

# Call to Mission

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## **Meet the Writer**

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## **Introduction to *Being Reformed: Faith Seeking Understanding***

Reformed and Presbyterian Christians are people of faith who are seeking understanding. From the beginnings of our Reformed tradition, Presbyterians have realized God calls us to explore ways the Christian faith can be more fully known and expressed. This vision has driven concerns for the education of people of all ages. Presbyterians have been big on providing resources to help us delve more deeply into Christian faith and the theology that gives our living tradition its distinctive heritage.

This *Being Reformed* curriculum for adults is one expression of the desire to open up what it means to be Presbyterian Christians in the world today. Our purpose is to enhance, enrich, and expand our insights. We want Presbyterians to grow in understandings of elements that are foundational and significant for their faith. Encounters with theology, church, worship, spirituality/discipleship, and social righteousness will guide our ways.

These studies engage our whole selves. We will find our minds moved by new ideas, our emotions stirred with responses of gratitude, and calls for action that can lead us in different life directions. Heads, hearts, and hands will be drawn into the joys of discovering what new things God is calling us toward.

We invite you to join this journey of faith seeking understanding. Celebrate the blessings of our Reformed and Presbyterian tradition of faith. Be stimulated and challenged by fresh insights that will deepen your understandings. Find a stronger commitment to the God who has loved us in Jesus Christ.

## To the Leader

The authors of *Being Reformed: Faith Seeking Understanding* emphasize essential Reformed theological principles that relate to our lives of faith. These sessions will help you lead a group into the theology and thoughts inspired by the challenging and interesting articles in the participant's book.

You might choose simply to begin the session with the prayer that precedes each session in the participant's book, then reading through the articles together, stopping when you or a student wishes to comment or raise a question. You could then close the session by discussing the questions at the end of the session and encouraging the group members to do the spiritual practice.

Unfortunately, that style of leading does not meet the needs of every kind of learner. The session plans encourage group leaders to try some new things to light up the hearts and minds of more people. Most teachers teach the way they like to learn. Choosing one new activity during each session will stretch you and open a door to someone who learns differently than you. Over the weeks, you will notice what your group enjoys and what they are unwilling to do. Let that, rather than your preferences, be your guide as you prepare to lead.

These session plans are designed to encourage group participation. Discussion and sharing create community and provide practice that all of us need in expressing our faith and wrestling with our questions. When asking questions, get comfortable with some silence while group members contemplate a response. Resist the urge to fill up the silence with your words.

If your group members like to talk, you might not be able to ask every suggested question. Also it will make a difference in your group session if group members have read the articles prior to the session. If you find it necessary to read from the participant's book during the group session, choose the passages that convey the core ideas.

You are more than a dispenser of information. In your role as group leader, you cooperate with God in the formation of faith and in the transformation of lives. You are the lead learner, modeling a way that faith seeks understanding. You are not trying to cover a lesson, but to uncover truth. Pray for yourself and your group members, prepare your session, relax, and enjoy!

May God bless your faithfulness!

# God's Mission

## Scripture

Leviticus 25; Isaiah 56:1–14; Luke 4:16–30

Supplemental Scripture: Isaiah 58:6–7

## Main Idea

Mission means that God sends the church beyond itself to meet God already at work in the world.

## Teaching Points

The session invites participants to consider:

1. Whose mission it is.
2. How God's mission of redeeming all that is broken in the world is revealed through Abraham, the prophets, and Jesus.
3. What the concept of jubilee, described in Leviticus, means for us as we participate in God's mission today.

## Resources Needed

Bibles

Participant's books

Christ candle and lighter

Newsprint and markers

Photo(s) showing mission involvement of your congregation  
or other groups

Plate or basket for offering

Small, inexpensive notebook for each participant

Pens or pencils

## Leader Prep

Prepare for leading each session by reading the participant's book and highlighting important points.

For Gather, set the Christ candle (a white pillar candle) on a table in the center of your meeting space. Place one or more mission photos on or near the table. Enlist participants to light the candle and read the opening Scripture.

For Head, familiarize yourself with the introduction to session 1 and the section "Whose Mission?" in the participant's book. Prepare three sheets of newsprint for the small-group discussion. Divide each sheet into two columns: one labeled "God's Call" and the other "God's Promise."

For Heart, familiarize yourself with the section "What Is Mission?" in the participant's book. Each participant will need a small notebook to use as a journal and a pen or pencil.

