

CHRIST'S MISSION

As a result of this study, we hope the participants will

[Learning Objectives]

- understand the purpose for Christ's coming: to seek and save the lost, to forgive sins, and to release people from bondage
- discover that they, too, have a mission in life that is a continuation of Christ's purposes
- celebrate the promise that Christ's salvation is available to all people, despite their worldly condition
- make the distinction between a mission focus (narrowing down the options to a specialized area of Christian service) and mission expansion (enlarging the range of availability)
- express gratitude for Christ's mission that reached into their lives individually, to the point that they now have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord
- identify and (re)commit to a specific ministry action that fulfills their mission in life
- evaluate their current commitments for consistency with Christ's mission in the world and church
- become individuals who live as called people rather than driven people

[Process Objectives]

- develop skills in the inductive method of Bible study, by observing the development of today's theme through the course of the gospel of Luke interpreting this material properly to discover Christ's message about their own calling and taking concrete steps to align themselves with that message
- begin to think theologically about the meaning of life
- desire to make the time commitment to prepare for the next lesson

[Relational Objectives]

- support one another in the pursuit of their life calling
- get to know their fellow adventurers at a deeper level
- share one hope for personal mission focus and/or expansion, and receive prayer support

NOTES RELATED TO THE PERSONAL STUDY QUESTIONS (PAGES 10-13)

The point of this lesson is to recognize the primary reason for Jesus Christ to be incarnated in our midst: he came to seek and to save the lost, to preach, to heal, and to release every human being from the consequences of our universal problem, sin. By the time Jesus was 12, he was aware that his heavenly Father had business for him to do, but his ministry went public and full-time when he was thirty. His identification with the anointed one of Isa 61:1-2 set tongues wagging in his

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hometown, but this did not deter him from a clear focus on offering salvation or widening his audience throughout Israel and among Gentiles. If Jesus had such a clear mission, is it possible that his followers would also be called to focus their ministry efforts with the same keen intensity? The application questions will define and guide this inquiry, with the hope that group participants will discover God's calling upon their lives.

PAGE 18 NOTES:

Scripture passages that give some insight into Christ's developing sense of call are listed here. At an early age, Jesus is aware that he has come to do God's business (not, presumably, his own), that this business entails preaching good news to the disadvantaged, proclaiming release from bondage of all sorts, and declaring the Lord's favor available to all people. Jesus also demonstrates authority in teaching, healing and forgiving sins (*gasp!*).

Jesus' declaration in the Nazarene synagogue (Lk 4:14-22) is extremely significant for at least three reasons: 1) this event occurs immediately after his 40-day desert retreat, and seems to be the announcement that his time has come to do the things for which he was sent; 2) by using a powerful and well-known passage in Isaiah that everybody knew referred to the Messiah, he was claiming to be the One for whom they had been waiting; and 3) the focus of his ministry is those who need release, rescue, and salvation.

PAGE 19 NOTES:

The key theme of Jesus' ministry calling, just in case you missed it, is **FORGIVENESS!**

Who stands to benefit? Anyone, particularly those with no social advantage at all, can be released from bondage to sin and its consequences. Examples include the man with leprosy, women of loose morals, babies, as well as the poor, imprisoned, the blind, and the oppressed. To be fair with the text, God's salvation is not *only* for the poor, as evidenced by Jesus' offers to the rich (Lk 18:18-27) and powerful (Lk 7:1-10). But Jesus goes to special lengths to be sure the powerless have been reached and loved and released from their infirmities and conditions.

Jesus focuses his mission on the spiritual needs (often accompanied by very physical needs) of the lost; but his efforts expanded to include not only "the house of Israel" but also Samaritans, Gentiles, and pagan Romans. The gospel of Matthew has Jesus placing a priority on reaching "the lost sheep of Israel" (15:24; 10:6), but Luke does not mention this limitation and in fact promotes the idea that Jesus' salvation was "for all people" (Lk 2:10).

PAGE 20 NOTES:

There are various ways to get at the question of "What am I doing? Why am I here?" One way is to pick up on the theme introduced by the songs and celebrations early in Luke (1:46, 2:9, 2:14, 2:20, and 2:32). Presbyterians have a confessional statement that [our] "chief and highest end is to

glorify God . . .” So in answer to the question of how this focus can shape your life, it might be helpful to examine what it means to glorify God. Glorifying God involves giving praise, reflecting God’s nature (letting God’s light shine) in me; shedding light on God or making him known; giving credit to God for mighty works and subtle influences.

