17:26.** According to Acts 17:26 who is in charge of moving peoples around the world?



From one man he made all the nations, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he marked out their appointed times in history and the boundaries of their lands. (Acts 17:26)

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2. The Bible is full of commands on how we should treat the alien/stranger/foreigner among us. **Read Deuteronomy 10:17-19.** Who is responsible for caring for the stranger? How should we treat the stranger among us?



For the Lord your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, who shows no partiality and accepts no bribes. He defends the cause of the fatherless and the widow, and loves the foreigner residing among you, giving them food and clothing. And you are to love those who are foreigners, for you yourselves were foreigners in Egypt. (Deuteronomy 10:17-19)

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3. The millions of refugees, international students and economic migrants that are now in the UK often come from countries that have few Christians. What opportunity does this represent? **Read Deuteronomy 31:12.** What do you think God would want us to do?



Assemble the people - men, women and children, and the foreigners residing in your towns - so they can listen and learn to fear the LORD your God and follow carefully all the words of this law. (Deuteronomy 31:12)

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4. Think about your community. What different nationalities are represented? Does your church already have work with refugees, migrants or international students? If it doesn't what might the Lord be calling you, your small group or church to do?

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5. Now let's turn to the words that Jesus spoke just before he ascended to be with God. **Read Matthew 28:18-20.** Go through these verses and make a note of those words that are in any way connected to geography or movement. Who was Jesus speaking to? What did he want them to do and where did he want them to go? What do these verses have to say to us, 2000 years on?



Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age. (Matthew 28:18-20)

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6. It was two thousand years ago that Jesus commanded his disciples to go into all the world and make disciples of all peoples. What about now? Is the job done in the rest of the world; should we now focus on the UK? Take a look at eu.aimint.org/unreached for information and statistics about unreached people groups. Do these statistics change the way you think about the need for the gospel outside the UK?

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Bringing it home: The reality is that while the number of church attendees in the UK has decreased over the last eighty years, the UK still has many churches, full-time church workers and access to the gospel. As you can see from the statistics, there are many peoples around the world with almost no access to the gospel (called unreached people groups). While our churches engage with the lost around us, should we not also consider those people around the world that have never had the opportunity to hear about Jesus?

Do we need to do anything?



Making it real: *The Neem* (we have changed the name of this people group for security reasons) people of Chad are a sizeable people group scattered across many small, rural villages. Like much of Chad, where the Neem people live is very hot and dry for most of the year. A short rainy season enables them to grow millet, peanuts and sesame seeds. Any land not cultivated supplies grass (fresh, and then later, dry) to feed their animals. Most Neem people live off small scale agriculture and subsistence animal husbandry. The Neem people have been Muslims for many centuries but they are deeply steeped in traditional beliefs with a fear of spirits and sorcerers. Women in rural areas often know little of Islam, leading to a syncretistic religion. They seem to have little hope of, or desire for, change, nor any belief that it is possible. There are very few Neem believers in Christ. God has started to bring gospel workers among the Neem in the last few years - pray that he would send more, that he would work among the Neem people and that many churches would be planted in that area.*



If you would like more information on praying, giving or going to unreached peoples go to eu.aimint.org, joshuaproject.net or globalconnections.org.uk/mission-issues/publications/sphere/cape-town-commitment

For resources to help you think more about God's heart to reach the lost, visit eu.aimint.org.

3. Faith and love

Not too many years ago in the UK our society called itself Christian. In reality, not everyone was a Christian but the general culture gave lip service to, and generally abided by, Christian ideals. Now, things are very different! In this study we will look at the Bible and think about how God wants us to be in our local communities as well as how we should relate with the wider world beyond our shores.



Getting started: When it comes to your interactions and relationships with your friends, families and colleagues, would you find it easier to explain the gospel to them or to do something that will help them out practically? What do you feel comfortable doing, if either? What do you feel uncomfortable doing and why?

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1. Read Mark 12:30-31 and James 1:27. What strikes you about these verses? How does God want us to relate to the people around us? How does our culture respond to Christians loving those around them?



Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.' The second is this: 'Love your neighbour as yourself.' There is no commandment greater than these.
(Mark 12:30-31)

Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world. **(James 1:27)**

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2. Read John 3:16-17 and Romans 10:8-10. What is the way to life and salvation that God has given to us? How do we take hold of this gift? How does what James says in the James 1:22-27 fit with the message of salvation by grace?



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. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.
(John 3:16-17)

But what does it say? "The word is near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart," that is, the message concerning faith that we proclaim: If you declare with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you profess your faith and are saved. **(Romans 10:8-10)**



3. Compare the answers you gave to the previous two questions. Is there a conflict between the way our culture responds to Christians showing love through acts of service and Christians showing love through sharing the gospel? In our lives, are we inclined to favour one over the other? Is there a godly balance between the two?

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4. Thinking about our culture:

- Is it fair to say that our society would prefer Christians to stick to 'living lives of love' but forget about sharing the gospel with others? What responses have you received from your neighbours, colleagues and friends when you have attempted to share the gospel? Would you be able to share with the group some examples, either positive or negative?
 - Taking it a step further, what might some of the people around us think of the Bible and its message that all Christians should take the good news to the whole world – to unreached people groups in other countries?
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5. Read John 15:19.

