

5 RELATIONAL ENVIRONMENTS FOR MISSION

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Different relational environments will affect different people in different ways. Some of this is because of age, personality, gifting, past experience, introversion, extroversion, where they grew up, size of their family, and other factors connected with their story. No matter the reasons why, if we are going to be effective at loving people well, pursuing their stories, and helping them feel cared for, then we need a variety of complementary environments and experiences working together.

I've seen new people come into smaller environments with 10-20 people who love that size of relational dynamic, while others feel it's too small or actually still too large and not personal enough. Other people love larger groups with lots of people because of the energy and excitement and also because it allows for a measure of anonymity. Some people hate going into larger groups, for the same reasons that it's positive for others.

Again, I want to reinforce the idea that if we are going to effectively love, serve, and influence people with the Good News of the Gospel, both through word and deed, then we're going to need to organize our churches and Missional Communities with these relational dynamics in mind. We need all 5 types of environments below working together at different times and in different ways.

BIG EVENT: 100+

One example is the Sunday gathering in more established churches. Other examples could be churches hosting concerts, movie nights, parties around sporting events (Superbowl, World Series, March Madness/Final Four, World Cup), or holiday activities (4th of July party, Valentine's party, Christmas party). Again, big events like this provide an environment where newcomers can be anonymous. They can sit and listen and observe with very little pressure and very little expectation upon them to participate in any way. I've seen this be the first step into relationship for many non-Christians.

MEDIUM SIZE: 30-40

This size activity could include the same types of things as above, just on a smaller scale and maybe at someone's house, in their backyard, or at some other smaller, more intimate space. I've seen a lot of backyard parties of different types that would fit in this category. Cookouts and other types of meals like Thanksgiving, a fish fry, a chili cook off, or a pizza night are other examples. This size environment is less anonymous, more relational, more conversational, but still is "safer" for newcomers because of its size and energy level.

SMALLER GROUP: 10-20

This is the typical size for a Missional Community, so pretty much anything is possible with this number of people - meals, topical discussions, game nights, movie nights, sports nights, park days, beach days, etc. This size group usually allows for a deeper



level of communication and better opportunities to build trusting friendships. It also allows for newcomers to be cared for more personally.

FEW: 3-7

This smaller environment represents a few people from a Missional Community thinking together about how to creatively love and pursue 1 or 2 non-Christian friends. It could be a Ladies' night, a Men's night, or 2 couples inviting a non-Christian couple over for dessert. It may mean 2 singles inviting 3 non-Christian friends to camp, hike, throw a Frisbee, go to the beach, or sit around a fire pit. Unlimited possibilities. These types of things are also easier to organize, because of the logistics and because you're only working with a few schedules. This smaller relational environment allows for very personal care of our non-Christian friends and can lead to specific and deep conversations.

1 ON 1

Anything and everything is possible here. Many of the ideas listed above would work, as well as spending lunch or break time with a coworker. Coffee before work. Going for a run after work. Going shopping, mountain biking, or fishing on a weekend. Going to a movie or concert. Helping a neighbor or coworker fix their car, clean their garage, or complete an apartment or house project. Working with them in their garden. These 1 on 1 relational opportunities allow for complete focus on the non-Christian friend and for honest, vulnerable, and deep trust to be built.

REMEMBER

All of the relational environments above create the potential for conversation and care of non-Christians, but they don't guarantee that the time is actually "missional". These times spent with our non-Christian friends become missional when the Gospel as Good news has been experienced in tangible and verbal ways - when they have been loved well and truth from the Bible has been spoken into their life. The key with all 5 of these environments is for our non-Christian friends to leave each experience having seen something of Jesus in us and having heard something of the Gospel that speaks to their story.

