

Our Mission: Making Followers of Christ

Various Scriptures

One of the things that I found out early in life is that I will not stumble or fall into excellence in something. I loved playing basketball when I was a kid and it dawned on me very quickly that if I wanted to be good at basketball so that I could score points, make shots, and win games, I would have to cut certain things out of my life and work intentionally at certain skills involving a basketball.

From time to time you will hear various businesses say things like, “we are trying to get back to our core business model.” We want to narrow our focus to what we do well. Those of you who have owned a business before know that you can’t do everything. You cannot sell cars, raise goats, provide haircuts, and roast coffee.

It’s important to be intentional in your personal life and your work life, but its even more important for us as the church of Jesus Christ. Think about it. We have this group of people who gather together and we call ourselves a church. What are we supposed to be doing? What are the goals we are aiming at? There’s a lot we could do with our time, money, and effort. So, how do we decide where to spend the precious few years of life God has given us?

Well, I think we start with the question, what does God tell us is the purpose and mission of His people, the church? Why has he left us here on earth and what are we to accomplish? Then, when we have figured that out, we ask ourselves, how can we best spend ourselves in pursuing that mission?

In the summer of 2017 the elders spent several meetings discussing these very questions in order to try to bring a laser focus to our ministry here. We don’t want to be haphazard. We don’t want to be a pool raft floating down the river with the current. You can’t rescue very many dying people from a pool raft as you float along. We want to be a speedboat with a powerful motor attached so that we can cut against the current and bring the good news to drowning sinners.

So, in order to get a laser focus on God’s mission for His church we need to think about God’s goals for the entire creation. Let’s broaden out a bit and think about what God wants to accomplish and then we’ll find out our role as a church within God’s plan. Here’s a pretty good one sentence summary:

"The message of the Bible, in essence, is that God is at work to bring into being a people under his rule in his place." - J.G. Millar

The only thing I would add to this description is that all of this is ultimately for God's glory. He will magnify Himself as he places his representatives on earth, under his rule and reign in order to reflect Him and bring Him honor.

Of course, this begins in the garden of Eden with Adam and Eve, continues with Israel as they represent God on earth and are His people under his rule in his place, and is realized in the person and work of Jesus Christ. He comes as the fulfillment of OT expectations and then in Matthew 28:18-20 he sends his followers out to gather more followers who will live as God's people under his rule. The interesting thing about this is that we are not yet in God's place. That will be the New Earth. In the meantime, we are sojourners according to 1 Peter 2:11. We are refugees, in between a homeland that we no longer belong in (this world) and a homeland to which we haven't yet been.

So, as sojourners living in between we are to act on behalf of our King and go out into the world to make disciples or followers of Jesus Christ. We are to proclaim the gospel of the King so that others will know Him and follow Him. This is what God is doing in the church according to Matthew 28:18-20. This is it. There's our laser focus. Everything we do in the life of this church must come under this heading and advance this goal, making followers of Jesus Christ.

That's clear enough, but because we are fallen human beings we tend to get distracted. We can't stay focused. How many of you have gotten up out of your chair to go into the kitchen, arrived at the fridge, and completely forgotten what brought you there? If it's that easy to get distracted from the task of making a sandwich, how much easier is it to drift off mission from what God has called us to? Sometimes it's just more comfortable to float with the current.

Because of our tendency to drift, we need to continually remind ourselves of our mission in order to stay on task. A big part of that is knowing what our mission is and then working to stay on mission in every area of ministry. So, what is our mission? Here's what the elders wrote and it's now on the front of your bulletin if you need a reminder:

Woodhaven Bible Church exists to make followers of Christ who worship God, connect with one another, and serve the church and the world.

We are going to spend the rest of September fleshing out this mission statement. Our ultimate goal is to make followers of Christ and we believe that healthy, fully formed, mature followers of Christ will consistently do 3 things. They will worship God, connect with other believers in community, and serve both the church and the world. Worship. Connect. Serve.

But let's spend the rest of our time this week discussing this main goal of making followers of Christ. What does it mean to be a follower of Jesus Christ? We just spend almost the entire summer studying Mark 8-10 and learning about discipleship at the feet of Jesus. Today we can pull together some of the major themes from that series and summarize.

Of course, in the ancient world, a disciple or follower was one who committed his life to learn from a master or teacher. One author describes ancient disciples like this: *"A disciple is rational (learner), relational (family), and missional (missionary)."* – Jonathan Dodson

In other words, no matter who your teacher was in the ancient world, being a disciple meant committing yourself in 3 areas. You learned, you had a personal relationship with the teacher and the other followers, and you tried to advance or propagate the teaching and lifestyle of your master.