- Recognising that our society is becoming increasingly antagonistic to those that trust in Jesus and to the message of the gospel, why is it so important that we do respond to Christ's call in Matthew 28 to go and make disciples of all the world? What does that mean for us?
- While God clearly calls Christians to love those around us, how do we respond to the desperate need around the world in a loving, strategic way that does not neglect Christ's command to make disciples? What might be a good balance between giving to Christian organisations that prioritise helping people physically and those that prioritise sharing the gospel and planting churches?



If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you. (John 15:19)

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6. Has your church thought through how it engages with mission? Does your church have guidelines in place to help strategically balance the need to take the gospel to all the world and love those in need? What do you think those guidelines should look like? If your church doesn't have guidelines, could your group think about what they should look like?



Making it real: *The Fulani of the Sahel are a former nomadic people group that live throughout the Sahel, from Sudan in the east, to Senegal in the west. They number over 40 million. The Fulani are overwhelmingly Muslim, however*

their traditional pre-Islamic rituals and beliefs are still followed today and are only vaguely linked with Islam. They are shepherds and farmers whose diet is largely based on millet. They are an animistic people group who embraced Islam in addition to their traditional beliefs. Most people practise a moderate form of Islam but some people have studied in Qur'anic schools. Increasingly the neighbouring Hausa people and their Muslim teachers are seeking to enforce Islamic beliefs. Pray for more gospel workers to go to the Fulani, and for those who are currently working among the Fulani. Pray that they would show Christ's courage, patience and love for the Fulani. Pray that the Lord would build his church.

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Bringing it home: What has stuck out from today's study? Has anything surprised you? After thinking about these verses and your group's discussions have you come to any conclusions?

Go back to the opening discussion. Would you answer the same way now?

Spend some time responding to God in prayer.

For resources to help you think more about God's heart to reach the lost, visit eu.aimint.org.

4. The question of calling



Getting started: When you think of guidance and working out where God is leading you, do either of these resonate with you?

- Does it feel like everything is a bit shaky and uncertain, one misstep and you will fall ‘out of God’s will’, a bit like you’re on a tightrope?
- Does it feel that your future is a wide open space – you have so many options that you don’t know which to choose? Like looking for a path in the desert?

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1. Read Daniel 4:35 and Proverbs 16:33. Try to sum up these verses with one sentence. Who is in charge? What do you feel as a result?



He does according to his will among the host of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth; and none can stay his hand or say to him, ‘What have you done?’ **(Daniel 4:35)**

The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the Lord.
(Proverbs 16:33)

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2. In the Bible we also read examples of God’s will of command. **Read 1 Thessalonians 4:3, Isaiah 58:6-7 and Mark 16:15-16.** From these verses it’s clear that God wants us to do certain things, to live in a certain way. Can we sum up how God wants us to live? What verses can you think of that supports what you are saying?



This is the will of God, your sanctification: that you abstain from sexual immorality. **(1 Thessalonians 4:3)**

Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of wickedness, to undo the straps of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke? Is it not to share your bread with the hungry and bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked, to cover him, and not to hide yourself from your own flesh? **(Isaiah 58:6-7)**

He said to them, “Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation. Whoever believes and is baptised will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned...” **(Mark 16:15-16)**



3. Read Psalm 119:105, Proverbs 3:5-6 and Romans 12:2. What do these verses teach us?



Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight.
(Psalm 119:105)

Your word is a lamp for my feet, a light on my path. **(Proverbs 3:5-6)**

Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect. **(Romans 12:2)**

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4. It's really encouraging to know that as we seek to follow him he is directing our footsteps **(John 10:27-28)**. However, what should we do if we have an inkling that God is moving us on into something new? What does God's word say about that? **Read Psalm 37:4, Proverbs 11:14. Matthew 6:33, 2 Timothy 2:21-22.** Are there any principles we should follow as we try to discern what God has for us?



Take delight in the Lord, and he will give you the desires of your heart.
(Psalm 37:4)

For lack of guidance a nation falls, but victory is won through many advisers.
(Proverbs 11:14)

But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. **(Matthew 6:33)**

Those who cleanse themselves from the latter ('common use'- from verse 20) will be instruments for special purposes, made holy, useful to the Master and prepared to do any good work. Flee the evil desires of youth and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace, along with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart. **(2 Timothy 2:21-22)**

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Making it real: *The Didinga people live in the Didinga hills of South Sudan, in the valleys, on the plateaus and slopes, and on the adjacent plains of the region. They are primarily focused on raising cattle but they also farm, with the area having sufficient rainfall to grow two crops per year. They live in homesteads based on their clan, in round houses with cone-shaped roofs. They make a lot of music and various crafts. Although there is a Didinga chief, decisions are made by the community, and younger people have the right to question the elder. The Didinga people are animistic; worship and fear of their ancestors forms a large part of their belief and religious practice. The majority of the Didinga people can't read or write.*

There is an AIM church planting team among the Didinga people which is involved in language learning, Bible storying, discovery Bible studies, and



children and young people's ministries. Pray that God would grow his church among the Didinga people, so that new Didinga Christians are able to spread the gospel throughout their own people.

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Bringing it home: Has anything struck you from this study? Have you come to any conclusions about following God and discerning his will?

Think back to the image of a tightrope walker and the desert. We have read quite a few verses in this session; have any of those verses changed your thinking? If you were to describe what it looks like to follow God, how would you describe it?

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