

Listening for Mission



**Six sessions for small groups
who are seeking to go where God sends**

Growing in God

This initiative is the result of the partnership of the Diocese of St Edmundsbury and Ipswich with Rural Ministries. It is open to Christians of any denomination or stream.



Introduction to Listening for Mission

This set of small group notes is designed to help you to listen to God and discern what he is saying to you about your call to reach out with His love in your local area or network. Although they are arranged in 6 sessions, you could take longer than one week over some of the activities, take them in a different order and miss some out altogether. There is more material that you need to use so pick and choose: The point is to listen to God and to respond to his call – everything here is just a resource to help you to do that.

Remember the Lightwave practices which are shared with cell church and many forms of missional groups:

All Involved – Everyone in your group has a part to play and a ministry
Make sure all voices are heard and try sharing out the leadership of different parts of the sessions

Becoming Disciples – We are all learning together to follow Jesus

Creating Community – Act in a way which promotes love and caring, not only within your group but especially beyond it too.

Doing Evangelism – This is about being God's good news as well as telling God's good news. How is your group good news for your local area?

Encountering God – It is God who loves us and transforms us. Every time you meet, make sure there is time to meet with him.

If your small group is in Suffolk, the Lightwave Community would love to support you in your next steps. You can also help us in our county-wide discernment and planning by sharing what God is saying to you. There is a feedback form at the end of these notes, and you can email this to lightwave.community@cofesuffolk.org or [complete it online](#) – there is a link from this page: www.lightwave.org/discernfuture

I look forward to hearing from you

Sally Gaze

Leader of the Lightwave Community

Session One: 360° listening

Welcome

Tell the group about someone you know who is a really good listener. How has their good listening made a difference to you?

Worship

Praise God for listening to us and make some time to listen to him. For example, play some quiet music, sit quietly as a group with your hands open and seek to receive anything God might want to show you. Use the words which Eli told Samuel to say to God, "Speak Lord, your servant is listening." Take time to encounter God.

Word

Share anything which you felt God might be saying in your time of worship. As you engage with the next part of this meeting say a prayer asking God what he is saying to you for your situation.

Listening is an essential part of loving.

As Christians, we are called to:

- *Listen to God through prayer*
- *Listen to our Church and its traditions*
- *Listen to people – their hopes, fears, needs and joys*
- *Listen to and be aware of ourselves – our feelings and experiences*

This is sometimes called 360-degree listening because we are listening all around.

1. Watch the story of *Cable Street* on YouTube (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IxGSFQxSrIo>). Pool your ideas on how listening in different directions plays a part in the story.
2. Look at the story of Jesus in Luke 2.46. What exactly does Jesus do here?
3. If you can, make a list of examples from the Old and New Testaments of people listening/researching before embarking on something God wants them to do. If not, agree who will do some finding out before the next session.

Witness

What group or community has God called you to reach out to as a small group? Is it people in a particular village or workplace, people of a particular age group or gender, people with particular needs or interests?

Pray together about this

Session 2: Initial Research

Welcome

- Share with each other why you want reach out to the people you have identified, and your personal vision for that.
- What have you noticed God is doing already in this community?
- Watch *The Living Room* at <https://youtu.be/6FtGPPr1nXM>. How did the team listen to the students and build up their own sense of community in the early stages?

Word

Remind yourselves of the Old and New Testament examples of people listening/researching before embarking on something God wants them to do.

Then read Nehemiah 1 – 2.

- What steps does Nehemiah take to find out about Jerusalem?
- What are his responses?
- How does Nehemiah “audit” (assess the situation in) Jerusalem once he has arrived?

How does this story speak into your situation as you seek to reach a particular community/engage in a particular project for God?

Pray for each other and about what God is saying to you.

Witness

Think again about the community you are seeking to bless

- What do you think God is doing already in this community?
- Where do you think the needs are, and the points of darkness or difficulty for the community you are seeing to bless?
- What gifts and resources do you bring?
- Who might your partners be? (Churches? Schools? Charities?)

Pray about what you learn.

Worship

Like Nehemiah, you may have noticed weaknesses in yourselves and in the local community or network, but Jesus is able to sympathise with our weaknesses, so we can acknowledge these and approach the “throne of grace” with boldness (Hebrews 4.15-16).

Nehemiah prayed, “O Lord God of heaven, the great and awesome God who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love him and keep his commandments” (Nehemiah 1.5).

Praise God for his faithfulness and love. Choose a way to do this which suits your whole group (e.g. Write on a praise wall, sing a hymn or take turns to speak out a one-sentence prayer of praise)

Session 3: In-depth Listening

Welcome

Watch the story of *Somewhere Else* at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vVOJuau8Qog> and see how a new community began as one minister walked the streets of Liverpool, watching, praying and listening.

