

Combined Small Group Notes for next two sermon series:

“What Have We Got to Share?” & “Ever Feel Like Something’s Missing?” (6 September to 19 October)

Background:

Under the banner of ‘A Passion for Life’ (APFL), the churches in the North Cotswold Gospel Partnership are holding a collective month of invitational Sundays over the course of four Sundays in September and October (27/9, 4/10 11/10 and 18/10).

Over the summer, we’ve been trying to raise the question **“Ever feel like something’s missing?”**

We’re still encouraging discussion around that question within all of our regular outward-facing activities and encouraging our Small Groups to raise the same question with their friends, family and neighbours.

In week leading up to each “invitational Sunday”, we’re asking everyone to focus down on a particular aspect of what might be missing in people’s lives, asking **“Where can we find real... purpose/...security/...freedom/...hope?”**

Leading up to Sunday 27th Sept - **...purpose**

Leading up to 4th October - **...security**

Leading up to 11th October - **...freedom**

Leading up to 18th October - **...hope**

The reason for adopting that particular model for this round of joint ‘Mission’ initiative is that a national survey conducted by ‘A Passion for Life’ revealed that our cultural context has shifted in recent years to a situation where **20% of people are ready and willing to respond positively to an invitation directly to church** (many more than in previous decades). They also discovered **people indicating a preference for being invited to experience what we do routinely**, rather than to attend a ‘show’ put on specifically to ‘hook them in’ (as there seems to be a greater desire to see who we really are and what we do in church than to be ‘done to’ at separate themed event events that didn’t really reflect our normal practices). **The themes themselves are simply a reflection of the survey’s findings of the top four things that people felt were missing from their lives.**

The emphasis we’re trying to bring to the church family is therefore on **taking responsibility for issuing the ‘invitation’** (and trusting God to use that invitation to draw people in), rather than on worrying unduly about the end-result in terms of attendance.

In other words, for those who are ready to receive an invitation, we pray that God will help it land positively and that the people who respond will then meet us in an authentic expression of our worshipping life together, rather than in a more contrived bridging event.

Sessions marked “Looking Back” revisit a Sunday already past; sessions marked “Looking Ahead” prepare the group for the Sunday that’s still to come, including how to frame invitations where relevant.



Week commencing 7 September — Looking Back: The Gospel

Welcome (5 mins)

Q) When did you last share a piece of genuinely good news with someone — big or small? What made you want to tell them, rather than keep it to yourself?

Worship (10 mins)

Read: Psalm 34:1–8

- **Sing/Listen:** Play or sing a version of either '*King of Kings*' — Hillsong Worship or '*Living Hope*' — Phil Wickham.

Pray briefly in thanks for the ways each of us has personally tasted God's goodness.

Word (40 mins)

Way in: This week's sermon opened our autumn season by asking, "What have we got to share?" — starting with the gospel itself. Peter and John had no silver or gold to give the man at the temple gate, but they gave him something far better (Acts 3:1–10). Psalm 34:8 invites people to "taste and see that the Lord is good" — our job is the inviting; God does the work of drawing people to himself.

Read: Acts 3:1–10

Q) What did Peter and John actually have to give the man at the gate? What didn't they have?

Note: It's worth sitting with how little they had materially, and how much they gave anyway. The point isn't poverty as a virtue, but that the most valuable thing we carry was never money.

Watch: the 20-minute video "What Is the Gospel?" (BB3) by Niv Lobo, from A Passion for Life.

Login: <https://www.apassionforlife.org.uk> - **email:** office@smcn.uk, **password:** *Psalm121*

Q) The talk describes two things every faithful gospel outline does — putting people into God’s true story, and putting the spotlight on what Jesus has done. Which of these two do you find easier to talk about naturally, and which feels harder?

Q) Have you come across any of the outlines mentioned (the Bridge, Two Ways to Live, “the manger, the cross and the crown”)? Which, if any, do you find easiest to picture or remember?

Look up (in pairs): take 90 seconds each to give a natural, unrehearsed answer to the question, “What’s the heart of what you believe?” Don’t aim for polished or exhaustive — aim for honest and clear, then swap.

Witness (10 mins)

Pray for specific people group members would like to invite to “taste and see” over the weeks ahead. Pray for confidence that doesn’t depend on getting every word right, since the outcome was never ours to carry.

