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MEMBER'S HANDOUT
the mission of God





LEARNING OUTCOMES



By the end of this session we hope you will understand:

- The importance of a theological understanding of the mission of God as the foundation for your ministry in fresh expressions of church
- The biblical foundations for that theological understanding in both Old and New Testaments
- Some common wrong or divergent understandings of contemporary mission
- Some of the ways in which a theological understanding of mission has shaped the church down the centuries
- Ways of thinking about God's mission in the contemporary church and in fresh expressions of church

We will encourage you to reflect after the session on:

- The importance of our understanding of the mission of God for the shaping of the life of the church you are called to serve
- The implications of this understanding for your own life and ministry
- Your own particular vocation to share in God's mission
- Ways of continuing to reflect on God's mission as the course moves on

1 - THE HEART OF MISSION

In the last section we looked closely at our mission context and the way our society is changing.

That analysis gave us some of the reasons why the life of the Church in Britain is changing and needs to change to more of a mixed economy: fresh expressions of church alongside more traditional congregations.

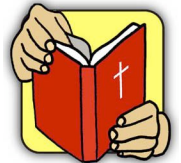
Those reasons will lie beneath why many of us are sharing in this course and why we are committed to new mission ventures in different ways.

But they won't be the deepest reasons.

Underlying the change at a deeper level still is our understanding of who God is and in particular that God is a God of love.

God loves the world he has created powerfully and eternally.

"For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but have everlasting life".



Understanding God's love is demanding. Paul prays in Ephesians 3 that the Christians "might have the power to comprehend, with all the saints, what is the breadth and length and height and depth and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge" (Ephesians 3.18-19).

God's love is at the heart of God's nature. God's love lies at the heart of the creation of the universe and at the heart of God's hope for the world.

It is in the nature of God's love and all love to be active. According to the whole witness of Scripture, God does not stand back and wait for the world to come to him.

God calls all of us into a saving relationship through his Son Jesus Christ

Because of love, God is a God of mission: a God who sends. The word mission comes from the Latin verb: mitto: I send.

- God's mission flows from God's love.
- God's mission is at the heart of God's nature
- God's way of mission is always a way of love
- God's mission reaches out to the whole of creation
- God's mission is God's love in action

**GOD'S MISSION: TRUE OR FALSE**

1. "It is not the Church of God that has a mission in the world but the God of mission who has a Church in the world"
2. "Mission is finding out what God is doing and joining in"
3. "God works only in and through his chosen people, the Church"
4. "Mission is primarily about growing the church"
5. "Mission is something which happens in other parts of the world"

THE MISSION OF GOD IN SCRIPTURE

Mission in the Old Testament

The Bible tells the story of the love of God in action, the mission of God in the Old and the New Testaments.

- In the book of Genesis, God calls Abram not for his own sake only but for the sake of the whole world: "in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed" (Genesis 12.3).
- Moses is called and sent by God to bring the slaves out of Egypt to be God's own people. Throughout the Old Testament, we see Israel wrestling with this call. To be God's own people is to bear witness to God's grace, love and holiness not just in Israel but to the whole earth.

The goal of God's mission in the Old Testament is establishing the reign or rule or kingdom of God. The marks of the kingdom are peace and freedom, justice and righteousness throughout the whole earth.

A very important starting point for mission is to begin to "mind the gap": to become aware in our own day of what the world is like (on the one hand) and what the world is called to be (on the other).

Much of the groundwork for this vision of what the world is called to be is to be found in the study of the Old Testament where the theme and range of the material is concerned with the whole of human life. The themes of the New Testament give greater weight and focus to the life of the emerging Christian communities and their concerns.

It is impossible to go to one or two key texts in the Old Testament to give a blueprint for God's call for human society. The whole must be read and studied and reflected upon in dialogue with the life of the world. Out of the gap which emerges spring energy and vision for mission and change.

What the world is called to be



What the world is like now

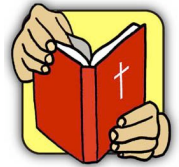
The Kingdom of God in Isaiah

Throughout the Book of Isaiah there are a number of striking images of the coming kingdom of God which will mean:

"They shall beat their swords into ploughshares and their spears into pruning hooks" (2.4)

"The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light" (9.2)

"The wolf shall live with the lamb and the lion shall lie down with the kid" (11.6)



These visions for an ideal future, in stark contrast with much of our present experience, have formed down the centuries a powerful means of bringing people together to work for change.

