

The GlobalChurch Project  
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## Ash Barker

### Local Church Small Group Resource

This resource is designed to help your small group discussion. It's shaped to inspire you to consider new ways for understanding the mission of the church. Questions are organized in themes. Consider choosing the themes appropriate to your small group context. You don't need to cover all the questions. Allow for a time of response.

Small Group Preparation:

- Video: Ash Barker, 38 minutes.
- Scripture: Isaiah 58:10 and Luke 14:13–14.
- Participants are encouraged to bring their own journals or writing materials.

Themes explored in the video:

- **Following Jesus into Urban Mission**
- **Joining with Jesus in Urban Mission**
- **Mission and Ministry in Urban Slums**
- **Incarnational Mission & Enfleshed Hope**
- **Risky Compassion & the Compassionate Samaritan**
- **Priorities of Presence**

## Beginning the conversation

Consider the questions suggested below to start the conversation for your small group. They'll consolidate the content of the video, after you've viewed it.

1. What were the major themes in Ash Barker's responses?
2. How does Ash Barker describe the needs of the urban poor?
3. Discuss the difficulties of the content. What was difficult to understand? Was there anything you would like to clarify with the group?
4. Theological method: How is Ash's theology informed and shaped by his practical ministry? What approaches does he take in understanding God in the context of his ministry among urban poor communities?

## Going deeper

Explore the major themes raised in the video. Critically engage with Ash Barker's theology. Consider the questions that respond to the issues raised in your preliminary discussion.

1. **Following Jesus into Urban Mission:** As you listen to the Barker's story of choosing to live and serve among the poor in Melbourne, Bangkok, and Birmingham, what strikes you? Share that with people in your group. (To learn more about Urban Neighbors of Hope, which the Barkers founded, see [www.unoh.org](http://www.unoh.org)).
2. **Following Jesus into Urban Mission:** What do you learn from the Barker's story, about how God leads people to join with him in mission, ministry, and service?
3. **Joining with Jesus in Urban Mission:** Discuss: "The people with the problems are the best ones to deal with them, and when those people work together the best chance of change happens."
4. **Joining with Jesus in Urban Mission:** What do we learn from the story of Poo and her cooking school in a Bangkok slum? How does this challenge us to walk in the Spirit in mission, building relationships, and making the most of the dreams, hopes, skills, and gifts of people on the ground? See [www.cookingwithpoo.com](http://www.cookingwithpoo.com)
5. **Joining with Jesus in Urban Mission:** What difficulties and challenges faced the Barkers in a Bangkok slum community? (Poverty, family pressures, language learning, raising children, the difference between the slum community and the expat world, transitioning back from slum to Western life, translating Christian concepts, etc.)
6. **Joining with Jesus in Urban Mission:** How did the Barkers help Thais understand the Good News, when the concepts do not translate well? What do we learn from this?
7. **Joining with Jesus in Urban Mission:** Discuss the ways the person and experience of Jesus helped Thais open up to an understanding of Jesus (moving from experience to knowledge).
8. **Joining with Jesus in Urban Mission:** According to Ash Barker, what was the progression for many Thais from self-identifying with Jesus (and getting to know him) to identifying with his church (and beginning to fellowship with Christians)? Why didn't the Barkers push this with Thais?
9. **Joining with Jesus in Urban Mission:** Listen to Ash tell the story of how his family moved from Bangkok (Thailand) to Birmingham (UK). What strikes you about this story? What do you learn from the Barkers' experiences? How does Lesslie Newbigin's legacy and passion connect with the Newbigin House ministry in Birmingham, UK? (To learn more about Newbigin House, and the Barkers' ministry in the UK, see [www.newbiginhouse.uk](http://www.newbiginhouse.uk)).
10. **Mission and Ministry in Urban Slums:** What strikes you about the growth of urban slums around the world? (Close to 100,000 people are moving into slums every day, and some cities, like Bangkok for instance, will soon double in size—especially cities in the *10/40 Window*).
11. **Mission and Ministry in Urban Slums:** According to Ash Barker, how should Christians respond to the growth of urban slums?
12. **Mission and Ministry in Urban Slums:** What does Ash Barker say that God is doing in the slums today?
13. **Incarnational Mission & Enfleshed Hope:** How does Ash barker define "incarnational mission", and why is he cautious about the way the language is sometimes used? What are the possibilities and limits to the metaphor of "incarnation"?
14. **Incarnational Mission & Enfleshed Hope:** How do "Messiah complexes" hurt missionaries and slum dwellers? How does "joining with the Trinity" serve as an antidote (and positive alternative) to "Messiah complexes"?