Week commencing 14 September — Looking Ahead: The Away Day & Inviting Others

Welcome (5 mins)

Q) Tell us about a time someone invited you to something and you were really glad they did. What made that invitation land well?

Worship (10 mins)

Read: John 6:1–13

- **Sing/Listen:** Play or sing a version of *‘Way Maker’* — Sinach

Pray, thanking God for the ways he takes what little we offer and multiplies it.

Word (40 mins)

Way in: Sunday 20th is our church Away Day — a chance to be together, celebrate, and welcome anyone along, including children and newcomers. It rounds off our short “What Have We Got to Share?” series by looking at our lives, before we move straight into four invitational Sundays through late September and October. This week’s session looks ahead to both.

Read: John 6:1–13

Q) The boy in this story had very little — a packed lunch — but didn’t hold it back. What does Jesus do with what little is offered to him?

Watch: the 20-minute video “Inviting People to Church” (SO4) by Alex Hillman, from A Passion for Life.

Login: <https://www.apassionforlife.org.uk> -email: office@smcn.uk, password: **Psalm121**

Q) Alex talks about the “church-and” habit — not just saying “I went to church” but adding something real about it. What’s one true, specific thing you could say about church the next time someone asks about your weekend?

Q) He also talks about introducing non-Christian friends to Christian friends well before any invitation to church itself. Is there someone you could start doing this with, ahead of the Sundays coming up?

Note: Remind the group that “no” doesn’t mean “never” — if someone’s been invited before and said no, that’s not the end of the road, just not yet.

Witness (10 mins)

Pray for the Away Day itself — for a warm, welcoming, celebratory atmosphere, and for anyone who might come along for the first time. Begin praying, too, for the four invitational Sundays ahead (27 Sept, 4, 11, 18 Oct), and for the people group members hope to invite.

Ever feel like something's missing?

A series of Sundays exploring where we can find real...



Life

...purpose (27th Sept)
...security (4th Oct)
...freedom (11th Oct)
...hope (18th Oct)

Week commencing 21 September — Looking Ahead: Where Can We Find Real Purpose?

Welcome (5 mins)

Q) What's something you've poured a lot of energy into, that turned out to be less satisfying than you'd hoped?

Worship (10 mins)

Read: Psalm 90:12–17

Sing/Listen: Play or sing a version of *Yet Not I But Through Christ in Me* — CityAlight.

Pray, asking God to number our days well and establish the work of our hands.

Word (30 mins)

Way in: Sunday 27th begins our four-week invitational series, “Ever Feel Like Something’s Missing?” — written especially with not-yet-Christian guests in mind. The first theme is purpose. This session looks ahead, so we’re ready both to engage with the theme ourselves and to think about who we might invite.

Read: Ecclesiastes 2:17–23

Q) Solomon had every possible resource for building a meaningful life and still called it all “meaningless.” Why do you think purpose is so hard to manufacture for ourselves?

Read: John 10:7–10

Q) Jesus offers life “to the full” — not just after death, but now. What might that look like practically, in an ordinary week?

Q) If a guest said, “this all sounds nice, but isn’t finding purpose in God just another empty promise?” — how might you respond honestly, without over-claiming?

Witness (10 mins)

Spend a few minutes thinking individually about who you might invite to Sunday 27th. Share names if comfortable, and pray for them by name, and for courage to extend the invitation this week.



Week commencing 28 September — Looking Ahead: Where Can We Find Real Security?

Welcome (5 mins)

Q) What's something that makes you feel secure — and how solid does that foundation actually feel, if you're honest?

Worship (10 mins)

Read: Psalm 62:5–8

- **Sing/Listen:** Play or sing a version of either '*Firm Foundation (He Won't)*' — Maverick City Music / Cody Carnes or '*Cornerstone*' — Hillsong Worship

Pray, asking God to be our security in whatever feels unstable at the moment.

Word (30 mins)

Way in: Sunday 4th October continues our invitational series, looking at security. This session looks ahead, both for our own reflection and to help us think well about who to invite.

Read: Matthew 7:24–27

Q) Same storm, two houses — the difference was the foundation, not the décor. What are some of the things people commonly build their sense of security on?