Each share one thing which strikes you from this story.

Word

Read Acts 17.16-34 (Paul in Athens).

- What aspects of Athenian culture does Paul find out about?
- How does this shape his approach to sharing the message about Jesus with them?
- How does this story speak into your situation as you seek to reach a particular community/engage in a particular project for God?

Pray for each other and about what God is saying to you.

Worship

"What you worship as something unknown, is the One I am proclaiming to you... In Him we live and move and have our being. As some of your poets have said, 'We are His children.'" Acts 17. 23,28

Sing (or listen to a song) to God for his greatness and his presence in all places and cultures.

Then praise God for particular signs of his presence in the community to which you seek to reach out. Name individual people and places/ events and give thanks for God's presence in each one.

Witness

From the last two sessions – and perhaps between sessions – you will now have some information about the community you are seeking to serve.

Here are some more questions you will probably need to find answers to, by exploring them with the community which you seek to serve:

- Are there needs that can be met by loving service?
- What are the hardships and difficulties, joys and pleasures in people's lives?
- What do people most value? What do they place a low value on?
- How do people relate to God? Do they ever think of going to church? Do they pray?
- How do they get to know new people?

Discuss how best you can do some in-depth listening to the people you are seeking to serve and plan to do this. Here are some ideas – choose one or two which are most relevant to your situation or invent your own ways:

- Set up one-to-one meetings with representatives of the community and talk in depth with them. You could ask some of the questions above.
- Invite a group of people to a pub meal or other informal meeting in a relaxed setting. Provide something to eat and drink and a warm welcome and ask those who come to tell you about their wider community.
- Offer a meeting place, or some practical help, or join in an activity in which many from the group you seek to serve participate. As you do things together, you will more naturally be able to get to know the people who you are alongside. Most of us will only share ourselves with those we are coming to know and trust.

Session 4: More in-depth Listening

Welcome

Get a large-scale map of the local area. Begin to plot on it your team members and any not-yet-Christians you are in contact with in the local community. Then put on the key meeting places.

or

If you are seeking to reach out to a network rather than a geographical area, begin to draw a spider diagram of the network on a sheet of paper. Show on it the patterns and places where people meet, the methods and content of communication, people who connect others together and people who influence opinion.

Worship

Spend a time in silence looking at a picture that expresses something of God's strength and power (e.g. sky at night, lightning, the sea, a big tree). Then praise God in words for his strength, wisdom and power – you could sing, write or spend time praying in words as you continue to look.

Word

Read Numbers 13 & 14.1-9 (Moses and the explorers)

How does this story speak to you? Each share a verse or something from the story which strikes you?

Only if it is helpful, use these questions too

- Whose idea is it to send explorers?
- What are they to do?
- What is the difference between the response of Caleb and the rest of the spies?
- In what ways are you like the explorers and in what ways different?

Pray for each other and about what God is saying to you.

Witness

Summarise all that you have learned so far about the community you are seeking to serve. Add any new insights to the map/diagram

EITHER

A If you have not already done some practical things to engage in in-depth listening with the people you seek to serve, continue your conversation from last time. Plan a date or dates for a meal or activity at which you can spend time with the people you wish to serve better. Remember, these are the sorts of things you need to answer to serve a community well and share Jesus with them in a helpful way:

- Are there needs that can be met by loving service?
- What are the hardships and difficulties, joys and pleasures in people's lives?
- What do people most value? What do they place a low value on?
- How do people relate to God? Do they ever think of going to church? Do they pray?
- How do they get to know new people?

OR

B If you have done this listening:

- Try drawing the community – representing them as a person or as a family or as an abstract shape on a large sheet of paper. What stands out about the community from this representation?
- Look at the 8 questions in appendix 1. Is there more to discover before you can make a decision? (For example, about possible partners.) Plan how and when you will do that.
- Is there anything else that God seems to be saying?

Session 5: Planning and Checking

Welcome

Think about what makes good news. Tell the group about an issue you are facing and say what would be good news for you in that situation.

Worship

Praise God that He has good news for our every need. For example:

When...	God gives...
Lonely	Friendship
Empty	Fulfilment
Guilty	Forgiveness
Broken	Wholeness
Trapped	Freedom
Rejected	More than Acceptance (He seeks us out)
Feeling Worthless	Reassurance of our infinite value
Aimless	Purpose for Living
Dying	Eternal Life

Give thanks for God's good news to your group and to you as an individual.

Word and Witness

Read Acts 13.1-3 (The Church in Antioch).

