

God's Missionary Kingdom



A Bible study to reveal God's heart for the nations.

Session One - The Centre of Our Faith and Life

Objective:

We will examine through group discussion our personal views of God's missionary kingdom.
We will study Scriptures to better understand God's mission as the centre of our faith and life.
We will evaluate the role of missions in our personal lives and in the life of our church, with a special focus on actions to be taken to enhance our mission emphasis.

Session Prelim:

While discussing plans for a congregation's upcoming Mission Festival, an elder remarks: "I think it's good to have a Mission Sunday once a year. It helps our members remember why we have missions as part of our annual budget. Let's not get too carried away with missions, though. We have many activities that are just as important, like . . ."

1. If you had to finish his statement, what church activities would you list?
2. Do you agree or disagree with his comments? Explain your response.

First Impression:

1. When you hear the word "missions," what image or pictures come to your mind? Describe one of these images to the group.
2. When you hear the word "missions," what other words come to mind? What words do you associate with missions? Write at least three of them here:
3. What do these images and words that you associate with missions tell you about how you see missions in the life of the church? Use these impressions to make a first attempt here at defining missions as it relates to your life and to the life of the church. Write a definition of missions:

Mission is

If your group is able to reach consensus on a definition for missions, write that definition here:

Mission is

Determine if your personal and group definition change in any way following the "Exploring the Scriptures" section that follows.

Exploring the Scripture:

Throughout the Old and New Testaments, God reveals Himself as a missionary God. There has never been a time in history when God did not have the whole world in His heart. This is true of the story of God's chosen people, Israel, and it is true of the story of Christ and His church.

The Bible is the story of God at work in missions. This exploration of scripture will reveal the centrality of missions in the life of God's people.

1. Read Genesis 12:1-3:

Look closely at verses 2 and 3. What seven-fold blessing does Abram receive as the Lord begins His missionary enterprise? List the words of each blessing here:

- a. _____
- b. _____
- c. _____
- d. _____
- e. _____
- f. _____
- g. _____

Now look back to the week of creation, when God blessed man and woman and set His heart on all the earth being blessed through them:

Then God blessed them, and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it; have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves on the earth."

The promise to Abram is a promise of the earth being blessed as it was in the beginning, only now through a chosen people, from whom God would bring a Saviour into the world. As you look again at the promises to Abram, which words speak strongly of God's missionary heart?

INSIGHT: From the beginning of time, blessing all the world was God's intention.

2. Read Exodus 3:13-17:

Note how God identifies Himself to Moses in verse 15, tying Himself to the missionary promises given to Abraham and reaffirmed with Isaac and Jacob.

Now read Exodus 9:13-16:

According to these verses why did God bring the plagues to Egypt and set His people free? Note especially verse 16. What are the clear missionary words in this verse? Write them here:

3. Exodus 19:3-6 gives us the words of the Lord to Moses at Mount Sinai:

Note in verse 5 that "the whole earth" is in God's heart again. Then in verse 6, God gives two great missionary titles to His people. What are they? What is the missionary importance of each title?

a. Title: _____ Importance: _____

b. Title: _____ Importance: _____

4. Psalm 22:27-31 and Isaiah 52:7-10 present the goal of God's kingdom:

Note especially verses 22:27 and 52:10. For what purpose has God established his kingdom? What does He hope to will happen because of His chosen people's mission? What words present the worldwide scope of the mission of God's people?

INSIGHT: God's people are set apart to represent Him to the world and to accomplish His missionary purpose.

5. Psalm 78 talks about God redeeming His people from the land of Egypt and their constant complaining while travelling through the desert. Note especially verses 17-39. What recurring temptation do these verses reveal for God's chosen missionary people?

INSIGHT: God's people are tempted to think their mission is to themselves rather than to the whole world.

6. Read Matthew 4:17, Luke 4:16-21 and John 3:12-17:

On the basis of these passages, answer the following questions:

- a. What was the chief message of Jesus' preaching?

- b. What was His mission? _____

7. Luke 15:1-7 presents a picture of God's missionary heart:

With all our talk in missions about "the world," this text reminds that each individual person who comes to faith is precious to God. Why might this passage be very important to a missionary? To someone on your church's evangelism committee/team?

INSIGHT: God's heart is for the whole world and for each individual in it.

8. The first church was a missionary church. Listen as we read through the following passages:

Acts 2:36-41

Acts 7:54-60

Acts 8:34-35

Acts 11:15-18

Acts 13:1-3, 16, 46-48

Acts 17:1-4, 10-12, 22-28, 32-34

On the basis of what you heard, answer the following:

a. To whom was the early church sent in mission? _____

b. What was their attitude toward God's mission?

c. What price did the early church pay for its commitment to God's missionary kingdom?