Read: Psalm 62:5–8

Q) The Psalmist says his soul “finds rest in God alone.” How is that different from saying God will remove all our problems?

Q) How might you gently raise this theme with someone you're hoping to invite, without minimising real and present worries they may have (financial, health, family)?

Witness (10 mins)

Pray for those invited to Sunday 27th — how did it go, and is there a follow-up conversation to have this week? Then pray for who might be invited to Sunday 4th October, by name where possible.

Week commencing 5 October — No Small Group This Week

There is no small group session this week, as the church is gathering for First Priority Prayer instead. Please do encourage your group to attend, and to continue praying personally for anyone they've invited to the “Ever Feel Like Something's Missing?” series, including Sunday 11th October (Freedom), which falls during this week.

Ever feel like something's missing?

A series of Sundays exploring where we can find real...



Life

...purpose (27th Sept)
...security (4th Oct)
...freedom (11th Oct)
...hope (18th Oct)

Week commencing 12 October — Looking Ahead: Where Can We Find Real Hope?

Welcome (5 mins)

Q) Briefly, how did Sunday 11th October (on freedom) go for you, or for anyone you invited? Anything worth sharing or praying into before we move on?

Worship (10 mins)

Read: Revelation 21:1–5

- **Sing/Listen:** Play or sing a version of either *'Blessed Be Your Name'* — Matt Redman, or *'Is He Worthy?'* — Andrew Peterson / Chris Tomlin.

Pray, thanking God for a hope that holds even when circumstances feel unchanged.

Word (30 mins)

Way in: Sunday 18th October is the final Sunday of our invitational series, looking at hope. This session looks ahead to that theme, and also marks the natural point to start thinking about next steps for anyone who's shown interest across the series.

Read: Romans 8:18–25

Q) Paul says the whole of creation “groans” — but with longing and expectation, not despair. What's the difference, practically, between groaning in hopelessness and groaning in hope?

Read: Revelation 21:1–5

Q) God promises to make “all things new” — every tear wiped away, death defeated, mourning and pain gone. What would it mean to take that promise seriously, rather than treating it simply as poetry?

Q) For anyone you've invited across this series, is there a good next step beyond Sunday 18th — another coffee, an invitation to explore further, simply continuing the friendship?

Witness (10 mins)

Pray for Sunday 18th October, and for everyone who has been invited at any point across this series, wherever they've ended up. Give thanks together for the season so far, and pray for what God continues to do beyond it.

Week commencing 19 October — Looking Back: Our Resources

Welcome (5 mins)

Q) Is there something you've started doing differently since a particular conversation, sermon, or moment challenged you? What made it stick (or not)?

Worship (10 mins)

Read: 2 Corinthians 9:6–11

Sing/Listen: play or sing a version of '*Build My Life*' — Pat Barrett / Housefires

Pray, thanking God for his provision for the church and for each of us.

Word (30 mins)

Way in: Six weeks ago, on 13th September, the sermon looked at our resources — particularly our financial giving, and how it sustains the church's pastoral and outreach ministries. This session looks back, to give us space to reflect honestly on what, if anything, we've actually done since then.

Read: Acts 4:32–35

Q) The earliest church held possessions loosely, selling and sharing as there was need. What would it take for that spirit to grow more fully among us?

Q) Their practice was to put the money from the sale of their possessions at the apostles' feet for them to distribute according to need. How does that principle translate to our situation today when it comes to our own planned giving, and where we direct it?

Read: 1 Corinthians 9:7–14 (this should be a familiar passage as we looked at it earlier in the year; 1 Timothy 5:17–18)

Q) Paul insists that those who minister the gospel deserve to be supported for it. How does that change how you think about giving — not as "the church needs money" but as honouring those who serve us?

Note: This is a sensitive area — keep the focus on personal reflection rather than disclosure of amounts, and don't put anyone on the spot.

Q) Thinking back to the sermon on 13th September, has anything changed in how you give, or how you think about giving, since then? If not, is there a next step — not necessarily "more," but perhaps "more intentional" — that feels right for you now?

Witness (10 mins)

Pray for the financial provision of the church, for those who give, and for those who lead and minister among us. Pray, too, in thanksgiving for the whole season of teaching from 6 September through to today.