



God's mission – our mission?

A six-part Bible study resource that allow individuals and congregations to explore what the Bible says about mission and God's heart for the nations.

Introduction to 'God's mission – our mission?'

The overall aim of this Bible study resource is to allow individuals and congregations to explore what the Bible says about mission and God's heart for the nations.

We pray that biblically based convictions will be developed which will lead to even greater involvement in God's mission both at home and overseas.

We desire to see individuals and congregations reawakened to the missionary nature of God's Word and understand better what is meant by the word 'mission'.

We all need to recognise that as followers of Jesus we are called to partner with God in His mission from the end of the pew to the ends of the earth.

The study is divided into six units which are all rich in Scripture. Take time to read through the Bible passages and to reflect on the questions before discussion time.

1 God's heart

Mission flows out of who God is page 4

2 God's nations

God blesses His people that they should bless others page 8

3 God's servants

God sends out His people page 12

4 God's world

God's mission from Jerusalem to the ends of the earth page 16

5 God's command

Jesus' command to 'Go and make disciples' page 22

6 God's witnesses

Being involved in God's mission to the world page 26

As you journey through this Bible study we pray that you will see the passion and purposes of God in reaching out to the lost and broken with His love and grace and the role we must play in partnering with God in His mission.

God's mission – our mission?

God's heart

Why do we do mission?

As a Church, as God's people,
as followers of Jesus Christ,
what motivates us?

Before we can fully understand
what mission is, why we do it
and even our motivations for
doing it, we need to understand
God's heart for His creation and
that He is a 'missionary God'.
We need to start with God.

Creation

J. Andrew Kirk, in his book *What is Mission?*, said "*The mission of God flows directly from the nature of who God is*".

Read Genesis 1:26-31

- From this passage what do you learn about God's character?
- What do you learn from these verses about God's view and plan for humankind and the universe He created?

The fall of man

John Stott in his book *The Living God is a Missionary God* states "The Genesis record moves on from the creation of all things by the one God and of human beings in His likeness, to our rebellion against our Creator and to God's judgment upon his rebel creatures." But even within His judgment God revealed His redeeming love by giving a glimpse of His salvation plan through the one (Jesus), who though bruised, would crush the head of the serpent (Satan) – **see Genesis 3:15; 1 Corinthians 15:20-24; Hebrews 2:14.**

The consequence of humankind's rebellion was, and is, separation from God and yet God in His mercy and love sought out humankind to offer blessing and salvation. **Read Genesis 7:1; 8:20-9:1; Genesis 12:1-3; Exodus 6:6-8; Psalm 98:1-3.**

- Describe how God reveals His mercy to humankind.

STUDY 1

Salvation and blessing

Read Psalm 103, reflecting on God's blessing and salvation to humankind and answer the questions that follow:

- God is personal and relational, reaching out in love to humankind. What examples of this can you find in the passage?
- Verses 19-22 remind us that God is King over everything. His Kingdom rules over all. Why is this important when we think of God as a missionary God?

God, the missionary God, revealed Himself in His Son Jesus Christ.

Read Matthew 3:16-17; John 6:38-40; 1 John 4:10.

- How did God ultimately display His love for humankind?

Read Philippians 2:6-11; Revelation 7:9-10.

- What does this reveal about God's overall plan and desire for all humanity?

Further reflection

It is vital we remember that God is a 'missionary' God. How should this impact and change you as an individual, your congregation and the Presbyterian Church in Ireland as a whole?

Go deeper

God's love was poured into His chosen people, the Children of Israel, but God's heart was not just for them; He loved all peoples.

Read 1 Chronicles 16:23-29; Psalm 67:1-2; Isaiah 45:18-25.

- Describe God's desire for all peoples, all nations.



God's nations

God desired His chosen people to live lives that were holy and pure, reflecting His character to the nations around them.

Unfortunately the Children of Israel did not follow God sincerely. Often they did not influence the nations around them but rather they themselves were influenced to turn away from the one true God. However, ultimately through this people, sinful though they were, God sent His chosen Messiah, Jesus Christ.