Reflection and Action:

1. Take a second look at your personal and group definition of the word "missions," completed in the "Word Association" section of this session. Having worked through this study of the place of missions in Scripture, would you change the definition in any way? Use this space for a definition that reflects your insights from the study so far:

Missions is

2. Analyze each of the following and evaluate the role missions seems to play in each:

- a. Your church budget
- b. Your church structure (committees/offices/staff)
- c. Your church mission statement (if you have one)
- d. Your church prayer life
- e. Your personal prayer life

3. Review the "INSIGHTS" highlighted in the "Exploring the Scriptures" section of this session. Which of those insights presents the greatest challenge to you as an individual Christian concerned with missions as the heart of the church? Share these challenges with the group.

4. Discuss what changes in your congregation may have been suggested by this session. What can happen in your church to give missions a more central role in your church's life?

5. If you were to take one action step to make missions more central in your life, what would it be?

Session Two - Needed By Everyone

Objective:

We will examine through group discussion our personal views of other religions and cultures.
We will study Scriptures to understand that God's mission is needed by people of every ethnicity, religion, culture and language.
We will focus on our attitudes and actions as we approach with the Gospel those who do not share our faith and culture.

Session Prelim:

Over dinner with a friend, a discussion centers on the various religions of the world. Your friend, who is not an active Christian, says, "Why do Christians think they have the only true religion? I think everyone has their own way to God. It may be Christianity, or Islam, or New Age. The way you get to God isn't important, as long as you get there."

Your friend's opinion is shared by many people who struggle with Christianity's exclusive claims on religious truth. How would you respond to your friend in a winsome way? Choose your words carefully and share them with your group.

First Impression:

Consider your immediate response to each of the following statements. Assign a letter to each statement reflecting the intensity of your agreement or disagreement with the statement as follows:

- a. Strongly agree
 - b. Agree
 - c. Undecided
 - d. Disagree
 - e. Strongly disagree
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1. _____ Every religion reveals some divine truth, since God is present in the unique search of every religious person.
 2. _____ God will save anyone, Christian or non-Christian, as long as they are sincere in their religion.
 3. _____ Christians, myself included, know only two religions: true religion, which is communion with God through faith in Jesus Christ, and all other religions, which are false.

Share your responses with the group and come back to these responses at the end of the session.

Exploring the Scripture:

The Scriptures reveal God's desire to bring the whole human family to Himself. At the same time, the Bible reveals the division between those who call on the name of the Lord and those who do not. Further, the Scriptures present one and only one way to heaven. This truth is the foundation for the church's commitment to present Christ to every culture, race and religion.

1. Read Genesis 4:3-7 and Hebrews 11:4.

What is the difference between Cain's offering to the Lord and Abel's offering? What does this imply regarding the religious acts of people and God's acceptance of those acts?

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2. Look closely at Genesis 6:5-9, 22 and Genesis 7:1.

What led God to save Noah and his family from the flood? What made Noah different from the rest of humanity?

3. In Joshua 24:2-4, 14-24, Joshua says farewell to the Israelites whom he has led into the Promised Land. Read these verses and answer the following questions:

a. In verses 2-3, from what does God say He took Abraham?

b. In verses 14-15, Joshua presents the people with three alternatives. What are they and which does Joshua choose?

c. In verses 16-18, the people choose to serve the Lord instead of false gods. On what truth and experience do they base their choice?

d. In verse 23, what clear proof or evidence of the integrity of their commitment to the Lord is required of the people?

e. Discuss the implications of these verses for the church's attitude toward people of other religions. According to these verses, what must people leave behind and what must they take on if they are to be saved?

INSIGHT: Exclusive, uncompromising trust in the Lord is required of all who would be called His people.

4. Read each of these passages aloud in the group:

John 6:68; John 14:6; Acts 4:12; 1 Corinthians 1:22-24; 1 Timothy 2:5-7; Hebrews 7:26-27

Jot down words from these passages that support the following statements:

- a. There is only one Saviour_____
- b. There is only one saving message_____
- c. There is only one saving name_____
- d. There is only one sacrifice for sin_____
- e. There is only one hope for salvation_____

INSIGHT: The Scriptures present faith in Jesus Christ as the only way of salvation.