For Hands, review the descriptions of jubilee in Leviticus 25 and in the participant's book. Be prepared to give examples of how your congregation is—or could become—involved in mission.

For Depart, place an offering plate or basket on the worship table. This will remain on the table for the next five sessions, so that members can donate toward a mission project selected in consultation with your church session and/or mission committee.

## Leading the Session

### Gather

- Invite participants to introduce themselves and to share a word, phrase, or image that comes to mind when they hear the word *mission*.
- Light the Christ candle. Read Isaiah 58:6–7.
- Pray together the prayer at the beginning of session 1 of the participant's book.
- Point out the mission photos you have placed in the worship space. Invite participants to bring other images of mission to add to a mission wall, bulletin board, or display table throughout the next five sessions. Those images could be drawings, photos from personal or church files, or photographs documenting their observations over the next few weeks of people or places in need and people involved in mission.

## Head

- On newsprint, write “What is mission?” Refer participants to the introduction to session 1, and ask: *Why do the writers say this is the “wrong first question”? What should our first question be?* Write on the newsprint: “Whose mission is it?”
- Look together at the section “Whose Mission?” in the participant’s book. Ask: *What does theologian David Bosch mean when he says, “God is a missionary God”?*
- Invite a volunteer to read aloud the two passages from the *Book of Order* (participant’s book, pp. 6–7). Ask: *What do these passages say about the Trinity—Father, Son, Holy Spirit—and mission? About the church and mission?*
- Form three groups. Give each group one of the following passages to read: Genesis 12:1–15; Isaiah 2:4, 58:6–7, 65:17; Luke 4:16–30. Ask the groups to list on the prepared newsprint what their passages say about God’s call and God’s promise. Have each group share the two lists. Ask: *What do the lists tell us about mission?*

## Heart

- Look together at Isaiah 58:6–7 and Luke 4:16–30. Both Jesus and the prophet understood God’s mission as a call to heal a broken world. Ask: *What signs of brokenness are mentioned by Jesus and Isaiah? What are some examples of brokenness in the world today?* List the responses on newsprint.
- Give each participant a small notebook and a pen or pencil. Ask everyone to spend a few minutes in silence, prayerfully reflecting on the examples of brokenness you have listed. Offer these suggestions: *Choose an example of brokenness that tugs at your heart, and write a few sentences about it in your notebook. Or think about a broken place in your own life, and compose a prayer for healing.*
- Ask participants to keep their notebooks, using them as journals to record words, thoughts, and ideas that they find particularly meaningful throughout your six-week study. See the spiritual practice in the participant’s book for suggestions.

## Hands

- On newsprint, write “Jubilee.” Ask a participant to read aloud the first two paragraphs of the section “God’s Mission and the Jubilee” in the participant’s book. Have another participant read Leviticus 25:10. Ask: *How does the concept of jubilee relate to God’s mission? What would a year of jubilee look like in our world today?*
- Call attention to the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)’s three critical global campaigns for poverty alleviation, evangelism, and reconciliation (participant’s book, p. 10), noting that you will be learning more about them in upcoming sessions. Ask: *How might these efforts help fulfill the jubilee vision?*
- Discuss: *Is our congregation involved in mission in any of those three areas? If not, what might motivate the congregation to hear and respond to God’s sending word?*

## Depart

- Call attention to the offering plate or basket on the table, and invite participants to offer contributions, as they feel led, over the next few weeks. This offering should be over and above their annual pledge to the church. Explain that, at the end of the study, the offerings will be donated to a mission project selected in consultation with your congregation’s session and/or mission committee.
- Remind participants to record insights in their notebooks and to look for visual images of God’s mission to bring to the next session.
- Pray a closing prayer.
- Challenge participants to carry with them this statement as a benediction: “Human beings have no higher goal in life than to glorify and enjoy God now and forever, living in covenant fellowship with God and participating in God’s mission.”<sup>1</sup>

1. Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), *Book of Order 2013–2015* (Louisville: Office of the General Assembly, 2013), F-1.01. Reprinted with permission of the Office of the General Assembly.



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# God's Mission

## Scripture

**Leviticus 25** A universal redemption. Prisoners and slaves were freed; debtors were absolved. The land enjoyed a Sabbath rest, and its natural produce was the common property of all. Why? God owns all.

**Isaiah 56:1–14** An inclusive view of community: Foreigners who keep the Sabbath are full members of the community. The temple will be a house of prayer for all peoples.

