



Commissional Purposes

Colossians 3:11–17

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Our Initiatives

Over the last 18 months, we have been working to develop our ministries as we are becoming a commissional church. It has been our desire to become what God has told us we are. It is our desire to work out in practical wisdom what we believed was our essential identity. We saw the need for several initiatives:

We enhanced our Mission Statement so that it reads:

By God's Grace and through His Word
we will cultivate in the hearts of God's people
a passion for the supremacy
of the Lord Jesus Christ
magnified in love for Him
manifested in love for one another
and *multiplied by love for the lost*.

We highlighted our place in the redemptive mission of the church as we seek to fulfill the Great Commission;

We are developing evangelistic strategies that involve the whole church in the kingdom mission of preaching the gospel.

Our Term

When the Lord gathered His disciples just before His ascension, He gave them what is known to Christians as the great commission. Consider Matthew 28:19-20.

And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹ 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, ²⁰ teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.

- A King in His authority
- Subjects both doubting and worshipping
- A kingdom work of discipling the nations.
- This mission has two distinct phases or objectives:
 - To evangelize so that people come to be baptized
 - To edify so that people come to be obedient

This kingdom mission, which was launched in eternity past, has been growing in clarity and force all through redemptive history. At the center of it is Christ and

the cross. The thrust of it is to call out a people who will believe and bow to the King and bring Him glory forever.

Many have coined terms to represent this great outward flow of people from the church to the lost among our neighborhoods and the nations. We have chosen to coin a new term for being the kind of church that is taught and thrust out to carry out this kingdom mission. Therefore, we see the church as a ***Commissional Community***. We are engaged in the continuing mission even today. What was begun by Christ with His disciples, was empowered by the outpouring of the Spirit, was clarified and carried out by the apostles, we continue.

Our Aim

It is our aim and fervent desire that see ourselves ***becoming a commissional church***.

Over this spring, culminating in our Elder's Retreat, we have been thinking through what it means to be a commissional church in regards to our meetings as a church. This morning, it is my great privilege to share with you the fruit of that work and the changes it will involve.

Central Truths

Thinking about change is often difficult for people. Even really good change often displaces us from what we are comfortable with and from what we have done in ministry. As shepherds here we want some central truths from this text to so fill our hearts that our desires, wants, affections and actions will all be pleasing to God.

The Reality of God's People (v. 11)

¹¹ Here there is not Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free; but Christ is all, and in all.

The church is made up of all different kinds of people and cultures. There are significant challenges posed by our diversity.

The reality is that these external differences are not core realities. Jesus Christ is our essential reality. In Christ, the church is a new people group. We are our own culture. Christ is our all and in us all. This is our essential reality.

The Relationships of God's People (v. 12-14)

¹² Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, ¹³ bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive.

¹⁴ And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony.

We must know who we are:

- We are chosen. Each of us has been selected out by God so He has placed us among the people He intended. You don't get to choose who are Christians.
- We are holy. God has made us holy in Christ. We have been clothed in His righteousness. We are saints, all of us. This is the Bible's emphatic declaration over God's people¹.
- We are loved. We are beloved, like Christ is beloved. God has chosen to love us by bringing us into Christ. His love for Christ becomes love for us as well. This is both corporate and individual. God loves the church. God loves the people who make up the church.

We must live out who we are with intentional choices of love in our relationships. We must put on, in our hearts, all that promotes harmony and unity. We must choose affection, compassion, kindness, patience, humility, and meekness precisely because we tend to proud, harsh, impatient and self-asserting with others. We have our own agenda, interests and rights that we insist on holding on to. So we must assert our unity and express our love through upholding our harmony.

The Responsibilities of God's People (v. 15-16)

¹⁵ And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful. ¹⁶ Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God.

Two key responsibilities emerge from verses 15-16: God's peace must rule us and God's Word must indwell us.

God's peace must rule among us in our hearts. Verse 15 has nothing to do with personal guidance. It is about peace being the referee among God's people who are living out their identity in seeking to maintain harmony in love. God's peace is to rule us in such a way that we are thankful.

God's Word must reside within us. This begins in the individual Christian and extends to the whole body. The peace of God will rule us where the Word of God lives among us. The way the Word dwells among us is through all the means that God lays out here. The Word is living and dwelling where there is teaching, admonishing, and singing. Our teaching, admonishing and singing are to be filled with the Word, if you will, the Word is to dwell, to live in them.

We learn and live who we are together in relationships, sustained by love and ruled by peace when the Word is central to us.

The Reverence of God's People

(v. 17)

¹⁷ And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

I have chosen to use this word to give a Biblical meaning to the idea of reverence, respect and reputation. What we do as a community of believers:

Includes all our words and our deeds whether those are in our hearts and or in our actions;

Is done before the face of God and in His continual Presence;

Is to be submitted under the rule of our Lord and King, Jesus;

In view of God's fame and reputation, that is, in His name;

While the breathing of gratitude the air of grace.