5. Read Matthew 24:4-14

As the church carries out its missionary mandate, especially in the end times, what dangers and challenges will we face, according to Jesus? List them here:

6. For inspired counsel regarding the message, scope and importance of the church's missionary enterprise, read Galatians 3:6-9, 26-29 and 6:14-16.

a. Why was Abraham counted righteous according to 3:6?

b. What is the scope of the church's mission as revealed in 3:26-29?

c. In 6:14-16, what is the message of the church for the world? What graphic language does Paul use to describe his commitment to this message and to the whole world?

INSIGHT: Undergirding the church's missionary work is a deep, sacrificial commitment to the entire world, no matter what our cultural differences.

7. Throughout Paul's ministry as an apostle, he called people to leave idolatry behind. He also called on Christians to be careful to distinguish themselves from the false religions of their day. Watch this dual emphasis at work as you read Acts 17:22-31; 1 Corinthians 8:1-13; 10:14-22; and 10:31-11:1.

- a. If Paul were calling down the idols of our day, where would he go and to what would he point?

- b. Where have Christians at times been too willing to compromise with false religious notions?

- c. In what situations might the church's missionaries make compromises with the cultural practices of people without compromising Biblical and Gospel truth?

Reflection and Action:

- 1. Take another look at your responses to the three statements in the "First Impression" section of this session. Now that you have studied the Scriptures, would you change your response to each question in any way? Explain your answer.

- 2. Develop a winsome response to each of these statements, based on what you've read in the Scriptures:

- a. Sincerity is what matters. As long as someone believes strongly enough in what he or she believes about God, that is all that counts.

- b. Christians should not try and force their beliefs on people of other religions. We'll all end up in heaven anyway.

- 3. How successful do you think the church is among Christians today in fostering Paul's attitude of being "crucified to the world"? Does the church of today "ache" for the world's eternal destiny?

- 4. What is your church doing to help people respond to the threats of false religions and cults? Are people being prepared in any way to stand firm against such threats? What strategies can your church develop to ensure the Gospel's integrity among your people in the face of such threats?

5. There has been an upward trend in cultural spirituality in general over the past number of years. In what ways is this spiritual interest both a threat and an opportunity for the church? Do you see signs of this today?

6. Increasingly, churches are being asked to minister cross-culturally to ethnic minorities. How can cross-cultural ministries affirm and celebrate the unique cultural background of an ethnic group and still present an uncompromised Gospel? Do you think it is important for missionaries and churches to respect and maintain an ethnic group's cultural customs and practices? Where does one draw the line? Give examples (such as in the need for ministry to refugees).

7. Decide to get to know the teachings of a non-Christian religion, with an eye on understanding the special challenges which that religion presents to someone seeking to hear Christ and the Gospel.

Session Three - Compassion, Justice, Mercy

Objective:

We will consider through group conversation the church's responsibility for the physical, social and economic needs of all people.

We will study the Scriptures to enhance our understanding of how our compassionate God administers both justice and mercy through His missionary kingdom.

We will make decisions regarding our personal role in bringing compassion, justice and mercy to others.

Session Prelim:

Imagine yourself a pastor who receives the letter below. How would you respond to it?

Dear Pastor:

I'm writing to register my serious disagreement with our policy of sending food and blankets overseas for the needy. It seems to me that our interest, time and money in the church needs to be focussed on bringing the Gospel to the people of the world, not taking care of their physical needs. Let the Red Cross do that! When is the church going to stop doing what government agencies are meant to do?

Signed,

A CONCERNED MEMBER

Talk in your group about a response to the letter. What's wrong with it? What's right with it?

First Impression:

The Scriptures, as we will see, present God as a God of both justice and mercy. God's people as well are to have hearts for justice and for mercy.

1. What, in your opinion, is the justice the church is concerned with? That is, in what way(s) can and does the church work for justice? Jot down here some examples of the church's work for justice:

2. Now consider the church's ministry of mercy. Cite some examples of the church at work, showing mercy to others:

Exploring the Scripture:

1. Read Exodus 33:19 and 34:6-7.

What words in these passages speak of God's mercy? What words speak of God's justice? Jot down here a few of the phrases depicting both justice and mercy:

2. Read Matthew 9:36-10:1, 5-16. Share your responses to the following questions:

a. In 9:35, who specifically brings compassion from the heart of Jesus?

b. Look at verse 36 and tell what Jesus sees about the crowds and their situation that brings out His compassionate response? _____

c. On the basis of these verses, who comes to mind as you consider people in your circles who are "harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd"?

d. In verses 37-38, the limited supply of those who can help the shepherd-less crowds is cited. Researchers consistently show that fewer young people are choosing service-oriented vocations, including service as professional church workers. What do you think contributes to this trend?