Raymond Fung's book, the Isaiah Vision, takes as its agenda the changes envisaged in the vision of Isaiah 65.17-24:

- That children do not die
- That old people live in dignity
- That those who build houses live in them
- That those who plant vineyards eat the fruit

This is a powerful vision for a community and the basis of a radical agenda for social and political transformation.

The vision of the coming kingdom in Isaiah depends on the anointed king who will come. The Hebrew term for "anointed" is Messiah and the Greek term is Christ.

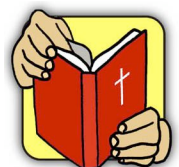
"The spirit of the Lord shall rest on him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord. His delight shall be in the fear of the Lord.

He shall not judge by what his eyes see or decide by what his ears hear; but with righteousness he shall judge the poor and decide with equity for the meek of the earth..." 11.2-3



In the later chapters of Isaiah this coming king is portrayed also as the obedient servant (the Greek term is "pais" - the same as the Greek word for son) who is called to suffer and to die. In the suffering and death of the servant is redemption and renewal for the whole earth.

"But he was wounded for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities. Upon him was the punishment that made us whole and by his bruises we are healed" (53.5).



Mission in the New Testament

The message of Jesus has at its very heart this hope new vision for the world which is summed up in the shorthand phrase "the kingdom of God":

"Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God and saying, 'The time is fulfilled and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe the good news.'" (Mark 1.14-15)



Jesus' ministry includes both teaching about the kingdom and signs of the kingdom's presence through miracles of healing and deliverance. In Luke's gospel, Jesus' public ministry begins in the synagogue in Damascus as he reads aloud (and applies to himself) the manifesto of Isaiah 61 (Luke 4.16-21).

"The spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me; he has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed, to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and to release the prisoners; to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour." Isaiah 61.1-2)



Following the pattern of the Old Testament, from the very beginning of his ministry, Jesus calls others to be involved in the mission of establishing and proclaiming God's reign:

"He went up the mountain and called to him those whom he wanted, and they came to him. And he appointed twelve, whom he also named apostles, to be with him, and to be sent out to proclaim the message" (Mark 3.13-14).



The mission of the disciples is to live and to proclaim the message of the kingdom. The mission of Jesus himself is, of course, far greater than this. Jesus not only lives and proclaims the kingdom of God. It is through Jesus' death on the cross and the power of the resurrection that the kingdom is established:

"For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross" (Colossians 1.19-20)



For this reason, at the heart of the gospel message which the church proclaims and at the heart of mission is the story of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ (see also 1 Corinthians 15.1-3). It is only by his death and resurrection that the kingdom is established and the possibilities of reconciliation and renewal for all people and all creation are held open. The gap between God's vision for creation and the reality is very wide. The only possibility for a new beginning and the redeeming of creation is through an event as deep and radical as the crucifixion and resurrection of the God's Son out of love for the world.

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the mission of God

In every time and in every place the church is called to demonstrate, live and proclaim this good news: a truth emphasised by the different passages in the New Testament where the early disciples are commissioned by Christ:

"Thus it is written, that the Messiah is to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day and that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things. And see, I am sending upon you what my Father promised; so stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high." (Luke 24.46-49)





The Spirit and Mission

Mission is at the heart of God's grace and love: the Father sends the Son. The Father and the Son together send the Holy Spirit. Part of the work of the Spirit (and a particular emphasis in Luke's theology) is to empower the church in this task of mission:

"But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea, in Samaria and to the ends of the earth"
(Acts 1.8).



This empowering of the Spirit is worked out in all kinds of ways in the accounts of Jesus' ministry in the gospels and in the story of the early church in the Book of Acts. Part of the study in reflection on mission is reflection on the ways in which the Holy Spirit is and can be empowering the church today in a whole variety of ways to demonstrate and articulate good news.



CASE STUDIES: FRESH EXPRESSIONS OF CHURCH AND MISSION



As you watch the DVD think together about what model and understanding of mission underlies this new venture.

What connections are there between the DVD and what we have talked about so far in this session?

