

The Mission and You

Good morning! I want to start this morning by reading several different passages. They are connected as I hope you'll see. There's a thread which unites them together.

Read Genesis 12:1-3, Deuteronomy 7:6-8, Isaiah 43:5-7, Ephesians 1:3-10

Intro

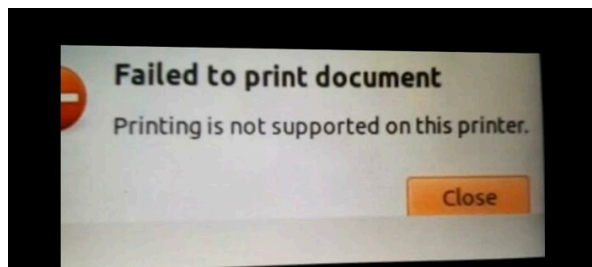
Well, it's the new year. Many of you have probably made or thought about New Year's resolutions – what you want to do this year. Maybe you want to get in shape or spend more time with your family or you have some financial goals for yourself. It's that time of year when it feels like we can step back and sort of take stock of things in our lives. And the same is true for our church as we think about our mission together. It is good and healthy for us to do some reflection, some evaluation, and some planning from time to time. And that's what I want to do with us today. There are some newer people in the room and there are some in the room who've been around church or around Cornerstone for a very long time. So we need to make sure that all of us are on the same page about what this whole thing is all about.

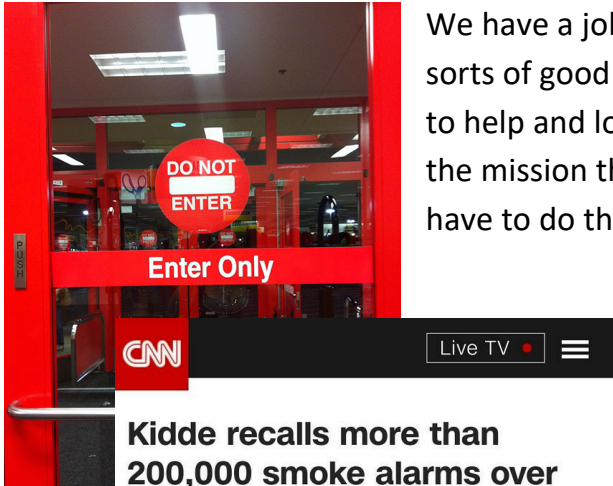
If I were to just pull you aside and ask you some questions – what is it that we're doing here as a church? What is it that we're trying to accomplish together? You hear it from us almost every week, we exist to help people know God, grow together, and serve others. In other words, we are to make disciples. But *why* is that our mission? What does it mean? What does it look like in my life and yours? Is our mission so important that we cannot fail at it?

Why is it that if we fail at everything else, we must not fail at this?

You may have seen these memes float around on social media; silly things that happen when people have one job to do and don't do it. Things like this...

(show pictures)





We have a job as a church – did you know that? We can do all sorts of good in the world, and we can try all kinds of ministry to help and love people. But we cannot fail at our one job – the mission that Jesus commanded of us. If all else fails, we have to do this – make disciples.

So what I want to do today is think about our mission together. There are three questions that I want to tackle this morning. We'll start a bit broader and high level and then move toward the practical by the end.

I want to ask first, what is the mission of God? What has God revealed about His purpose in the universe? What is God up to?

And then secondly, what is our church's mission? What does God want from us as a New Covenant community?

And then finally, what is your mission? What does God want from you specifically in 2024?



What is the mission of God?

This is a huge question, isn't it? It would be hard to imagine a bigger question than that. And instead of taking one passage and going deep with it, I want to pull from several different passages to answer these questions.

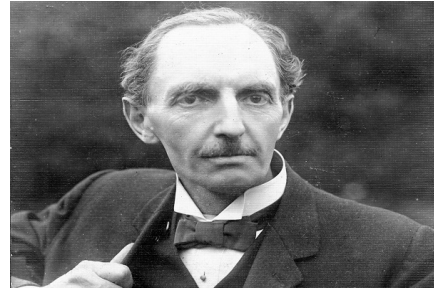
In fact, we read a few of them a moment ago. There was a thread that connected those passages and it's this – they each speak to God's purpose or His mission in the world.

And I want to look at one specific way to answer this. I'm not going to try to identify all of the things that God is doing in the world. Rather, I want us to think about this – why is God doing what He's doing? What is the ultimate purpose behind all that God does?

And we need to start here, because if the church isn't aligned with what God is doing, then at the end of the day, it won't matter at all what our church is doing. And the same could be said for our individual lives as well.