**Luke 4:16–30** An appropriation of Jubilee. Jesus applies the Jubilee year to his vocation. God's plan is being completed.

## Prayer

O God, we are grateful for your love in Christ that continues to form us as your children. As our lives are aligned with your compassion and mission, may we experience our unity in you and our growing maturity as directly related to joining you in mission. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.

## Introduction

“What is mission?” is the wrong first question. We can't know what mission is without first asking, “Whose mission is it?”

If our first question is “What is mission?” then we—the church—can convince ourselves that anything and everything we do is “mission.” Sunday school is mission; the church softball league is mission. The church is called to many faithful ministries within itself: worship, study, fellowship, pastoral care, and more. However, these ministries should not be confused with mission. When everything the church does is called mission, the church easily deceives itself and mission is buried under the weight of church programs designed to meet the needs of church members.

Mission more appropriately describes a purposeful sending: God sends the church beyond itself to meet God already at work in the world. *Whose mission is it?* God's mission.

## Whose Mission?

*Mission* characterizes God's movement toward the world. South African Reformed theologian David Bosch asserts that mission is best understood as an attribute of God, in the context of the doctrine of the Trinity: the Father sends the Son in the power of the Holy Spirit. "God is a missionary God."<sup>1</sup>

The *Book of Order* begins with this understanding of mission. Notice the ways in which God's sending starts within the Trinity and moves outward:

The good news of the Gospel is that the triune God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—creates, redeems, sustains, rules, and transforms all things and all people. This one living God, the Scriptures say, liberated the people of Israel from oppression and covenanted to be their God. By the power of the Spirit, this one living God is incarnate in Jesus Christ, who came to live in the world, die for the world, and be raised again to new life. The Gospel of Jesus Christ announces the nearness of God's kingdom, bringing good news to all who are impoverished, sight to all who are blind, freedom to all who are oppressed, and proclaiming the Lord's favor upon all creation.<sup>2</sup>

Our world is broken—hunger, unemployment, poverty, disease, abuse, war, drugs, terrorism, loneliness, racism, injustice, and death cause despair. What is God doing? The triune God's self-giving love overflows, reaches out, and extends hope. The God who creates all things is on a mission to liberate creation. God redeems and rescues all that is enslaved and broken.

God sent Jesus Christ, who announced good news to the poor, proclaimed release for prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, let the broken victims go free, and proclaimed the year of the Lord's favor (Luke 4:18–19). These practices were signs of God's reign—a new humanity, a new creation, a new beginning for human life in the world—inaugurated by Jesus' mission, but not completed. Led by the power

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*The God who creates all things is on a mission to liberate creation. God redeems and rescues all that is enslaved and broken.*

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1. David Bosch, *Transforming Mission* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1991), 390.

2. Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), *Book of Order 2013–2015* (Louisville: Office of the General Assembly, 2013), F-1.01. Reprinted with permission of the Office of the General Assembly.

of the Holy Spirit, the church is launched into the same mission as that of our Lord Jesus Christ:

The mission of God in Christ gives shape and substance to the life and work of the Church. In Christ, the Church participates in God's mission for the transformation of creation and humanity by proclaiming to all people the good news of God's love, offering to all people the grace of God at font and table, and calling all people to discipleship in Christ. Human beings have no higher goal in life than to glorify and enjoy God now and forever, living in covenant fellowship with God and participating in God's mission.<sup>3</sup>

In the New Testament, the disciples and the faith community are "sent" (Greek, *apostellō*) by God. The apostolic church is the sent church, sent to bear witness to what God has done, is doing now, and promises to do in the future.

"As the Father has sent me, so I send you," Jesus said (John 20:21). Jesus sends the church into the world to continue God's mission. Collectively and individually, we are called to be a sign in and for the world of the new life that God has made available to people in Jesus Christ. The church exists for mission, for the world, and for others, as a sign and instrument of God's future.

## **What Is Mission?**

Now that we know that the mission is God's, we can ask: "What is mission?"

God is a loving God. God's love fuels a mission to rescue and reconcile broken people and a broken world. The world God loves and called good is broken—wars tear apart families and cultures, economic insecurity pushes people to the brink of despair, and governments and institutions grapple to survive uncertain times. We know brokenness personally. Our lives are splintered by long work hours, unemployment, endless activities, a pervasive sense of entitlement, the need to care for children and aging parents, and a lack of true community and relationships.