3. Look carefully at the words of Jesus in Matthew 5:38-48.

Jesus "stretches" the extent to which His hearers are to live in a spirit of love and compassion. Of the following challenges, which two "stretch" you the most in your personal witness for Christ? (Check two and share your response with the group.)

- a. Turn the other cheek (5:39)
- b. Give not only your tunic, but your cloak as well (5:40)
- c. Go an extra mile (5:41)
- d. Give if asked and willingly lend to the borrower (5:42)
- e. Love your enemies (5:44)

- ___ f. Pray for those who persecute you (5:44)
- ___ g. Love perfectly and completely, as Christ loved (5:48)

4. Read John 18:36-37, Romans 8:31-39, and Romans 12:1-2.

As Christians carry on God's mission in the world, what attitudes toward the world are suggested by these passages? In other words, how does a Christian see the world, and what are the Christian's priorities as God's mission is carried out in the world?

5. Look at Amos 2:6-8 and 5:7, 10-11. Note the injustices that Amos mentions in his calls to repentance.

Which of these injustices do you still see in some form today?

6. In Acts 2:42-47; 4:32-37; 5:12-16; 6:1-7 and Galatians 6:9-10, we're given a glimpse of the early church at work.

From these passages, how do you think the early church would arrange these ministries in priority (1, 2, 3, etc)?

- ___ a. fellowship
- ___ b. worship
- ___ c. witness
- ___ d. service
- ___ e. nurture

Does your church in practice rate them differently? Talk about it.

INSIGHT - Compassion moves the hearts of God's people to carry on ministries of justice and mercy.

Reflection and Action:

1. With which is your church more concerned: justice or mercy? Explain your answer.

2. Describe the last time that you were "cut to the heart" by the need of a hurting person? What was that person's need? Were you able to respond? Describe the situation.

3. Develop a response to the person who says, "If God is a missionary God, why doesn't He provide food, clothing, shelter, freedom and equal opportunity for all people so that the church can focus on spiritual, not physical, needs?"
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4. When Jesus heals the sick in the Gospels, He often also addresses their need for forgiveness and spiritual wholeness. Why does the church today still need to address the whole person? What happens if we only address the spiritual needs of people? What happens if we address only their physical needs?
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5. Comment on this frequently heard observation: "You can't preach the Gospel to a hungry person." True or False?
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6. Take a close look at your church's calendar for this month. Pull out of the calendar all the events that in some way could be called "missions." List them all on a whiteboard or a large paper. Now put an "M" next to the ones that are clearly mercy ministries; a "J" next to the ones that are clearly justice ministries. You might also put a "P" next to those that make for peace, that is, those ministries that foster wholeness in relationships.
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After you've identified the various mission outreach activities of your church and labeled them as directed, jot down as many observations as you can concerning your church's mission and ministry. What does this tell you about your commitment to missions? Are you primarily a "mercy church," "a justice church," or a "peace church"? Does this information suggest any changes, if your church is to be more in tune with God's compassionate concern for hurting people?

7. Discuss the need for balance in a church's ministry to the whole person. In what way can your church enhance its ministry to the emotional needs of people? How about your ministry to the physical needs people have. Finally, how can you improve your ministry to the spiritual needs of people?
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Session Four-Nurturing and Equipping God's People

Objective:

We will examine through group discussion how we are nurtured and equipped for the Lord's mission.
We will study the Scriptures to discover how we are called and equipped for mission.
We will look closely at our personal lives, with a focus on our own calling and role in God's missionary kingdom.

Session Prelim:

Spend some time discussing the fallacies inherent in each of the following statements:

1. You can't expect laypeople to do the pastor's work.
2. The more people involved in a project, the less effective it will be -- and that includes the church's ministry!
3. The church should be happy with just a few good workers. After all, it is a volunteer organization.
4. Since the church is comprised of volunteers, one cannot expect effectiveness and excellence.

First Impression:

Think about the media used by the Holy Spirit to nurture your personal faith and witness. Then consider which of the following most enhances your Christian life in the school of faith called the church. In other words, which of these most inspires your role as a missionary for Christ? (Place a "1" next to the one that has the greatest impact on you; a "2" next to the one that has the next greatest impact; and so forth.)

- a. The Scripture
- b. Sermons
- c. The example of other Christians
- d. Fellowship with other Christians
- e. The internet
- f. Other _____

Share your responses with members of the group.