15. **Incarnational Mission & Enfleshed Hope:** What does it mean to see and express “incarnational mission” as “enfleshed hope” (making hope real)?
16. **Risky Compassion & the Compassionate Samaritan:** What did the Samaritan do that was different from the priests and the Levites? What do we learn from the “compassionate Samaritan”? (E.g. travelling a dangerous path, seeing a person suffering, feeling genuine compassion, coming close to others and sharing life with them, responding to suffering and need, and taking risky and compassionate action).
17. **Risky Compassion & the Compassionate Samaritan:** Listen to Ash as he describes the “risky compassion” of his poor neighbors? What do we learn from this?
18. **Risky Compassion & the Compassionate Samaritan:** “Only those who risk going too far can possibly find out how far one can go.” (T.S. Eliot). Discuss what this means for life and mission.
19. **Priorities of Presence:** What does it mean to be “present”? How do we dwell deeply in neighborhoods and communities? How do we take time to see where God is at work, and to slowly, prayerfully, humbly join with him?
20. **Priorities of Presence:** How do we discern the strengths and capacities of communities and neighborhoods? How do we join with (and build on) these strengths, gifts, passions, and capacities?
21. **Priorities of Presence:** What does Ash say about hearing, supporting, and training community organizers? Why is this important?
22. **Priorities of Presence:** Why is advocacy, land rights, and structural change needed? How does Ash say that Christians can apply appropriate pressure to help this happen?

## Application

Ensure the discussion is specifically drawing on your local setting. Make sure the discussion is relevant to the lives of faith for your small group. Encourage relevant and thoughtful examples from each participant.

1. **Following Jesus into Urban Mission:** How is God guiding you to join with him in mission, ministry, and service?
2. **Joining with Jesus in Urban Mission:** “The people with the problems are the best ones to deal with them, and when those people work together the best chance of change happens.” How can this conviction shape your mission and service (or that of your ministry or church)?
3. **Joining with Jesus in Urban Mission:** Think about your ministry in your neighborhood. How are you walking in the Spirit in mission? How are you building relationships? How are you making the most of the dreams, hopes, skills, and gifts of people on the ground?
4. **Joining with Jesus in Urban Mission:** What biblical concepts don’t translate very well in your cultural setting? How are you translating these ideas?
5. **Joining with Jesus in Urban Mission:** Do people in your culture or neighborhood move from an experience of Jesus to a knowledge about Jesus? How does this shape your witness and message?
6. **Mission and Ministry in Urban Slums:** Is God calling you to serve among the urban poor? How are you responding?
7. **Mission and Ministry in Urban Slums:** How can your church or ministry respond to the growth of urban poverty and urban slums?

8. **Incarnational Mission & Enfleshed Hope:** Do “Messiah complexes” influence your ministry or organization? How will you address this, letting “God alone be God”? How will you avoid “playing God in the lives of the poor”?
9. **Risky Compassion & the Compassionate Samaritan:** What strikes you about the story of the Compassionate Samaritan? How will you live out the lessons of this story, in your own life? (E.g. travelling a dangerous path, seeing a person suffering, feeling genuine compassion, coming close to others and sharing life with them, responding to suffering and need, and taking risky and compassionate action).
10. **Risky Compassion & the Compassionate Samaritan:** “Only those who risk going too far can possibly find out how far one can go.” (T.S. Eliot). What does this mean for your life? How can this idea shape the mission of your ministry or church?
11. **Priorities of Presence:** think about your community or neighborhood. What does it mean to be “present”? How can you dwell deeply in your neighborhood and community? How will you take time to see where God is at work, and to slowly, prayerfully, humbly join with him?

## Informing community

Facilitate the space for your group to respond to the discussion. You might consider this section as a personal time of written journal responses to the following questions.

1. What is God encouraging our class and me, to do?
2. In response to the issues raised in the video, what are areas I want to ask God for forgiveness in? How do I need to change? What does God want me to stand up for?
3. How do I need God to minister to me and my community, for us to better engage with the contextual issues of our community?
4. How can I gain a better understanding of ministry among the poor? What do we ask that God would do in our hearts?

## Prayer

Spend time in prayer over what you’ve learnt.

Invite the ministry of the Holy Spirit to clarify, heal, and inspire change for your participants and communities.

## Links

**Website:** [www.theglobalchurchproject.com](http://www.theglobalchurchproject.com)

**Book:** Graham Hill, *GlobalChurch: Reshaping Our Conversations, Renewing Our Mission, Revitalizing Our Churches* (IVP Academic, 2015)