Abram

One of the most significant 'sending stories' in the Old Testament is that of Abram. Abram (later known as Abraham) was sent out by God on a particular mission. When you hear the word mission... what comes to mind? How would you describe it? It may come as a surprise that the word mission, as we use it, does not directly occur in the Bible. So where has this word mission come from?

The English word 'mission' comes from the original Latin word *mittere* which means 'to send'. Throughout the Bible and church history God has been and continues to be a 'sending' God.

Read Genesis 12:1-5.

- What was the purpose of God sending Abram?
- Abram was sent out by God. What practical implications did this have for Abram and his family? How is Abram's 'sending' a model of the way God continues to work in the lives of His followers?
- What does God promise Abram and his descendants?

The Children of Israel

Abraham's descendants did grow and multiply and became known as the Children of Israel. This 'nation' was set apart by God for God. Over several generations the Children of Israel found themselves enslaved to the Egyptians. God sent Moses back to Egypt to bring them out of slavery. God sent the Children of Israel to the Promised Land; He had a special role for them in pointing others to the one true living God.

Read Deuteronomy 28:9-10.

- What promise/command did God give to the Children of Israel in these verses?

STUDY 2

The Nations

God's love extended beyond the Children of Israel; He did not forget his promise to Abram that all nations would be blessed through Him; this is very evident across the Old Testament. There are numerous passages referring to 'the nations'.

Read Isaiah 49:6; Jeremiah 16:19-21; Micah 4:2-3; Zephaniah 3:8-9.

- What do you learn about how God viewed other nations?

God's love and compassion for all nations is also displayed in the Old Testament through His sending of prophets and teachers to turn the Children of Israel back to God and also to challenge the nations around them to worship Him alone. A fine example of this is found in the book of Jonah.

Read Jonah 1:1-3

- What was Jonah's response to being sent by God to the people of Nineveh?

As we know, God caused a great raging storm to come upon Jonah and he was eventually cast into the sea and swallowed by a large fish. Jonah spent three days in the belly of this fish, during which time he repented of his disobedience (to a certain degree). God caused Jonah to be vomited out and we then see God's second attempt to send Jonah to the people of Nineveh.

Read Jonah 3

- What was God's response to the people of Nineveh's repentance?

Read Jonah 4

- What was Jonah's response to their repentance and God's mercy?

Further reflection

In the last verse of the book of Jonah God clearly shows that he must be concerned about all people.

Jonah 4:11 – *"But Nineveh has more than a hundred and twenty thousand people who cannot tell their right hand from their left, and many cattle as well. Should I not be concerned about that great city?"*

- How does God want you to respond in love to those certain 'people' whom you feel do not deserve God's love?
- Think of occasions when you have resisted God sending you to a certain place or group of people. Spend time in prayer seeking forgiveness and praying for an openness of heart to be 'sent'.

Go deeper

Despite the sin of the Children of Israel throughout the Old Testament God consistently revealed Himself through some of His faithful servants whom He sent to other nations.

Read about Joseph in **Genesis 41:39-45**, Namaan's Servant Girl in **2 Kings 5:1-15**, Esther in **Esther 4:12-5:8; 7:3-6; 8:1-2**, Daniel, in **Daniel 3-6** (The exile carried the truth to the people of Syria, Babylon, Persia, and Media)

- How did they reveal God to those in other nations?

God's servants

God sending out His people was not only confined to the Old Testament. Indeed throughout the Old Testament God pointed to the one that He would send into the world, the promised Messiah, the Saviour who would save all peoples from their sins.

Jesus, God's only Son, was sent by the Father into the world. Jesus in turn sent His disciples out to be His witnesses not only to the Jewish nation but to all nations; to the ends of the earth. In this study we are going to contemplate this 'sending' further.

The ultimate sending – Jesus

Read 1 Chron. 16:23-24; Psalm 96:10; Isaiah 60:3 & Isaiah 61:1.