Exploring the Scripture:

A vital aspect of God's mission is how God calls and prepares His people to be missionaries in His kingdom. Let's look closely at Scripture's confirmation that God's mission nurtures and equips us all to be about His work.

1. Vital to the nurturing of Christian as missionaries is the work of the Holy Spirit. Read carefully John 16:5-15, which gives Jesus' promise of the Holy Spirit to His disciples and to us.

What aspect of the Holy Spirit's person and work is highlighted in each of these verses?

- a. Verse 7 _____
- b. Verse 8 _____
- c. Verse 13a _____
- d. Verse 13b _____
- e. Verse 14 _____

2. The Scriptures serve several functions in our lives. What are the Scriptures meant to accomplish for us according to the following passages?

- a. Luke 1:1-4 (especially verse 4):
Function _____
- b. John 20:30-31
Functions
 - 1. _____
 - 2. _____
- c. Romans 15:4
Functions
 - 1. _____
 - 2. _____
- d. 2 Timothy 3:14-17
Functions
 - 1. _____
 - 2. _____
 - 3. _____
 - 4. _____
 - 5. _____

INSIGHT: The Holy Spirit uses His Word, the Scriptures, not only to teach us the way of salvation but also to equip us to accomplish His missionary goals.

3. Now read Acts 1:4-8. Then respond to each of the questions that follow:

- a. In verses 4-5, why was it so important for the disciples to wait for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit? Also, why was receiving the Holy Spirit at Pentecost so important for the disciples?

b. In verse 8, Jesus says the disciples will receive "power" when the Holy Spirit comes. Power for what?

c. The Holy Spirit was to empower the disciples for an ever-expanding missionary enterprise. Note verse 8. How has the Spirit prepared you for mission work at home (your Jerusalem)?

d. How has the Spirit prepared you for mission work beyond your local church (your Judea, Samaria and ends of the earth)?

4. Vital to the effectiveness of the workers in God's missionary kingdom is their identity. Look at 1 Peter 2:4-5, 9-12.

a. List here the four beautiful descriptions given God's kingdom workers in 1 Peter 2:9:

i. _____

ii. _____

iii. _____

iv. _____

b. For what purpose has God blessed us with this identity? (Look at verse 9b.)

c. According to verse 11, who are we? How does this description fit you?

d. According to verse 12, what will move unbelievers to glorify God?

5. Vital to the missionary kingdom of God is the fellowship and unity of His kingdom workers. Read Ephesians 4:1-6.

List the resources and blessings that serve as the foundation of our unity as workers in God's kingdom.

- a. One _____
- b. One _____
- c. One _____
- d. One _____
- e. One _____
- f. One _____
- g. One _____

INSIGHT: God's missionary workers are blessed with an identity and a fellowship that make them effective in mission.

Reflection and Action:

1. Consider your personal spiritual life right now. How strong and vital are your faith and witness? Are you on the mountaintop? Have you "plateaued"? Or are you in the valley? Talk about it in your group.

2. How much time do you, as an individual Christian, give each week to being nurtured as a called missionary of God? Take a look at your calendar. How much time do you give for spiritual inspiration and nurture? Is it enough? Are any changes suggested?

3. Evaluate your congregation's youth and adult Christian education program. How many courses during the year are geared directly to equipping people for mission in the world?

4. If you had an opportunity today to take a six-week course with the intention of building your personal witness, which of these topics would most appeal to you?
 - a. Talking about God to others
 - b. Doing good works for the right reason
 - c. How to be a winsome witness
 - d. Taking the fear out of evangelism
 - e. Helping the poor
 - f. Getting closer to God
 - g. Learning to use the Bible as a missionary handbook

Explain your choice(s) to the group.

5. The church depends on the Holy Spirit for the inspiration, power and gifts necessary to carry out the Lord's missionary imperatives. Describe the promise Jesus gave (Luke 24:46, Acts 1:4-8) prior

to the upper room experience of Acts 2.

6. What changes would you make in your life if you became more conscious of your identity as a "priest" of God?
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7. How successful is your congregation at winning people to the idea that we are all involved in God's missionary work on earth? What percentage of your members would you say are active in some programmed form of missionary work? What does this percentage suggest to you?
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Session Five - Discipling The Nations

Objective:

We will examine through group conversation our perceptions regarding the scope of God's mission.

We will study the Scriptures to define more accurately the frontiers of missions.

We will identify more clearly our role in supporting God's world mission with prayers, income and personal service.

Session Prelim:

Spend a few moments thinking about your personal mission field. In the space below, jot down the initials of people in your circle of family and friends who either do not know Christ as Savior and Lord, or whose spiritual lives cause you concern. In other words, as you consider your family, neighbors, work or school associates and friends, who presents to you a personal missionary challenge?