- What is the Church in Antioch doing in order to discover God's call?
- How does God lead them to take the next steps in mission?
- Spread out the maps and diagrams you have made. Pray and spend some time thinking about how the gospel is good news for the community you are seeking to reach. From the pictures you are building up, which aspects of the gospel are likely to speak into the needs of the community (the list above may help)? This may be your "open door". How will you, as a team, communicate and practically demonstrate these aspects of the gospel?

- The “open door” is just the beginning. Spend some time thinking about the ways in which gospel values may be most challenging to people as they grow in discipleship.
- Gather your plans together so that you can clearly explain them to someone else. You will need to answer the obvious questions (Who? What? When? Where? Why? How?), for example, saying:
 - What you plan to do
 - Why you are going to do this
 - Who will be involved and how
 - When and where this will take place
 - How other people are going to join in
 - What other help you need

Spend some time listening to God together. Share anything that you believe God is saying.

Session 6: Preparing for Action

Welcome

Think of an occasion when a plan did not work but when good things came out anyway. Share with the group what made the good things possible.

Word

Read Acts 13 and 14 (Barnabas and Paul's first steps in mission).

- Did everything go to plan?
- How did they adjust as events moved forward?
- What do you need to remember from this as you make your first steps together?

Pray for each other and about what God is saying to you.

Witness

Plan to invite your small group coach, Lightwave Hub Leader (or other respected Christian friend or minister on the coach-supervisor's recommendation) to meet with the group so that he/ she can listen to what you think God is saying and to your developing plans. Give them permission to ask some hard questions and give you feedback.

Following on the feedback from your coach-supervisor, improve your plans as needed. You may also want to think (or think again) about:

- How often does the team need to meet, to pray, worship and listen to God, to one another, and to the feedback from the people you are serving?
- Who else do you want to be part of the team? Or to be involved in other ways?
- Do you need partners, such as other agencies or churches?
- How much will this cost financially? Is a budget needed? Do you need to ask for funding – and where from? Don't forget that the Lightwave team can help here.

- Does the team – or individuals in it – need more training?
Training in what?
- Does the team need a companion who will meet with you regularly and review your progress? Who might that be?

What are your next steps? Fix dates and times, and (if needed) when and how to invite people.

Worship

Give thanks

- for what you have noticed about what God is like in the past few sessions
- for what you have heard from God in the past few sessions
- for the people you want to serve and the signs of God's presence there

Barnabas and Paul were 'commended to the grace of God for the work' (Acts 14. 26). Praise God for his grace, seen in Jesus, to you and to others.

Pray for each other, for God's grace for the work that you have planned.

APPENDIX 1: INITIAL KEY QUESTIONS

The following 8 key questions are ones which it would be good to work through as a small group. They come up through the sessions, but you may also need to plan a specific time or times to pray and work through these together – for example, at a dedicated small group meeting.

- Each share why you want reach out to the people you have identified, and your personal vision for that.
- What do notice God is already doing in this community?
- Where do you think the needs are, and the points of darkness or difficulty?
- What gifts and resources do we bring?
- Who might our partners be? (Churches? Schools? Charities?)
- What will be the cost of doing what you have in mind (financial/ emotional/ time costs)?
- What will make you shout “Hallelujah!” in one year’s time, and in 5 years?
- How can we find out more about the community we think we may be called to serve?

APPENDIX 2: FEEDBACK FORM

You can also [complete this feedback form online here](#). Or go to www.lightwave.org.discernfuture and follow the links. Or you can complete below and paste into an email and email to Lightwave.community@cofesuffolk.org

Name/Place of Group:

Contact:

Who is the Community which you are seeking to serve, bless and share good news with?

What do you notice God is already doing in this community or in wider Suffolk?

Where do you think the needs are, and the points of darkness or difficulty?

What gifts and resources do you bring?

Are you partnering with anyone? (Churches? Schools? Charities?)

What will be the cost of doing what you have in mind (financial / emotional / time)?

What will make you shout "Hallelujah!" in 2030?

If you have you experienced God's presence in any contribution of Lightwave or the wide Diocese, please tell us about this.

Please share anything which you sense God may be saying to us as we discern the future shape of the Lightwave community? (e.g. about calling, leadership, resourcing)

Please share anything you sense God is saying about mission in the rural areas of Suffolk?

Please email your feedback to Lightwave.community@cofesuffolk.org or until November 15th 2021 you can fill in a form online at <https://forms.gle/ZzJJPTMmxAvo9LKF9>

NB: These small group notes are based on the Booklet "Listening for Mission" available from www.freshexpressions.org.uk. Material is shared with permission.