So, if we bring this over to being a follower of Jesus here's what we get. *"A disciple of Jesus, then, is someone who learns the gospel, relates in the gospel, and communicates the gospel."* – Jonathan Dodson

Since the ministry of Jesus is all about the good news of the gospel our discipleship will be centered on the gospel. As we look at our mission statement and think about what it means to be a follower of Jesus, let's flesh out these 3 characteristics of followers of Jesus.

- **Learns the Gospel**

A disciple is a learner. When you commit yourself to following a particular teacher, you are signing up to acquire new information with your mind. You cannot be a disciple of Jesus without a hunger to learn of His person and work.

This means every follower of Christ is a theologian. Theology is vital to your life as a disciple. *"Its goal is to shape our ideas and words about God so that our functional theology corresponds to the truth about his divine being and character."* – Keith Johnson

Our functional theology is the beliefs that often go unstated but that actually shape the way we live. We may say one thing but act as if something else is true. A follower of Jesus is constantly seeking to bring his or her functional theology in line with the truth about God's character and ways. This takes instruction.

This is why our ministry has a heavy emphasis on teaching and this is exactly in line with the mission Jesus gives in Matthew 28:18-20. Let me encourage you that there has never been a time when there have been more gospel focused resources available for you and I. We have the privilege of learning the gospel in a deep and impactful way. So, be a learner of the gospel this week.

- **Relates in the Gospel**

Learning is a vital part of your discipleship, but you are more than a classroom student as a follower of Jesus. A major piece of your life as a disciple is learning to relate in the gospel. What does this mean?

A good word for this would be an adherent. A disciple in the ancient world had his lifestyle shaped and changed by the master or teacher. If the teacher taught that the good life was lived by those who ate only vegetables and would meditate 3 hours a day, the student learned to like broccoli and practiced his yoga. In other words, as important as doctrinal knowledge is, a true disciple is adherent of the way of Jesus. If you remember in the gospel of Mark that entire section on discipleship kept calling the path of Jesus "the way". It's because it's a lifestyle that is led and determined by the master. Another author described the ancient relationship between master and disciple this way:

"The relationship assumed the development of a sustained commitment of the disciple to the master and to the master's particular teaching or mission, and the relationship extended to imitation of the conduct of the master as it impacted the personal life of the disciple." -M.J. Wilkins

Disciples are more than students, they are family. We do not just acquire knowledge from a textbook. We interact with a living person named Jesus Christ

and we relate to other followers of Christ as family. Our interaction with Jesus shapes our interaction with one another. What does this look like? Let me read you a passage from Ephesians 4:1-3. Notice that Paul says we must walk worthy of the gospel. Our lives must be shaped by this calling of discipleship and that drastically changes the way we relate to one another. Now, we interact with one another in humility, gentleness, patience, and love.

So, in our relationships with others in this body we want to learn to initiate and respond in these ways, ways that are appropriate for followers of Christ.

- **Communicates the Gospel**

Keep in mind that an adherent to a master or teacher did not just privately learn the information. They would, of course, be changed by what they learned, but then they would go out and communicate the teaching of their master to others. The goal was to gain new adherents. So, what does this mean for us?

One of the primary characteristics of a follower of Jesus is that he or she communicates the gospel to unbelievers. We tend to naturally drift into our little Christian communities and shut ourselves off from relationships with unbelievers. But our mission as the church is to represent the culture of heaven by bringing the good news of the gospel to lost and dying people. We must be intentional about this or it will often be forgotten.

A disciple seeks out potential new adherents and communicates the gospel, but a disciple also speaks of the teaching of the master with other disciples. This is the very heart of local church ministry. This is how we build one another up in the church body. This is how we grow. We speak the truth in love. We remind each other of the glorious grace of God shown to us in Christ. We talk about how we are applying God's Word to our lives and seeking to live it out. We pray with one another for gospel conversations with unbelievers. We communicate the gospel to one another. Listen to what Paul says in 1 Corinthians 15:1-3. Paul was a follower of Jesus and He knew that he had to continually communicate the gospel to other followers. Here's how Jonathan Dodson describes this communication and why its so necessary for followers:

"Because his agenda of grace is the only solution to our common predicament of sin, Christian or non-Christian. Both desperately need the forgiving, reconciling,

and restoring power of the gospel to know and enjoy God, not just once but for a lifetime.”- Jonathan Dodson

This is the beauty of being a follower of Christ. It begins with grace we don't deserve. It's centered in grace and we will be kept by grace. We don't perform as disciples to earn God's favor. We respond to grace with joy and thankfulness and as our hearts are changed by encountering God's grace in Christ, we grow to be more like Him. So, let's be learners, relaters, and communicators of the gospel for God's glory.