Take a moment to share with someone in your group at least one person who came to mind. How easy was it for you to identify someone who needs your attention as a missionary of the Gospel? If it was difficult, what does this tell you?

First Impression:

How prevalent do you think each of these perspectives on missions is in the church today? Discuss whether or not each statement, in your opinion, is a commonly held perception regarding the scope of missions. Then talk about the validity of each statement.

1. Mission work is something done overseas.
2. The only contributions I can make to missions are prayer and finances.
3. Missions is the work of church denominations or mission agencies, not congregations.

Exploring the Scripture:

Throughout the Bible, the Lord uses historical events to extend His missionary kingdom. Always first and foremost in God's heart is His will that all people come to the knowledge of the truth and be saved (1 Tim. 2:3-4).

This worldwide scope of the missionary enterprise begins at home and extends to the whole world of nations.

1. Read Genesis 50:15-21. Then spend a few minutes as a group reviewing the story of Joseph and his brothers. How did Joseph first land in Egypt? What brought his family there? Now respond to each of these questions:
 - a. God used the evils of family conflict and famine ultimately to bring blessing to people's lives. Note especially verse 20. Where in the world today can you see God turning evil into something good that saves people's lives? How about in your own experience? Have you personally seen God turn evil into good in your life?
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b. What are the evils confronting people at work in God's missionary kingdom today?

2. Review Exodus 19:3-6.

God here indicates that His rescue of Israel from slavery in Egypt had a specific purpose. What was God's plan for Israel? Look at verses 5-6 particularly. How do these verses carry Israel's destiny as a missionary nation?

3. Even Israel's worship life was characterized by a missionary zeal. Look at Solomon's prayer at the dedication of the temple in Jerusalem, recorded in 1 Kings 8:41-43, 56-61.

a. How was Israel to respond to the foreigner who came to the temple to worship the true God?

b. Look closely at verse 60. What words show again the missionary purpose of prayer and worship?

c. As in Exodus 19:5, verse 61 presents God's high expectations for His missionary people. What does God expect of His people?

4. God has always had the nations in mind as He carried on His missionary kingdom. Facing desolation and exile, Jeremiah offered God's people a vision of restoration and homecoming. Look at Jeremiah 33:7-9.

Again, how is the scope of this vision shown to include more than just Israel? Where does God's missionary concern for the nations again show itself? See especially verse 9.

5. In the New Testament, the genealogy of Jesus in Matthew 1:1-17 presents the Saviour as having His roots not only in Israel but also in the Gentile nations of the world.

a. Try to identify the five women in Jesus' family tree in Matthew. They're mentioned in verses 3, 5, 6 and 16.

- b. From what nation did each of these women come? (See Joshua 2:1; Ruth 1:4; 2 Samuel 11:3.)

- c. How does the genealogy of Christ reveal God's heart for all the nations of the world beyond the chosen people, Israel?

6. In Matthew 28:16-20, Christ commissions all who follow Him for the great task of making disciples. What is the scope of this task? Look especially at verse 19.

7. Read Mark 16:15-16. What two phrases in verse 15 carry again the scope of the missionary enterprise?

8. The early church struggled with the scope of the Lord's mission. Was it to extend only to Israel or to the whole world, including non-Jews? Two key events helped define the scope of the Lord's work in the early church, Peter's vision in Acts 11:1-18, and the council at Jerusalem in Acts 15:5-22. Read these passages and summarize in your own words the early church's answer to the question, "To whom are we meant to bring the Gospel?" Recall from Galatians 3:26-29 (Session Two) Paul's understanding of the scope of the missionary kingdom.

INSIGHT: Throughout the Old and New Testaments, it is God's intention that His missionary kingdom extend to all nations. God never intends His people to claim an exclusive right to His grace.

9. In 1 Timothy 2:1-7, Paul presents the primary benefit of Christians living godly lives. Here too, the missionary purpose of sanctification comes through. What does God want, according to verses 3 and 4, to be the result of godly Christian living? Look also at verses 5 and 6. For whom did Christ die, and how does this shape the scope of our mission?

INSIGHT: Christ died for all. The Gospel itself, therefore, shapes the scope of our missions.

10. Look closely at Acts 14:21-28. List from this passage what the apostles Paul and Barnabas did on their missionary journeys:
- a. Verse 21 _____
 - b. Verse 22 _____
 - c. Verse 23 _____
 - d. Verse 27 _____

How are these activities paralleled in the life of your own congregation today? In the life of your missionaries?