This is our greatest concern: that as we are becoming what God has declared us to be, a missional church, we will be pleasing to Him. We want to please God and glorify Christ as we make disciples of all the people groups.

Elder's Resolution

As we worked through this as Elders, we put together an extensive resolution that summarizes our thinking and how we want to move forward as a gathered church.

Believing that the foundational principles for our gatherings are:

We affirm the following according to these relevant texts: Jeremiah 31:31-34; Matt. 28:18-20; Luke 24:46-48; John 4:23-24; 2 Cor. 3:12-18; Eph 4:11-16; and Col. 1:15-20.

In regards to being a Commissioned Church

That being a commissioned church affects how we gather as a people.

That being a commissioned church means that we gather to make disciples.

That being a commissioned church means that we gather to evangelize and edify those who gather.

In regards to New Covenant Gatherings

When we gather together, Christ meets with us and we fellowship together with God through the Spirit and in truth.

In regards to the Centrality of Christ

As we gather together, we will remember what God has done for us and to us in the Person and Work of his Son and that Christ, through the Spirit, sustains the life of the community and transforms us into His image.

Through God's Word, believing that the essential elements of our gathering are:

We affirm the following principles and precepts from God's Word according to these relevant texts: Acts 2:42-27; Acts 6:1-7; Acts 13:1-3; 1 Cor. 10:16-17; 1 Cor. 11:17-34; 1 Cor. 14:26-40; Eph. 5:15-21; Col. 3:16-17; 2 Tim. 4:1-4; Heb. 10:19-25; Heb. 12:22-29; Rev. 15:3-4; and Rev. 19:6-10.

In regards to Word Centrality

That the Word of God preached and taught is to characterize the whole of our gatherings.

In regards to Musical Praise

That God delights in the expressions of praise through singing and use of musical gifts.

That worship has multiple purposes in our gatherings including Godward praise, mutual encouragement and edification, comfort in distress, expressions of our life in this world.

That God is pleased to accept worship in a diversity of musical styles and cultural expressions.

In regards to Fellowship

That God's people must gather for fellowship in order to draw near to God, hold fast to our faith and hope and to know one another well enough in order to spur one another on to love and good works.

That God's people gather to eat together in order to build relationships.

In regards to Prayer

That God's people will gather together to pray for one another, for God's power in ministry and God's purposes in the world.

In regards to the Ordinances

That God's people will gather together to baptize those professing faith in Christ.

That God's people will gather together to regularly celebrate the Lord's Table.

In regards to the Collections and Offerings

That God's people will gather together to take collections and offerings as an act of worship.

That God has ordained that the work of the ministry is to be supported by the giving His people.

In God's Wisdom, understanding that:

We seek to discern our particular situation, needs, distinctives and aims through God's wisdom.

In regards to our *Gathering* Language

We choose to refer to our assembling together as God's people as *gatherings*.

We choose to emphasize *gatherings* over the use of the traditional language of services, worship, etc.

In regards to our *Gathering* Pattern

Observing the pattern of the Sunday gatherings of the New Testament church, we choose to set aside Sunday as the primary day for gatherings.

In regards to our *Gathering* Purposes

We choose to assemble regularly in four intentional gatherings.

1. Morning Gathering - Focused on the edification of new and untaught believers mindful of the lost through the expositional preaching of God's Word and expressions of worship.
2. Evening Gathering – Focused on our community life together and in-depth expositional preaching of God's Word.
3. Bible Education Gathering – Focused on the teaching of God's Word, mindful of chronological age and Christian maturity.
4. Flock Gathering – Focused on fellowship, prayer and one-anothering.

Be it resolved that:²

We propose the following for our gatherings as God's people.

Sunday

Morning Gathering 9:30 -10:30

Focus on preaching and singing

Morning Fellowship 10:30 – 11:00

Focus on fellowship and outreach

Bible Education 11:00 – 12:00

Focus on teaching

Evening Gathering 6:00 – 7:30

Focus on preaching and singing

Includes Scripture Sowers

Wednesday

Flock Gatherings 6:00 – 8:00

Focus on fellowship and prayer

Unswerving Commitments

In the midst of these changes, we have some unswerving commitments:

To evangelism through both individual and corporate efforts;

To bringing God's people to maturity through all the means that God has ordained with an emphasis on preaching and teaching;

To being as explicitly Biblical as we can even when it does not fit our tradition, past practice or personal preferences;

To expository exultation as our primary means of preaching in corporate gatherings on Sunday;

To in-depth, across the whole Bible, through books exposition of the Word of God primarily at the Sunday Evening gathering;

To as much truth as possible to as many people as possible caring for the new believer, the untaught or mis-taught believer and mindful of those who are lost particularly in the Sunday Morning gathering;

To worship that is Godward in its focus, Biblical in its content, rich in its theology, true to authentic Christian experience, deep in its affections using the best of both the old and the new.