THE MISSION OF GOD IN THE CHRISTIAN STORY

There is no single way of interpreting the Biblical understanding of mission to a set of neat precepts and rules. The Church has to keep on returning to scripture to renew and reform our vision of what we are called to do.

As we look back down the centuries we see patterns of change as in different communities and generations, the church has passed through difficult times, has returned to God in prayer and to the scriptures and has been renewed in faith and mission.

Some of these great movements are:

- The different monastic movements calling people to community, deeper commitment and self-giving love. Some of these early movements led to the carrying of the gospel to Britain by the Irish missionaries and by Augustine.
- The reformation across Europe as the church learned again to set the good news of Jesus Christ at the heart of its life and to read the scriptures and to pray in the ordinary language of the people.
- The renewals and revivals of the eighteenth century which led to the founding of the Methodist Church as John Wesley and others were led to go outside and beyond existing churches to those who could not connect.
- The call to take the gospel into the whole world from the 16th to the 20th centuries which led to the establishing of Christianity throughout Africa, South America and Asia by missionaries from Europe and North America.
- The Pentecostal and charismatic movements of the 20th century which have at their heart a rediscovery of the power of the Holy Spirit for Christian mission and which have led to the dramatic growth of the church in many parts of the world.



We stand in a long tradition of change, transformation and mission. At the heart of all of these movements of renewal and mission is a fresh vision of God's love which comes through deep engagement with Scripture. All of these changes have also been a response to wider cultural development and change and (often) changes in technology (such as the advent of the printing press or easier travel following trade routes).

In our own generation we sense a call to change and to grow in our sharing in God's mission through enabling existing churches to welcome others in and through establishing fresh expressions of church.

In our generation also, the vision for change needs to be nurtured by a fresh vision of God's love and grace through our own worship, prayer and engagement with Scripture and God's story.

SUMMARIES OF MISSION



A number of short summaries of what it means to share in God's mission have been produced in recent years.

The best known and the most widely used are the Five Marks of Mission of the Anglican Communion, adopted by the Lambeth Conference in 1988 and widely recognized by other churches and traditions:

- 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 strive to safeguard the integrity of creation and sustain and renew the life of the earth.



CONCLUSION AND FURTHER REFLECTION



Mission in the life of the church springs from a renewed experience and awareness of God's love.

Is it familiar or unfamiliar?

What challenges you?

What do you need to think about further?

How does this affect your thinking about fresh expressions of church?

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FURTHER REFLECTION



1 - Journal ***

Write down in your course journal what has surprised you most in this session. What are three things you have learned about Christian mission? Were your answers to the True/False exercise different or similar to the rest of the group?

What understanding of mission is operating in your local church at present?

Where do you see/are you most aware of the gap between the biblical vision of God's kingdom and your experience of life in your context?

2 - Reading

*** Mission Shaped Church Chapter 5

*** John Hull, Mission Shaped Church, A theological response. Do you agree or disagree with the main thrust of this?

3 - Watch and reflect **

Borrow a copy of the Expressions DVD. Choose a different fresh expression of church and repeat the exercise from the session.



4 - Bible Studies ***

(a) Work through the material in the Members Handouts not covered in the session and follow through some of the biblical passages. Are there any you would add as vital to our understanding of mission?

(b) Isaiah

Follow through the sequence of passages looked at in the notes above and reproduced more fully here. What does each one tell you about the kingdom of God and about the coming king?

- Isaiah 2.1-4
- Isaiah 9.1-7
- Isaiah 11.1-9
- Isaiah 42.1-4
- Isaiah 53.1-12
- Isaiah 61.1-4
- Isaiah 65.17-24

(c) The Acts of the Apostles



Follow through these references to the coming of the Holy Spirit in Acts (always connected with a new episode of mission).

- Acts 2.1-12
- Acts 4.23-31
- Acts 8.14-25
- Acts 10.34-48
- Acts 13.1-3
- Acts 16.6-10
- Acts 19.1-7



5 - Prayer and Reflection **

On your own or in dialogue with your learning partners, think about the particular community you may be called to serve in establishing a fresh expression.

Ask God to show you some more of his love for this group of people. Ephesians 3.14-21 would be an excellent passage to guide your prayers.