

Way of Discipleship Small Groups

God's mission, the church and purpose in life.



Touching base (5 minutes)

Open in prayer as is helpful for your group.

If this is your first session take time to introduce yourselves and set any ground rules you want to for your time together.

If you met previously take the opportunity either as a group or in pairs to check in with each other about how your response from last time has gone.



Opening question(s) (5 minutes)

What gives us a sense of purpose?



Understanding the information (30 minutes)

Share these thoughts in your own words or read them together:

The word 'mission' means 'sent out' and 'mission' statements say what the purpose of the organisation is sent to do – what does it exist for? At a fundamental level all human beings need a sense of mission. A psychologist called Viktor Frankl spent most of his life studying the question, "What makes life meaningful?" The answer included: A project to work on, ideally which helps others. "My food," said Jesus, "is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work." (John 4:34).



In Matthew's gospel we see a natural link between mission and discipleship. We read how He sends the apostles out (the word apostle means 'sent one') to proclaim this message: 'The kingdom of heaven has come near.' And to act: "Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those who have leprosy, drive out demons." (Matthew 10: 7-8) Jesus tells them that the logical outcome of receiving His life will be sharing that with others: "Freely you have received; freely give." (Matthew 10:8)

Jesus summarizes the goal of discipleship as being able to apprentice others. Pope Francis calls the church a "community of missionary disciples" because it is impossible to separate being with God and becoming like Christ from joining in with what God is doing. As God sent Jesus into the world, so He sends His disciples into the world. Jesus didn't die and rise again to save us from something, but for something.

Jesus' life, death and resurrection - everything He did was rooted in God's mission. So how might we understand it? In short, the mission of God is "to bring unity to all things in heaven and on earth under Christ." He is working towards no less than, "the re-creation of the world, when the Son of Man will rule gloriously." (Matthew 19:28) God is looking to "restore all things" (Acts 3:21) and "through (Christ) to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross." (Colossians 1:19-20) It is the mission of God that shapes a disciple's life, and the life of God's people. It helps us know **who we are** but also **what we are here for**.

At the heart of the church is of course worship. We exist to worship God and will enjoy Him forever. But our worship has always been expressed by responding to the call to join in with God for His purposes. "The Church exists by mission, just as fire exists by burning." (Brunner). It is not that the church has a mission, but that "the mission of God has a church". The relationship between the three words, church, mission and discipleship can sometimes be counter-intuitive to our expectations. Our task is not to grow the church – Jesus said "I will build my church." Neither is it to do God's mission for Him – we are to join in with where He is at work. Our commission is to "make disciples." (Matthew 28) As we grow in discipleship, we will be paying attention to where God is at work and equipped and led to join in with His mission. And as we join in with His mission, the community of worshipping people called out (church) by God will be shaped around His purposes.

When Puccini was fairly young, he contracted cancer, and so he decided to spend his last days writing his final opera, *Turnandot*...When it came to the part in the opera where the master had stopped writing because he died, Toscanini stopped everything, turned around with eyes welling up with tears, and said to the large audience, "This is where the master ends." And he wept. But then, after a few moments, he lifted up his head, smiled broadly, and said, "And this is where his friends began." Then he finished conducting the opera. Mission is 'to continue the opera' – to faithfully do the same things that Jesus did, in the manner in which He did them, for the same ultimate goal.

The creation-wide restoration mission of God has many dimensions, and there have been many attempts to define it. In 1984 the Anglican Church created a "mission statement" and these were fully adopted in 1996. The statement says: The mission of the church is the mission of Christ: To proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom. To teach, baptise and nurture new believers. To respond to human need by loving service. To seek to transform unjust structures of society, to challenge violence of every kind and to pursue peace and reconciliation. To strive to safeguard the integrity of creation and sustain and renew the life of the earth.

These principles emphasise: The creation-wide scope of mission. The social impact of mission which involves reversing of all the evil consequences of sin, against both God and neighbour. It is not just restoring an individual's relationship with God. The way mission gets rid of the sacred/secular divide. Mission is more about going to others and inviting them to join in, rather than expecting them to come to us.

In trying to summarise the nature of the church, one bishop described us as an instrument of God's reign – in other words – one of the (main) ways He sees His purposes on earth. But he also used two other words. The church is a sign of God's reign, and a foretaste of His rule. God needs a visible Christian community that functions as the body of Christ who live out His mission. Mission is not just something we do; it is who we are. The French philosopher Pascal said that it is virtually impossible to try and persuade people of the truth of Christianity, unless the more important thing is in place - to make people wish that it were true because they see the vision of what it offers lived out in real people's lives.

Discuss: What is the purpose of the church?

Reading the Bible (15 minutes)

Read Luke 4: 14-21 in which Jesus describes His mission.

Discuss the Discovery Bible Study questions:

What does this passage teach me about God?

What does this passage teach me about people?

How does this passage call me to obey God?

What might I do in response to this this week?



Seeing how it looks in real lives (10 minutes)

Watch the video at:

<https://youtu.be/PUhMuTBk28g>

What struck you as important in the video?



Responding to God's leading (5 minutes)

Give people an opportunity to think about, "What might God be showing me and how might I respond?" They may like to write this down and/or share it with the group and/or share it with one other person. A friendly question is to ask each other, "Is there anything that would be helpful to ask you next time?"



Group prayer (5 minutes)

All that I am, Lord I place into your hands.
All that I do, Lord, I place into your hands.
Everything I work for I place into your hands.
Everything I hope for I place into your hands.
The gifts you have given me I place into your hands.
All the time before me I place into your hands.
In the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.
Amen.



(Adapted from 'Prayers For Committing Our Work to God', in the Northumbria Community Trust, CelticDaily Prayer: Book One The Journey Begins (London: HarperCollins, 2000), p.278)



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