These aspects of glorifying God can find expression in our everyday life in such ways as 1) giving credit where credit is due; not withholding acknowledgment of God’s activity in a situation; 2) hoping that people would see Jesus in me, and experience something of God’s grace coming out in the way I speak and act toward them; 3) caring for those who are overlooked, despised, or underestimated by others.

PAGE 21 NOTES:

The purpose of these questions is to give the learners an opportunity to recall the circumstances that drew them into the circle of God’s grace and truth. If Jesus’ mission is to seek and save the lost, to forgive sin, and to release us from its consequences, the question here should focus on how your group members have experienced this happening. Some members may feel there was never a time in their lives when God was outside their experience, but even if there is no “conversion date” to recall, encourage your members to share as concretely as possible some aspect of life in which God has acted in a saving, redeeming way.

The comments made at the bottom of page 21 are intended to prime the pump for a conversation that may turn out to be difficult for some (on page 22), having to do with their calling in life. Particularly as people get older, there is a great temptation to feel that they are too old to find a new purpose for living. But anyone can “glorify God,” which is the most important calling of all!

Please note that there is a typographical error on the last line of this page. The first Scripture reference should be Luke 4:43; but while we’re at it, you might as well add John 4:39 as a beautiful example of how the testimony of one woman changed an entire town!

NOTES RELATED TO THE GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS (PAGES 22 AND 23)

Open your meeting with a short prayer of thanks for what Christ has done for you, and ask him to continue seeking us out, even as we seek him out in the Word of God.

PAGE 22 NOTES:

There is enough material in the personal study section to guide this first question, of Christ’s mission.

The theme of Jesus ministry seems clear enough, but the question of when Jesus became aware of his mission is interesting, because scholars disagree. For instance, is it possible that Jesus might

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not have really understood his calling until his prayer time in the Garden of Gethsemane, the night he was betrayed? Help your group look again at the Scriptural evidence and come to a conclusion about Jesus' sense of calling and purpose.

Jesus approached his assignment with amazing calm, considering the competing pressures and expectations of Roman rule, Jewish expectation, and his own very humble circumstances. It is clear, though, that Jesus did not seek to become a celebrity, a politician, or a powerful person of any kind. He stayed “under the radar” by going from village to village in Galilee (not the hub of the socially elite or politically powerful), starting first in synagogues to teach “the lost sheep of Israel” and then conducting an itinerant ministry to reach the lowly and undistinguished citizens of the area. His message was clear, and it required a choice to follow or not; but it was accessible to all.

The question of purpose in life is meant to help your learners to articulate the sense they have of a unique contribution they are making to the work of Christ's kingdom. If they get stuck answering this one, ask them where they feel drawn to human need, or what sort of passion moves them to act, or what cause do they have a heart for? If they have ever made the effort to discover their spiritual gifts, this exercise might provide a clue to their calling. Or perhaps, from negative experience, have they become aware of a need they have felt the tug to address?

PAGE 23 NOTES:

The purpose of the first question here is to get your folks interacting with each other on common experiences, particularly in the way they have determined their calling in life. This might also be the catalyst for a discussion of a group project, if enough people are headed in the same direction.

You, with every Christian believer, is a result of Christ's mission. How? His faithful witnesses transmitted the good news from one generation to another until *you* heard the gospel of the Kingdom, your sins were forgiven, your life was redeemed and reoriented around Christ's mission to reach others!

One's personal mission overlaps Christ's mission when it seeks out the “lost,” offers the ministry of reconciliation (2 Cor 5:18-19), and makes known the salvation of Jesus Christ to others. People may not see their “church activities” this way at all, in which case it would be worth the effort to uncover whether the congregation's mission aligns with Christ's or if it has become something other than a mission outpost in its community and beyond

CLOSING PRAYER TIME

Let the last question on page 23 inform your prayer time this week. As each person identifies a personal vision for mission—even tentatively—pray for this movement and the empowerment of God's Spirit to accomplish Christ's mission through him or her. Don't forget, “to glorify God” is a great calling, so in the absence of any other vision for ministry, pray that God would be glorified by the prayers, the conduct and the attitude of each group member.