- What do these prophecies and verses from the Old Testament teach us about why the Messiah would one day be sent by God?
- What would the Messiah do?

The sending of Jesus Christ was the fulfilment of the promise (covenant) that God had made with Abraham in Genesis. In the New Testament we see God's supreme sending in His own Son, Jesus Christ so that all humankind (Jew and Gentile) could come into relationship with God.

Nate Wilson in his book *Motivations for Missions* said *"Jesus reminded the Jews that their blessing was for all nations; the kingdom he spoke of was intended for all peoples (Matthew 8:11; Mark 11:17). After Jesus' resurrection, Luke (24:45-47) tells us that he taught the disciples from the Old Testament (the N.T. hadn't been written yet) that repentance for forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in His name to all nations!"*

Jesus sent out the first disciples

At different times during Jesus' earthly ministry He sent out His disciples on short term mission.

Read Luke 9:1-6; Luke 10:1-3, 9 & 17

- What was the disciples' task?

In **John 20:21**, Jesus reiterates that as He was sent by the Father, so He is also sending His disciples. The disciples are reminded of this yet again after Jesus' death and resurrection and before His return to heaven.

STUDY 3

Read Matthew 28:16-20; Luke 24:46-49; John 14:26, 16:7-8 and Acts 1:8.

- In what context and with what support was Jesus sending out the disciples?
- Where does Jesus send His disciples to?
- What did Jesus command His disciples to be and to do in these passages?

We see clear commands that Jesus gave to His disciples before He ascended to heaven. Jesus commissioned His followers to go and make disciples of all nations, to be His witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, and Samaria and to the ends of the earth.

So how did the first disciples respond to Jesus' command to go?

Read Acts 2:1-40

- What did the disciples receive in Jerusalem and what effect did it have?
- Who was in Jerusalem for this feast of Pentecost?
- What did Peter share with his gathered listeners?
- How was the Great Commission carried out that day?

In Acts 2 we see that people from different nations heard the gospel. Mark 13:10 speaks of the gospel being preached to all nations. The task is not yet complete; indeed there are many nations who have yet to hear the gospel of Jesus Christ (The Joshua Project www.joshuaproject.net).

Reflect on how these truths apply to us as Jesus' followers today.

Further reflection

Jesus' Great Commission was not simply for those first disciples. He continues to send us out as His followers today. Jesus does not call us to personal therapy but to mission-focused living for Him.

As the Church, as disciples of Jesus, in what ways should we step out in faith from the end of our pew to the ends of the earth to see people of every ethnic group reached with the gospel?

Go deeper

Read Acts 8:1, 4-8, 26-40

- What was the cause of the spread of the gospel into Judea and Samaria?
- What was the result of this persecution?
- How was Philip sent to the Ethiopian?
- What does this passage teach us about God's heart for people of all nations?



STUDY 4

God's world

In our previous study we saw that following the anointing of the Holy Spirit, the disciples began to share the good news of Jesus.

The Acts of the Apostles paints a wonderful picture of how God's mission began to spread out from Jerusalem. It was a clear fulfilment of the covenant that God had made with Abraham (**Acts 3:25**) to bless all nations.

Acts 1-7 tells of the disciples being witnesses in Jerusalem, although in Peter's first sermon numerous people from many nations came to faith in Jesus Christ (**Acts 2:9-11** "*Parthians, Medes and Elamites; residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya near Cyrene; visitors from Rome (both Jews and converts to Judaism); Cretans and Arabs*").

In **Acts 8-12** we see movement out into wider Judea and Samaria and therefore to the non-Jews, the Gentiles. Also the early church leaders based in Jerusalem learned what it meant to reach out to the Gentiles (**Acts 11**).

Acts 13-28 describes mission in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and to the ends of the earth, which included people from many different nations and cultures. The map below gives some indication of the spread of the gospel across the known world. In this study we will see that God continued to send out his followers to proclaim the good news of Jesus to the ends of the earth.



