

Message: Our Mission

What’s our mission?

That may seem like an odd question, but I can’t think of one that’s more important for each of us personally or the world. It’s a question Christians and non-Christians want to understand. As an example, “if you Google ‘missional,’ you’ll get well over a million hits and counting.”¹ That’s because our mission and the purpose of our life is intertwined. The way we live embodies our life purpose and is founded in our worldview, what we believe. This is true whether we are Christian or not.

When our life purpose, our beliefs and what we do are aligned we feel good, like things are going in the right direction. When our life purpose, beliefs and what we do are misaligned, we feel unsettled. It’s like driving down the road on a beautiful day: when the engine is running smoothly and the tires are in alignment, life is good. When the tires are out of alignment or the engine is missing, we can be so concerned about being stranded on the side of the road we lose sight of the beauty of the day.

The Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recently reported the suicide rate in the United States is at it’s highest point in three decades, with people between 45-64 at greatest risk.² The key factors appear to be a sense of hopelessness, concerns about health and financial instability. Women and men are at risk. Sadly, we seem to be losing our way and our will to live. Jesus’ words in John 10:10 ring true, “*The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.*” Jesus wants us to live our lives to the fullest, to feel good and have a mission or a purpose in life.

How are our life purpose, beliefs and what we do related?

To me, faith is what connects our life purpose, beliefs and actions. Faith in Jesus Christ comes with a life-changing benefit: the gift of the Holy Spirit to transform us, guide us and sustain us when things get tough. People with faith have hope, no matter how bad the ride gets. The more

¹ Reggie McNeal, *Missional Renaissance*, Jossey-Bass, 2009, xiii

² http://www.nytimes.com/2016/04/22/health/us-suicide-rate-surges-to-a-30-year-high.html?_r=0

God’s grace works in us, the more we want to share our hope and joy with others and the clearer our life purpose becomes.

Rick Warren’s best-selling book, The Purpose-Driven Life, says it succinctly, “It’s not about you.” Life is good and we’re most fulfilled when we receive God’s love and then share it, experiencing God with others. Our purpose is to bless other people by sharing God’s love with them. That’s what it means to live life to the fullest. Are you surprised that’s also what it means to be a disciple of Christ?

Sadly, many people aren’t fulfilled. They feel like they’re trapped in a never ending rat race. For many people, there’s something missing, no matter whether they’re outside or inside the church. Today’s church is a polite form of religion, but it seems to lack power, particularly the kind of power needed to change our lives. And if our lives aren’t changing, there’s little chance our society will recognize or respect us.

According to research done by David Kinnaman and Gabe Lyons for their book Good Faith, a majority of our society thinks Christianity is irrelevant and extreme. Their nationwide survey revealed that 62% of Americans view sharing your faith or praying with someone in public as “extreme.”³ And yet 80% of Americans want a deeper spiritual life. People fear what they don’t know. I believe people see Christians as irrelevant because we aren’t participating in the mission of Jesus. The paradox is that those same people condemn Christians who aren’t authentic. If you won’t own your faith and be honest about it, you’re increasingly dismissed as someone whose faith is really just an opinion, not a part of your true identity or life’s purpose. Faith and spirituality are respected. Fake, overly artificial faith is not.

That makes Peter’s words even more striking, “...in your hearts sanctify Christ as Lord. Always be ready to make your defense to anyone who demands from you an accounting for the hope that is in you” (1 Peter 3:15). Peter isn’t telling us we have to be able to defend everything in the Bible. Peter is reminding us that God called us out of darkness into the light and gives us a role in the mission (1 Peter 2:9).

³ David Kinnaman and Gabe Lyons, *Good Faith*, Barna, 2016

All we have to do is to be light in the world. We do that in the way we live. We communicate our unashamed love of God through what we think, say and do. That’s something everyone can do. It’s what makes some people part of the body of Christ while others just “go to church.” You either get it and you live it or you don’t.

What’s our mission? Jesus gave his disciples a mission in Matthew 28:18-20, “*Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you.*” That’s the mission of Jesus Christ and the mission of his disciples, everyone who commits their heart, mind, body and strength to Jesus. There’s one caveat: to make disciples, you first have to be disciples!