God's heart breaks for the creation that groans in labor pains. God promises that the broken will be whole, and the brokenhearted will be comforted. God calls Abraham and Sarah (Genesis 12:1–4) to leave all they know for a land they do not know. A promise is tied to

3. Ibid.

the call: the people of the world will be blessed. They will know the love of God and life's meaning and purpose.

Isaiah foresees God's blessed future characterized by peace, mercy, and grace:

- “They shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more.” (2:4)
- “Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of injustice, to undo the thongs of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke? Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, and bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked, to cover them, and not to hide yourself from your kin?” (58:6–7)
- “For I am about to create new heavens and a new earth; the former things shall not be remembered or come to mind.” (65:17)

Luke tells how Jesus began his ministry:

When he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, he went to the synagogue on the sabbath day, as was his custom. He stood up to read, and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written:

“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,  
because he has anointed me  
to bring good news to the poor.  
He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives  
and recovery of sight to the blind,  
to let the oppressed go free,  
to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.” (Luke 4:16–19)

Jesus' first sermon proclaims the content and trajectory of God's mission: alleviating poverty, reconciling relationships, and sharing the good news

of God's love.

Jesus' words

reverberate with

the language and

hope of jubilee.

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*Jesus' first sermon proclaims the content and trajectory  
of God's mission: alleviating poverty, reconciling  
relationships, and sharing the good news of God's love.*

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## God's Mission and the Jubilee

The concept of jubilee, a system of economic and social equalization, is first described in Leviticus 25. Jubilee is to be observed every fifty years. The number comes from seven cycles of seven years, with the fiftieth year being the jubilee “Sabbath.” Jubilee called for extreme measures to be taken. Property sold to relieve indebtedness was to be returned. Slaves were freed. Lands that had passed out of ancestral ownership were to be returned. The land itself was to be given a sabbath, a year-long rest from sowing and harvesting.

The principles behind the passage in Leviticus are clear. God declared, “The land is mine; with me you are but aliens and tenants” (v. 23).” As for those who fell into indebtedness and slavery, God says, “The people of Israel . . . are my servants whom I brought out from the land of Egypt” (v. 55). No one holds prior claims on any land or individual. Jubilee reasserts God’s sovereignty above all.

Jesus’ words in the Nazareth synagogue quote Isaiah, which in turn looks back to Leviticus: “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me . . . to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.” The year of jubilee! Jesus emphasizes three moral imperatives: “bring good news to the poor”; “proclaim release to the captives”; “let the oppressed go free.” Those are jubilee actions. Jesus interprets his ministry as a jubilee year.

Jubilee highlights how God’s vision of a just world touches on the economic, spiritual, and relational elements of human existence. God’s mission is universal and holistic, reaching the whole person and the whole of society in the created world with the gospel. In proclaiming a year of the Lord’s favor, Jesus not only invites us to imagine a world where poverty is eliminated, violence is ended, and good news is shared by all; he invites us also to imagine how we are called to participate in such liberation.

As a denomination seeking to serve within the broader Body of Christ in the world, the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) affirms jubilee elements to guide how we understand our ministry, giving shape to three critical global campaigns:

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- Poverty Alleviation: Providing Quality Education for a Million Children
- Evangelism: Training Pastors for Community Transformation
- Reconciliation: Ending Violence against Women and Children

Jubilee calls society to be transformed in social, economic, and spiritual ways. What does it mean for us? How does it call us in our ordinary lives to live more fully as disciples of Christ—the one who came to proclaim the year of God’s favor?

The focus on poverty alleviation, reconciliation, and evangelism may help you to consider where you align with the deepest cries of the world today. Knowing God’s vision proclaimed by prophets and apostles helps us see ourselves joining God to address the root causes of poverty, to end the scourge of violence, and to raise up pastors to proclaim the joy of the gospel.

### **Spiritual Practice**

Write in your journal. Read the Scripture passages for this session, and choose a word that stands out to you; walk with that meditation in mind. Sit in silence.

Each day, reread the section “God’s Mission and the Jubilee.” As you go about your day, note how the emphases of jubilee are relevant (or not relevant) in the world around you.

### **Questions for Reflection**

What new perspectives do you have about *mission* because of this session?

What might motivate your church to hear and respond to God’s sending word?

What role does love play in your church’s engagement in the world?