STUDY 4

Read Acts 10:1-8, 17-33, 44-48; Acts 11:1-3, 17-18; Acts 13:1-5, 13-14, 46-49.

- What role did the Holy Spirit play in sending out Peter, Saul and Barnabas?
- What role did the church play in sending out Peter, Saul and Barnabas?
- What can we learn from Peter's experience and from the church in Antioch about sending out and receiving back?
- To whom did God send Peter, Saul and Barnabas?

Paul was sent by God specifically to reach out to the Gentiles, those outside the Jewish faith and culture (**Acts 13:46 & 47 and Romans 10:12-15**).

The Philippian Church

During Paul's second mission journey he spent time in Philippi where he planted his first church in Europe. Sometime later he wrote to them to encourage them in their faith in Jesus Christ. In this letter we see clear evidence that God continued to call and send out His people to build His kingdom and to serve His Church through partnering with Him.

Read Philippians 1:3-6; 2:19-30; 4:10, 14-20.

- How did the relationship between Paul and the Philippian Christians impact their partnership in the gospel?
- Why did Paul want to send Timothy to the Christians at Philippi?
- For what purpose was Epaphroditus sent by the Philippians to Paul?

Further reflection

In light of the Scripture we have read, think about your congregation and any mission plans that may have been drawn up by your Kirk Session. Take some time to reflect and list the ways that you as an individual and your congregation have been actively getting involved in the Great Commission in your:

- Jerusalem
- Judea
- Samaria
- Ends of earth

What then is our response? Does God still send?

Do we, as followers of Jesus, still believe that God the Father and God the Holy Spirit sends out His workers? Is there still a need? See **Matthew 24:14**. Are we obedient to God's command to **go**? Make a commitment personally or as a group to pray, fast and ask God to send you out.

Glocal God

“ Global God broaden my vision of
your worldwide work.
Local Lord deepen my discernment
of your particular presence.”

From Gerard Kelly's book Twitturgies.

STUDY 4

Go deeper

Read 2 Corinthians 5:11-21.

Notice and prayerfully consider the apostle Paul's motivation for service – the compelling love of Christ, vs12-16; the power of the gospel, v17 and Christ's commission, vs18-20.

- What motivates you to do God's will? He has entrusted to us the message of the gospel and chosen us to be His ambassadors to represent Him and share His love and His truth with a lost and needy world.
- What things might hold you back from sharing your faith and the message of reconciliation that Paul writes of?

Consider the great cost to Christ and the lengths to which God was prepared to go to rescue us, in order that we might become His ambassadors (v21)

Pray that God would guide you into His perfect plan for your life and service.



God's command

We have thought about how we are sent by God through the power of the Holy Spirit and that we are sent to people of every tribe, nation and tongue in our Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and to the ends of the earth.

God continues to send us out as His Church. In this study we will look at Jesus' life and what we can learn from Him that will help us to fulfil His great calling and commission on all our lives.

In John 20:21 Jesus told His disciples "as the Father sent me, I am sending you." Jesus was the ultimate 'sent' one, on whom we need to model our lives.

Jesus commissioned His disciples to make other disciples, baptising them and teaching them to obey all His teachings. Jesus gave these directives after sharing His life and ministry with these eleven men over three years. What exactly did these disciples experience through Jesus' ministry and teaching?

Read Matthew 8:5-10; Matthew 19:14-15; Mark 1:40-41; John 4:4-10; John 11:33-36.

- How did Jesus relate to people?

Read Matthew 5:3-11; Matthew 6:9-13; Luke 9:23-25; John 13:34-35; John 15:5.

- What did Jesus teach His disciples about living out their faith?
What challenges you most in His teaching?

Read Matthew 8:14-17; Matthew 25: 34-36, 40; Mark 1: 14-15; Luke 24:44-49; John 13:14-17.

- In what ways did Jesus share the good news of the Kingdom?

