

A SHORT INTRODUCTION TO MISSION



tearfund

WHAT IS MISSION?

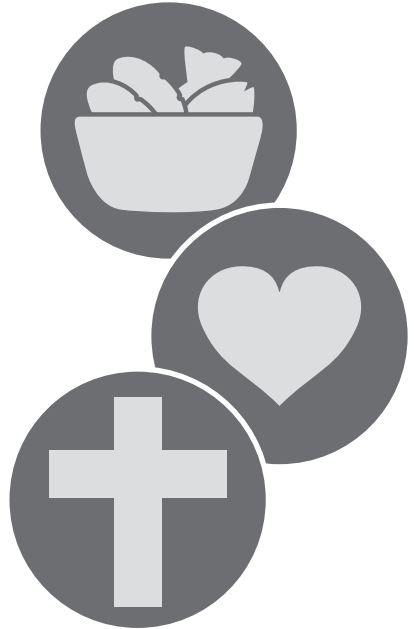
Jesus calls the church to participate in God's mission to redeem and restore all of creation.

This short guide introduces Tearfund's theology of mission. It looks at what the Bible says about mission, at how Jesus Christ shows us what mission is, and at how we learn to participate in mission ourselves.

Tearfund's understanding of mission is sometimes described by theologians as integral or holistic mission. At times, the church has divided mission into preaching and social action and has argued about which of these is more important. We believe the Bible shows us that the mission Jesus gives us cannot be divided like this. Instead, we are called to show the love of God and the good news that Jesus promised through every aspect of our lives. We do this by serving people, as Christ did.

As this guide explains, individual Christians have gifts and callings that enable them to play their particular parts in the mission of God. Tearfund also has a particular part to play in God's mission.

Tearfund's calling is to follow Jesus where the need is greatest and to work with the church to see people lifted out of poverty. Our expertise as an organisation is in international development and humanitarian aid. The context for us as we share the good news is therefore the places and people who are the most vulnerable and marginalised in our world. We share the good news of God's mission in our words, deeds and character within the various situations in which we find ourselves working. This is where we, as Tearfund, participate in the mission of God and how we seek whole-life transformation.

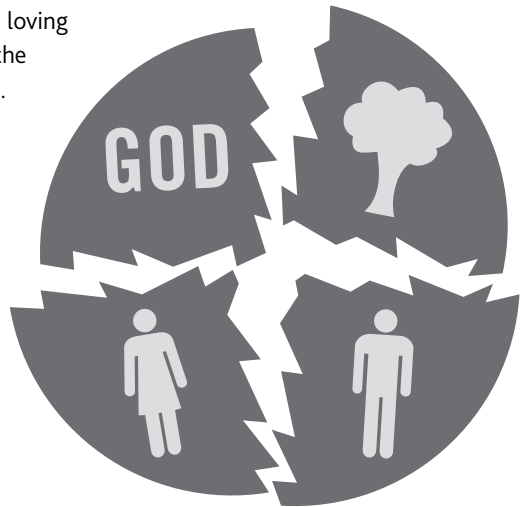


GOD'S CREATION AND THE NEW CREATION

When sin entered the world, relationships between God, people and the rest of creation were broken. God wants to restore these relationships.

(See Genesis 1–3, Romans 8:18–25, Revelation 21)

In the beginning, God created the world and it was good. God created humans to live in a loving relationship with him and gave them the responsibility of caring for his creation. However, humans were tempted not to trust God's authority and to seek power for themselves. This caused what we call 'the Fall'. In this moment sin entered the world, and the relationships between God, humans and the rest of creation were broken. Life became harder, and people's desire to protect themselves caused them to harm others. This is the root of poverty.



However, the Bible tells us that God wants to restore relationships, because God loves us and wants all of creation to be good once again. The stories of Abraham, Moses and the nation of Israel in the Old Testament tell us how God approached humans again, seeking a relationship with them. God wanted to show the rest of the world what it would look like to live in harmony with God, each other and the rest of creation. The gospels follow, telling us how Jesus' life, death and resurrection made restored relationships and a new creation possible. We read about the hope of this promised new creation throughout the New Testament (for example, in Romans 8), and its appearance is described in Revelation.

JESUS' MISSION

Through Jesus Christ, our relationships with God, each other and creation can be restored.

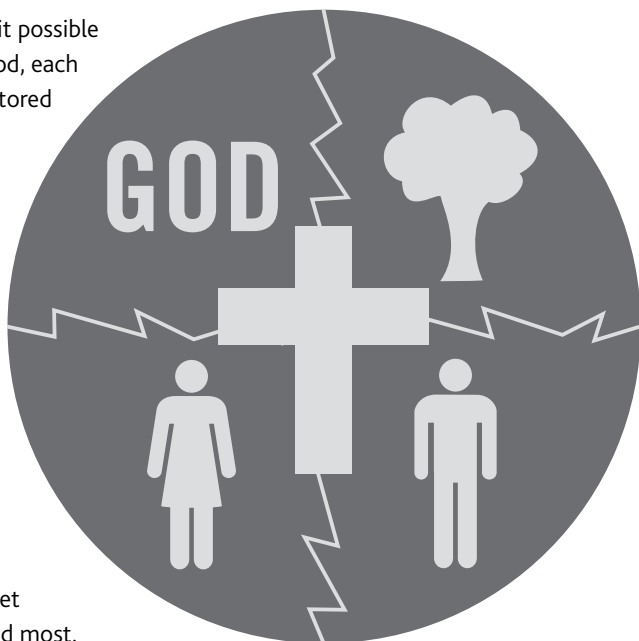
(See Luke 4:16–21)

Jesus' mission was to make it possible for our relationships with God, each other and creation to be restored and made good again. He described himself as having come to bring the jubilee. This referred to the coming of the kingdom of God: a time when people would be set free and when *shalom* (harmony) would be restored.