INSIGHT: The work of missionaries is the work of Christians within congregations and of those sent off to other places.

11. Read Matthew 24:14. Note how the scope of missionary endeavor relates to the final return of Christ. God's mission will continue to be a testimony to all nations right up to the end of this world. It will, in fact, be a last sign of our Savior's return. Talk about how the second coming of Christ can be an inspiration and motivation for the task of missions.

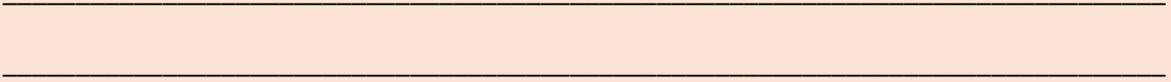
Reflection and Action:

1. What can happen in your congregation to enhance your church's understanding of itself as a "global" church? In other words, how can you enhance your church's self-concept of being in mission to the nations?

2. If you were to show a "missionary power point" on the mission work done at home by your congregation, what would be on the slides? Try labelling a group of imaginary slides up on the whiteboard or on large paper. Who is up on the slide? What are they doing? Where? And with whom? Consider a Missions Sunday "Home Missions Slide Presentation."

3. What are the factors that cause a congregation to be turned in on itself? List them as a group along with ways to counter the self-serving trend among congregations.

4. Evaluate your congregation's record of missions giving over the last five years. What has been the increase, if any? Has it kept up with increases in other areas of your church's ministry? Discuss the trend. What are its causes (increased or decreased)? And what are its effects on a congregation's fulfillment of God's intention for a mission "to all nations"?



Session Six - Empowering To Become World Christians

Objective:

We will examine through conversation our personal world missionary views, strategies and hopes. We will study the Scriptures to understand better and to obey God's missionary commission in our daily lives.

We will develop and share with others a personal strategy as world Christians.

Session Prelim:

A missionary on leave was invited to visit a congregation. After the worship service, he and his wife gave a presentation to the adult and youth Bible classes. They shared the challenges of reaching thousands of people groups cut off from the Gospel by ethnicity, religion, culture, language or geography. They reminded their listeners of the remaining 4,000 languages still needing to have Bible translation work begun or completed.

During the discussion session at the end of the class, one young woman spoke up and said, "I never knew there were so many people in the world who had never heard of Christ. I just assumed that there are Christian churches in every country where people can hear the Gospel. What should we do back home here to help? Or rather, what do you think someone like me should do?"

1. If you were the missionary, soon to return to a non-western country for missionary work, how would you respond?
2. Do you think that people today feel the sense of urgency exhibited by the woman's question?

First Impression:

Read each of the statements below. Place a (+) next to a statement that describes you right now; a (-) next to a statement that does not describe you; and a check mark next to a statement that you see as a personal goal as you strive to enhance your role in God's missionary kingdom.

- ___ a. I see myself as a missionary
- ___ b. I feel a sense of urgency when I consider the task of missions.
- ___ c. I cheerfully give of my income to support mission work.
- ___ d. I can think of at least one genuine sacrifice I have made in my life for the sake of missions
- ___ e. I can see where it is necessary for me to change my lifestyle for the sake of missions.
- ___ f. I see my home and friendships as missionary arenas.
- ___ g. I have prayed for a missionary or a people group within the last week.

Share your impressions with the group, especially the items you checked.

Exploring the Scripture:

1. Read Deuteronomy 6:1-9. Missions happen in your home. Missionaries are nurtured and equipped in your home. How are you doing at putting the following principles from this text to work in your own home?
 - a. Nurturing a love for God above everything else (verse 6).

- b. Talking about matters of faith at home (verse 7).
- c. Having visible signs in your home that you are followers of Christ (verses 8-9).

How do you carry on mission work in your home? How do those in your home carry on mission work outside the home?

- 2. Review the great declaration of loyalty made by Joshua in Joshua 24:14-15. For Joshua and his family to serve the Lord effectively, they had to make a commitment to give up all other gods and serve the Lord wholeheartedly. If you were to do the same, that is, if you were to make a covenant before God to serve Him first and foremost, what "gods" would you need to give up? In other words, as you consider your personal work as a missionary, what dilutes your attention and clouds your allegiance to Christ?
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- 3. Read Ephesians 6:4. Consider this:

If there were no Sunday school, kids club and other congregational ministries of education, how would a child come to know the Lord and desire to serve Him? If you have a child in your home, how does the value of missions get transmitted to your child? Is missions a vital part of the "training and instruction" in your home? Is missions, in your opinion, a vital part of your congregation's "training and instruction"?