STUDY 5

Go.... make disciples

Jesus was clear that He wanted His disciples to make other disciples. We see several examples of disciple-making in the New Testament by Paul with the churches in Galatia, Corinth, Ephesus, Philippi and Thessalonica. One individual whom Paul met while on his missionary journeys was a young man called Timothy. The books of Timothy 1 and 2 give us an insight into their friendship and how Paul discipled Timothy.

Read 1 Tim 1:1-2, 18; 2 Tim 1:2-5; 2 Tim 3:10-13

- What kind of relationship did Paul and Timothy have?

Read 1 Tim 4:6-16; 2 Tim 2:1-4, 14-16, 24; 2 Tim 3:14-17; 2 Tim 4:1b-5.

- What practical biblical teaching did Paul highlight to Timothy concerning how he was to live as a follower of Jesus?
- How was Timothy encouraged to 'make disciples'?
- In 2 Timothy 2:2 Paul encourages Timothy to pass on to other believers what he has learned from him. *"And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable people who will also be qualified to teach others."* How are you seeking to pass on what you are learning about Jesus to others and to those who are not yet believers?

Further reflection

How can we as the Church imitate Jesus today in our Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and to the ends of the earth as we seek to share the good news of the Kingdom?

Go deeper

Read as many of these passages as you can; **Matthew 9:35-38; Matthew 12:18-21; Mark 5: 25-34; Mark 16:15-16; Luke 4:1 – 5:26; Luke 10:38-42; Luke 19: 5-10; Luke 24:45-49; John 1:35-39; John 8: 6b-11.**

- From these passages what do you observe was Jesus' purpose in His mission?
- How did Jesus go about proclaiming the good news of the Kingdom of God?
- What tangible things did Jesus carry out as part of His mission?



God's witnesses

In our first study we asked the question *“why do we do mission?”* We have seen that God seeks to reconcile mankind to Himself from every tribe, nation and tongue through the sacrifice of His Son Jesus Christ on the cross.

We are called, like Jesus, to be sent out as part of His big mission plan to our Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and to the ends of the earth.

As we experience blessing from the Lord in our lives, we are called to be a blessing to the nations (Genesis 12:2-3). But what form will this blessing to all nations take?

Read Revelation 5:9-10 and Revelation 7:9-17.

- What do you learn about the ultimate objective of mission from these passages?

In his book *Genesis to Revelation: God's Heart for the World* Todd Ahrend says *“It is important to connect what is happening in Revelation with what God started in Genesis 12 in the life of Abraham. God will do it. There will be a representative from every nation, tribe, people, and language bowing and worshipping at His feet. Heaven is multicultural. God is a missionary God, and from cover to cover (of his Word) He is showing us His mission. Will you join Him in bringing a representative from every people group to His throne? It will happen; the only question is will you be a part of it?”*

If the answer is yes, then how can we be part of it? There are many different ways to be involved in what God is doing across His world.

We are going to explore six ways to reach God's world as suggested by OMF International on their website

www.omf.org/us

1. Learn about God's global mission

Read Acts 14:27-28.

- How did the early Church learn about what God was doing around the world?
- List ways in which you as a group/congregation/individual can learn more about God's heart for the world and what He is doing in global mission.

STUDY 6

2. Pray about mission

Jesus and Paul demonstrated the importance of prayer in mission.

Read John 17:6-26

- What did Jesus pray for His disciples?
- What did He pray for those who would believe through them?

Read Colossians 4:2-4 and 2 Thessalonians 3:1-2

- What did Paul request prayer for?
- How are you and your congregation praying for mission/missionaries at present? How could you deepen and develop this?

3. Get up and go

In our studies we have seen that God called His people to go out in mission for Him. God calls us to go, see and be part of what He is doing first hand.

- Could God be asking you to go?

Perhaps go out to visit missionaries. This is a practical way in which to learn more about the missionaries and their work. It gives an opportunity to offer support and encouragement and is a positive way of developing and deepening partnership. Many mission agencies send teams each year.

- Are we willing to go if God calls us, whatever our age or stage?