Shepherding Concerns

As your pastor/elders we are concerned to shepherd you through this change.

To be open to counsel offered in a Biblical spirit;

To answer questions as forthrightly and clearly as we can;

To lovingly care for you through change by understanding where it challenges, threatens, disturbs, and maybe angers you.

To encourage those who have waited long and are very encouraged and enthused about these changes to be patient, loving and kind to those who struggle.

Transforming Changes

As we are becoming a missional church, we hope to see these transforming changes in our congregation.

A confidence to bring unbelievers and untaught believers to our Morning Gathering;

A dedication to sitting under God's Word, both when we are being challenged with new or deeper truths and also when we are being taught what we already know;

A commitment to assemble with God's people understanding that each gathering has Biblically shaped and God-pleasing purposes;

A willingness to prefer others, especially those who need to grow in their maturity through learning and living God's Word.

Tempting Challenges

In the course of changes, there are real temptations that will challenge your being pleasing to God:

You may be tempted to impute motive and judge leaders (Matthew 7:1-5). Please know that we are open to counsel. We are committed to being open and transparent about the "why's" of these changes. We are truly seeking to unite the precepts and principles of God's Word with loving, wise and God-pleasing practice.

You may be tempted to interpret our changes as conforming to church growth movement concerns. Please be assured that we are not going "emergent" nor becoming "seeker driven." We are not changing because we want to be more acceptable to the world. We are not seeking to have our gatherings shaped by the expectations of unbelievers. We believe that there is a kingdom and a culture border between the world and the church. Erase that border and the world floods into the church; the church does not flood out into the world. But we have also come to understand that we cannot have barriers – barriers are foolish, neither wise nor God-pleasing. So, our Sunday morning gathering is still kingdom,

community, expositional, Christ-centered, and God-ward for *all* believers while opening wide the narrow gate for unbelievers.

You may be tempted to grumble and complain (Philippians 2:12-18). When we love and prefer others in such a way that we don't complain, then our gospel light is held up more brightly.

You may be tempted to reject change and not follow leadership, particularly when it affects you personally (Hebrews 13:15-18)

You may be tempted in craving your personal ministry to sin to keep it or to sin when it may be changed or cease.

Moving Forward: Our Plan

Today, we have introduced what being a missional church means for our Sundays. Our focus is on what we do on this day, primarily set aside for the Lord. Flocks and Wednesday Flock Gatherings are meeting their purposes and are being strengthened as we make some adjustments for the future.

This week's Flock gathering is set aside for discussion on this topic. You will have opportunity to talk with your elders about the changes that are going to take place.

There will be some meetings with ministry teams over the next week or so. These will be essential to supporting the implementation of the planned changes.

Starting August 8th, the elders will be doing a Sunday Morning series on our Missional Gatherings.

August 8	Missional Gathering	Pastor Mark	Our gatherings and how we will worship in our gatherings.
August 15	Missional Preaching	Pastor Russ	Our preaching and how we will continue our focus on exposition and serving families and their children
August 22	Missional Outreach	Pastor Dan	Our outreach and how the changes should encourage the bringing in of new families to our gatherings
August 29	Missional Teaching	Pastor Chad	Our teaching ministries and how the changes will grow our ABE and BTSC.

We plan to implement the changes beginning the first Sunday in September.

Let me conclude with the word of God from Hebrews 13:15–21 (ESV).

¹⁵ Through him then let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name. ¹⁶ Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God.

¹⁷ Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you. ¹⁸ Pray for us, for we are sure that we have a clear conscience, desiring to act honorably in all things. ¹⁹ I urge you the more earnestly to do this in order that I may be restored to you the sooner.

²⁰ Now may the God of peace who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant, ²¹ equip you with everything good that you may do his will, working in us that which is pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.

Notes

¹ This is very important. We tend to call ourselves “sinners”. In the Bible, sinners are unbelievers. Believers are saints. That is not to say we do no sin; we do. But being a saint is our identity, not being a sinner. What if the constant assertion of our identity as “sinners” is actually functional unbelief? What if I believed I was a saint, not a sinner, in such a way that the power of the old man I used to be was actually made of no effect so that I began to actually live up to who I am?

² In the Elder’s Resolution, this is a table as follows:

Day	Gathering	Biblical Focus	Time
Sunday	Morning	Preaching and Singing	9:30-10:30
	Morning Fellowship	Fellowship and Outreach	10:30-11:00
	Bible Education	Teaching	11:00-12:00
	Evening	Preaching and Singing	6:00-7:30
Wednesday	Flock	Fellowship and Prayer	6:00-8:00