There's a poem by the missionary C.T. Studd that captures this idea well. He writes...

*Two little lines I heard one day,
Traveling along life's busy way;
Bringing conviction to my heart,
And from my mind would not depart;
Only one life, twill soon be past,
Only what's done for Christ will last.¹*



Only what's done for Christ will last. And the end of all things, only what we've done for Jesus, only what's been for His glory and in alignment with His purpose will last into eternity.

So what is God's mission?

I'm going to make three statements and show you just briefly why I think the Bible backs them up.

God is working all things together for the glory of His Name

Sounds basic, doesn't it? But sometimes Christians get this wrong, and we think that God is all about us. Like parents who want their children to be healthy and responsible and mature – that's kind of like what God wants from people. That's why he loves us and cares for us. He just wants us to succeed.

Now, God does love you and is for you and wants to provide for you and protect you and guide you. But he does those things for a greater purpose than to just make much of you. He does all of that for His own name's sake. He does it for His own glory.

When you see this, you'll start to see it everywhere. Have you ever noticed that when you learn a new word or buy a new car, you start to see it everywhere? There's a name for it. It's called the Baader Meinoff phenomenon.

¹ <https://paulhockley.com/2016/05/24/quote-only-one-life-twill-soon-be-past-poem-by-c-t-studd/>

My dad bought a Tesla a few years ago. And my five year old son was pretty impressed with it. An electric car? That's pretty cool. And he started to point them out whenever we saw them. And suddenly, we started to see them everywhere. I hadn't noticed them before, but now they were all over the place.

The same is true when you start to notice that God is all about the glory of His name. Let me show you some passages...

Psalm 23:1-3

The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want. **2** He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters. **3** He restores my soul. He leads me in paths of righteousness
Why? Why does God do all of this?
for his name's sake.

So why does God shepherd us and provide for us and restore us – for His name's sake. It's for His glory.

We find this theme in several places, and especially in the Old Testament prophets. Ezekiel, for example, is always talking about the name of God as His primary motivation. But I want us to listen to the words of the prophet Isaiah. In this passage, he's writing to God's people and giving them some hope in the midst of the judgement they are facing. They're going to be scattered by their enemies. But God is going to save them and rescue them from wherever they are. He says...

Isaiah 43:6-7

Fear not, for I am with you; I will bring your offspring from the east, and from the west I will gather you.
6 I will say to the north, Give up, and to the south, Do not withhold; bring my sons from afar and my daughters from the end of the earth,
7 everyone who is called by my name, whom I created for my glory, whom I formed and made."

God is going to save His people which is ultimately fulfilled in the coming of Jesus the Messiah. And He's going to gather them. And He tells them in verse 7 – everyone who is called by my name, whom I created *for my glory*...

I want you to think about this. The reason you exist, the reason you are here on earth today is for the glory of God, the name and renown of God. The praising of His infinite perfections, that's why you exist. You're not here just to hang out with God. God was not lonely and decided to make you because He was just tired of being alone after eternity of being alone. God was perfectly content within the Godhead. God the Father, God the Son and God the Spirit did not need to create you. He did create you for the praise of His glorious grace. That's why you exist. It's the reason you're alive.

There's a class on missions that is taught around the world and in our community sometimes called Perspectives in World Religion, and near the end, they'll unpack what they call cat and dog theology.

Here's how they break it down. A dog goes, "My owner feeds me, cares for me and cleans up after me. He must be God." A cat goes, "My owner feeds me, cares for me and cleans up after me. I must be God." That's why when you come home your dog is all over you and your cat couldn't care less. Far too many evangelicals are feline in their theology. "Well God loves me, and He's for me. I must be the point." But friends, when you're the point, everything falls apart.

It's too small a thing for us to live for our own glory, or for God, who is perfect, to be primarily concerned about our glory. God is concerned about the glory of His name. And frankly, that's good news for us. It's good news because secondly...

God is redeeming a people for His own possession

God is about saving us when we could not save ourselves. One of the most important passages in all the Bible about what God intends to do, His mission, is Genesis 12:1-3. Here God makes a covenant promise to Abraham and to His offspring. Listen to what God declares that He will do...

Genesis 12:2-3

And 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. **3** I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."

God is going to bless Him so that Abraham will be a blessing. God will bless him so that through Abraham and His offspring all the families of the earth will be blessed.

That's what God was doing with Israel in the Old Testament – they were to be a blessing to the whole world. But they failed at that because of their sin and idolatry.

And so Paul will pick up this idea in Galatians 3 and teach us that this promise that God made is the gospel. And indeed, all who trust in Jesus are united to this promise by faith.