Sadly, the traditional way of “doing church” is being viewed with suspicion, disregard or concern, inside and outside the church.

That’s what the post-Christendom movement is saying. We all agree it would be nice not to have to worry about buildings, budgets, ministry programs and the like. If we make those things our measures of success and focus on performance, there’s a lot happening, but it’s going the wrong direction. I think you’ll agree with me that we aren’t here for meetings, but for a much deeper, more fulfilling reason. We want to experience God’s love and we want to live it out, each and every day.

We need to change our focus. If we want better attendance, offerings and cleaner buildings, then we’ll focus on those things. But if we want to see people inspiring others by their faith and living up to their full potential as children of God, then we need to focus on being disciples who make disciples. That means we have to look at other measures of success. For example, we might want to look at how many volunteer hours we put in each quarter. Or how many blessings we were able to give and receive. Or how many people from the community came to a service activity we did for our community, in our community.

Moses’ words in Exodus 19:5 give us hope, “*if you obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession out of all the peoples.*” God loves us. God calls us. When we hear the divine voice and respond, God is overjoyed. When we hear God’s voice, respond and

seek to be in relationship with God and others, God sees us in a new way. God delights in us. We’re a treasure. Our picture is up on God’s refrigerator and on the mantel. God has blessed us but, sadly, we’re often oblivious to God’s voice and touch.

God wants to bless us even more fruitfully. And the best way to receive God’s abundant blessing: empty yourselves by pouring God’s love into others, blessing them. When you empty yourself, you’re a cup waiting for God’s grace to fill to overflowing. That’s the true source of God’s blessing, a work of the Holy Spirit in and through us.

God called Abram and all of his spiritual descendents to be a blessing to the world (Genesis 12:1-3). When we hear God’s call and respond in love, we’re Abraham’s spiritual descendents. God calls us to hear and accept Jesus as our Savior. When we’re born again, we’re doubly blessed. Not only are we washed clean in God’s eyes, we’re made new, beginning with a heart transplant. God transforms selfish, stone hearts into living, spirit-filled hearts. A person with a heart for God can’t help themselves. They can’t keep from sharing God’s blessing with others. Nothing can hold them back, even their own fear and timidity.

I invite you to share God’s blessing in your small groups, at home, in the marketplace, everywhere you go this week. There’s no better time to begin than the present. Please turn to the person seated next to you and ask this question: **“How may I ask God to bless you?”**

Please pray for God to bless them (silently or as you choose).

Thank you for sharing. I know it was uncomfortable. We either never learned how to do it or we’re out of practices. I can tell you blessing others gets easier the more you do it. After all, God made us to do so. There are benefits: we receive blessings in return. People will pray for us. You’ll interact with people in new ways, even those you may have known for some time. And you’ll experience divine appointments, when people are touched and touch you in return.

In the weeks ahead, we’ll make time during the service to share the blessings we gave and received, for these are times when God was present. When we share our experiences of God with others, we begin

to anticipate and look forward to new ways God’s Spirit will work in and through us. That’s a blessing, for it gives us hope. It’s the way to a great life on earth and in heaven. And that’s an inspiring mission.

Let us pray:

Lord, help me to be the person you want me to be today. Take away the desires that shouldn’t be there, and help me be single-minded in my focus and my pursuit of you. Help me to follow you and be transformed by your love so I may bless others with that same love. Bless us when we live generously, sharing your love with others. We commit ourselves to you in faith and in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Genesis 12:1-4 (NRSV)

Now the LORD said to Abram, “Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the land that I will show you. I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.” So Abram went, as the LORD had told him; and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he departed from Haran.

Exodus 19:5-6 (NRSV)

Now therefore, if you obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession out of all the peoples. Indeed, the whole earth is mine, but you shall be for me a priestly kingdom and a holy nation. These are the words that you shall speak to the Israelites.”

1 Peter 2:9;3:15 (NRSV)

But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.

...in your hearts sanctify Christ as Lord. Always be ready to make your defense to anyone who demands from you an accounting for the hope that is in you...

John 10:10 (NRSV)

The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.