God also calls us to go on mission overseas longer term. Perhaps you are now retired, are fit and healthy and have some extra time on your hands. Could God be asking you to consider going overseas for a longer period of time? Is this something you are praying about and asking God to show you? Maybe you are

nowhere near retirement, perhaps busy in your job with a young family. Spend time as a group praying for opportunities to go and the willingness to obey God's call.

4. Serve as senders

In study 4 we examined how the Philippian church served Paul as a 'sender'. They partnered with him in his gospel work by sending one of their own to visit him, to care for him and also to support him financially.

Read Philippians 1:5; 2:25; 4:18.

- How are you and your congregation supporting, encouraging and praying for missionaries connected to you?

There are so many ways that we can serve missionaries as senders.

Discuss the following points and think practically how you are going to 'serve as a sender'.

- How are you praying for them?
- How is your communication with them?

Who is responsible for communication with missionaries? There are now many ways in which to keep updated with what God is doing through the work of the missionary: emails, Skype, Facebook, texting, letters, cards and telephone calls.

- Think of practical ways to encourage missionaries, especially when they return home for a visit or for good.
- How is your congregation giving to mission?
(See Philippians 4:10-20)

STUDY 6

5. Welcome the world

Read **Leviticus 19:33-34; Deuteronomy 10:17-19 and Luke 7:1-10.**

- From these passages how should we, as followers of Jesus, treat those who have come from other cultures to live among us?
- As you think about the local community in which you live, how are you as an individual and as a congregation welcoming those whom have come from overseas?

Society is now made up of many nationalities and as followers of Jesus we are called to love our neighbour as ourselves.

Read **Matthew 22:39.**

- How do we love those from other cultures whom God has placed across our paths?
- As an individual or congregation how could this be done even better in your community?



6. Mobilise other Christians

Read **2 Timothy 2:2**

- What does Paul encourage Timothy to do here?
- Are you passionate about mission? If yes, how are you sharing this passion with others in your congregation or family?
- If we have a heart for the nations, how are we sharing it with those around us, encouraging and challenging them to be involved too?

Phil Parshall, missionary, author and mobiliser has said, *"Mobilisers stir other Christians to active concerns for reaching the world"*.

- How is your congregation stirring other Christians to activate concern for mission?

Too often perhaps, one of the thoughts we have about mission is that it is done by other people, 'professionals' – ministers or missionaries and does not require us to be directly involved. Tony Horsfall, author and missions trainer would disagree with this sentiment in his book *Timeout*.

"Mission is not an optional extra for a fanatical few within the church. Mission expresses the heartbeat of God, for God is a missionary God, and the Bible is a missionary book."

The theme of God's saving grace for the nations pulsates on every page, and should find a resonance in the hearts of all who take His Word seriously".

STUDY 6

Further reflection

Pray for opportunities for yourself or others to go, and for the willingness to obey God's call.

Ask God to show you which of the six ways outlined above you should commit to.

Consider whether you should learn more about serving overseas and ask your minister for further information, or consider contacting the Global Mission Secretary, Council for Global Mission, Presbyterian Church in Ireland.



Photographs reproduced by kind permission

Front cover: Two children in Kenya, by Helen Johnston 2005

p.7: Women's Empowerment Programme, Malawi by Robin Quinn 2011

p.15: World Development Appeal, Rwanda, by Chris Nelson 2013

p.21: Afghan boys in Kabul, by Graham Connor 2005

p.25: Viyele ECD centre, Malawi, by Diane Cusiack 2014

p.30: International Meeting Point by Matthew Overhead 2014

p.32: Worship in Nepal, by Helen Johnston 2005

p.33: International Meeting Point by Matthew Overhead 2014

p.34: World Development Appeal, Rwanda, by Chris Nelson 2013





Assembly Buildings, 2-10 Fisherwick Place, Belfast BT1 6DW
Tel: +44 (0)28 9032 2284 Email: info@presbyterianireland.org
www.presbyterianireland.org