Jesus shared God's love through his words, his deeds and his character, and he sought to transform the lives of the people he met in whatever way they needed most.

Sometimes this involved healing them, sometimes it involved feeding them and sometimes it involved talking to them about the things that were wrong in their lives. He did not discriminate between 'types' of need: he valued and served the people he met in ways that enabled them to begin living a full life. Jesus' life shows us what restored relationships and life in the kingdom will look like.

In his death and resurrection, Jesus freed us from sin and made it possible for us to have a relationship with God eternally. This allows us to hope, with certainty, that ultimately the new creation promised in the book of Revelation will come.



THE MISSION OF THE CHURCH

The church's mission is to show people God's love and to invite them into a relationship with him.

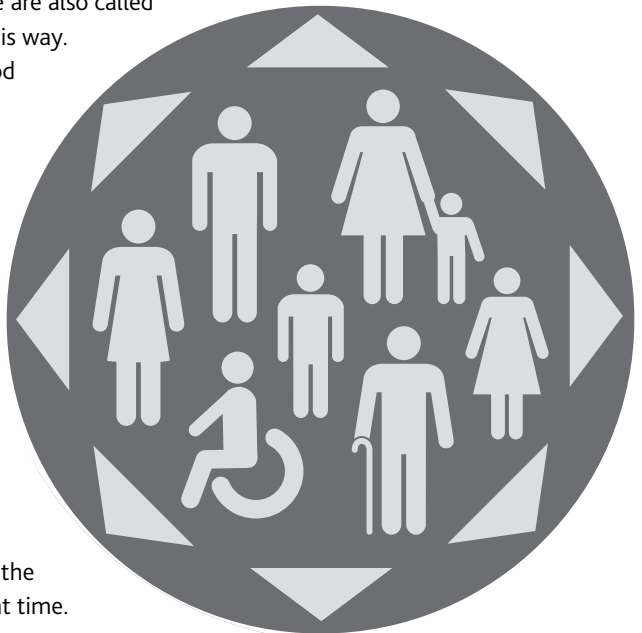
(See Matthew 28:19–20, Acts 4:32–35)

After Jesus had ascended to heaven and the Holy Spirit had been sent, the church was born. The church is the body of Christ on earth. It is commissioned to show the world what the kingdom of God will look like and to continue Jesus' mission. The mission of the church is to show people God's love and to let them know that it is possible to enter a relationship with him. We are called to do this in all the ways that Jesus did during his time on the earth. This is why we say that mission is holistic or integral: it encompasses the whole of life.

The church is called to show the world what it looks like to have a relationship with God that transforms our whole life. The world can see our relationships with each other and with God's creation. People can see if we are following Jesus' example. We are called to be a caring, inclusive community, serving those around us in love. We are also called to explain why we live in this way.

Our role is to share the good news of the gospel with individuals and with the whole community, seeking a just society in which all can flourish and come to know God.

The way that local churches participate in this mission will look different in different countries and contexts. This is because the ways in which we show people the love of God will depend on the needs that they have at that time.



PARTICIPATING IN GOD'S MISSION

As we live as Jesus' disciples, God will be able to work through us to bring transformation.

The following three things will help us to be active participants in God's mission.

Growing in discipleship



**Building relationships
in our communities**

**Discovering our
gifts and calling**

1 GROWING IN DISCIPLESHIP (See John 14:5–14)

Jesus called a group of disciples to live with him and learn from him as he carried out his ministry. He wanted them to be like him in their character and values, as well as in the things they said and did.

We are all part of the body of Christ. We cannot physically spend time with Jesus, but we can pray, worship and read the Bible. This is how we learn what Jesus is like and become like more him. Our time with God, and our filling with the Spirit, naturally leads to action because God's love fills us with his love for others. The Holy Spirit helps us to see how to serve people in any given situation and works through us to bring God's transformation in all areas of people's lives.

2 DISCOVERING OUR GIFTS AND CALLING

(See Romans 12:1–8, Galatians 2:6–10)

The church is commissioned to continue God's mission. Everyone in the church is called to be a part of the mission of God and is given different skills and opportunities in order to fulfil their part. We discern these as we grow as disciples. As the Romans reference above describes, and like Peter and Paul in the Galatians passage, we are all equipped to do different things – to share the gospel with different people in different ways. We are reminded to do them in loving unity, with no one thinking that their part is superior to anyone else's.

3 BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS IN OUR COMMUNITIES

(See Acts 18:1–4)

We need to get to know and understand the communities in which we are living and working, just as Paul did in Corinth in the above passage from Acts. This will help us to build relationships with people, to understand their needs and to show them God's love. Our lives show how we have been transformed by our relationship with God: our love for others and for God's creation is clearly seen in who we are, what we say and what we do. This is how we naturally invite and welcome people into the kingdom of God, making it possible for their relationships and lives to be restored as well.

Participating in God's mission will lead us towards a more just world, because it is hard to ignore injustice done to people whom we love and want to see flourish.

Further reading

You can find additional information on mission in the following documents:

- Tearfund's *Theology of mission*
- *What's my part?* (six short Bible studies on the nature of mission and our participation in it)

You can access these resources online at www.tearfund.org/mission, or use the contact details below to request a printed copy.

If you would like to help your church to explore the ideas about mission outlined in this booklet, visit www.tearfund.org/church.



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