INSIGHT: As do all Christian values, missions calls for sacrifice and commitment and is taught best in the home by those who see their homes as arenas for nurturing missionaries.

- 4. Turn now to two chapters from the history of the early church's mission work: Acts. Chapters 16-17. As a group, search these chapters for guidance and directives for the work of missions today. Individuals or small groups in your class may wish to take one of the items (a-e) below and report back to the total group.
 - a. In Acts 16-17, what message is preached along the way by Paul and the other missionaries? What, specifically, do they preach? Write on large paper or chalkboard the message of the early church. See 17:3 for one example. Catalogue as many as you can.

- b. In Acts 16-17, how are the missionaries strengthened for their task? Note 16:13 and 16 for an example. List as many sources of strength as you can find in these two chapters.

- c. In Acts 16-17, what "price" was paid by the missionaries? In other words, what do they endure for the sake of the Lord's mission? Look at 16:22 for an example. List other "crosses" carried by the first missionaries.

- d. In Acts 16-17, several people receive the ministry of missionaries. List all who are reached by the missionaries in these chapters.

- e. In Acts 16-17, the Gospel is presented, and the people respond in a variety of ways. Two such responses are recorded in 17:32. List other responses, both positive and negative, to the Gospel.

INSIGHT: Missionaries face challenges and need the support of prayer and fellowship.

5. Finally, look at Philippians 4:10-20.

- a. What feelings do you see underpinning these words of Paul to the Philippians? What does he feel?

- b. Where is contentment to be found for those who face hardship in God's missionary kingdom (verses 12-13)?
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- c. Look at verse 15. Why does the congregation of Philippi stand out in Paul's mind?
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- d. How important do you think it is that congregations support and pray for particular missionaries? What are the benefits of such a direct, personal sponsorship?
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Reflection and Action:

Review the following 16 insights gleaned from all six sessions. Circle the three that speak the strongest and most challenging word to you about your personal role in missions:

Session One:

1. From the beginning of time, blessing all the world was God's intention.
2. God's people are set apart to represent Him to the world and to accomplish His missionary purpose.
3. God's people are tempted to think their mission is to themselves rather than to the whole world.
4. God's heart is for the whole world and for each individual in it.

Session Two:

5. Exclusive, uncompromising trust in the Lord is required of all who would be called His people.
6. The Scriptures present faith in Jesus Christ as the one and only way of salvation.
7. Undergirding the church's missionary work is a deep sacrificial commitment to the entire world, no matter what our cultural differences.

Session Three:

8. Compassion moves the hearts of God's people to carry on ministries of justice and mercy.

Session Four:

9. The Holy Spirit uses His Word, the Scriptures, not only to teach us the way of salvation but also to equip us to accomplish His missionary goals.
10. The workers in God's missionary kingdom are blessed with an identity and a fellowship that make them effective in mission.
11. God graces the church with the gifts it needs to accomplish His missionary goals.

Session Five:

12. Throughout the Old and New Testaments, it is God's intention that His missionary kingdom extend to all nations. God never intends His people to claim an exclusive right to His grace.
13. Christ died for all. The Gospel itself, therefore, shapes the scope of our missions.
14. The work of missionaries is the work of Christians within congregations and of those sent to other places.

Session Six:

15. As all great Christian values do, missions calls for sacrifice and commitment, and is taught best in the home by those who see their homes as arenas for nurturing missionaries.

16. Missionaries face challenges and need the support of prayer and fellowship.

As the course comes to a close, spend a few moments considering your personal missionary strategy for the immediate future. Jot down some responses for each of these questions:

1. From your existing NETWORK of relationships, who most needs to hear the Word of God from you right now? What will you say to this person? When will you say it?

2. In what specific way will you speak and act compassionately for justice and for mercy, with special concern for the physical and emotional needs of others?

3. Who will support you in your work? On whom will you lean to be more effective? What resources will you use to remain strong in your work?

4. In what real, measurable way will you practice being a world or global Christian?

5. What will you suggest to your congregation to enhance your parish's self-concept as a global church?

6. What will you say or do in your home to enhance and nurture a missionary zeal?

7. What change in your lifestyle or habits will you initiate to sharpen your effectiveness as one who supports others in mission?

8. What opportunity will you take to make a genuine sacrifice for the sake of the Lord's mission?

Share your responses with at least one member of your group. Speak words of encouragement. Close by praying for one another. Then move out into the world as a vital participant in God's missionary kingdom!