So this passage in Genesis 12 about God's promise to Abraham had you in mind. You and I today have been grafted into the people of God by faith in Jesus, who is the true Son of God and the offspring of Abraham.

That's incredible, isn't it? We're a part of God's plan and part of His people. So that's why the apostle Peter can write to the churches in Asia and say,

1 Peter 2:9

But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.

These words are not just for Israel any longer. God has revealed the gospel – that Jesus lived and died and rose again to save sinners from every nation. God has revealed that now to the Gentiles. So now we all are part of God's people – a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, and a people for God's own possession. God made us a people for Himself.

Why? Why has God done this? What was God's purpose in doing all of that? This verse tells us – it is so that we might proclaim the excellencies of God. God is excellent in all of who He is. And He saved a people for Himself to glorify His name! That's God's mission. That's why He has redeemed you and adopted you into his family.

There's a danger here when we think that God has loved us because we probably deserve it. I'm pretty awesome, why wouldn't God love me?

I remember one time as a kid, my Dad got my Mom a card, "It's so wonderful to be married to someone so kind and beautiful and intelligent....(open it up) I hope you realize how lucky you are!"

You may have seen cards like that. I remember even then thinking, "Good luck Dad!"

We can fall into that kind of thinking. But God wants us to know, it's not about us.

Deuteronomy 7:7-8

It was not because you were more in number than any other people that the LORD set his love on you and chose you, for you were the fewest of all peoples, **8** but it is because the LORD loves you and is keeping the oath that he swore to your fathers, that the LORD has brought you out with a mighty hand and redeemed you from the house of slavery, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt.

It wasn't because Israel was so great that God chose them. He chose them because He's so great! He set His love on them. He made a covenant promise to Abraham, and He will keep His word. God chose them because he loves them.

And the same is said for us.

Ephesians 1:4b-6

In love **5** he predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, **6** to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved.

Why has God chosen us? Why did He predestine us (or choose beforehand)? He did it in love. And He did it according to His will – that is, because he wanted to. God loves you and chose you – why?

To the praise of His glorious grace. He did it so that He would be magnified and exalted as glorious in his mercy and grace.

So brother and sister – take heart in this truth. God has set his love on you. He has decided to love you. And nothing can separate us from the love of God. He has chosen us according to His own will. He decided to do it and He is faithful to follow through.

That's God's mission – to save a people for His own possession to the praise of his name.

God is reconciling all things to Himself

So the question becomes, where is God's mission leading? What is the ultimate plan for history? How is God going to bring glory to His name through saving a people for Himself when the world is so messed up? How will He fix everything that is so broken?

Eph 1:9-10

[God is] making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ **10** as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.

God's will, which is He is working all things together to do, is to unite all things in Christ. Or we read it this way in Colossians 1.

Colossians 1:19-20

For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, **20** and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.

God is reconciling or reuniting all things in heaven and on earth. Because of our sin, this world is broken. Things are not the way they were supposed to be. But God's mission is to reconcile all things to Himself. That's where all of this is going. One day, this earth will pass away. And God will re-create a new heavens and a new earth where every tear will be wiped away and all things will be at peace and rest.

God will undo every injustice, He will judge all the wickedness and evil, and He will set all things right. God is all about reconciling all things to Himself. That's what God is doing, and again, He's doing it for His own glory.

What is the mission of our church?

So if God is about His own glory, then what has He called us to do? What is our purpose collectively as a church?

Jesus gives the church a particular commission or task with His last words on earth just before He ascended to the right hand of God. We find those words in

Matthew 28:18-20

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."

The main verb here is make disciples. That's the command. A disciple is someone who is learning from and following another. We are to be disciples of Jesus. We are to learn from Him and walk according to His example.

In these verses, we are told to make disciples by baptizing people. Those who trust in Jesus in their hearts show it by entering into the New Covenant community called the church through baptism.

And we are to teach people to obey all that Jesus commanded. So what are the things that Jesus has commanded for us to obey?

Well, there are a lot of things we can say to answer that question. In some sense, the whole NT is answering that question. So we've chosen to talk about this mission under three headings: Know God, Grow Together, and Serve Others.

Know God

First, we are to help people know God. For us that means two things – evangelism and worship. We are to share the good news of Jesus and His salvation with our families and friends and neighbors and co-workers and anyone who will listen. That's job one. We are to make disciples by preaching the gospel to a lost and dying world.

That's why we spend so much time and effort on things like the Fall Festival for our neighborhood and the Sports Camp that we did this past summer for the kids in our community.

We do these things to love and bless our neighbors, but ultimately, we hope to have an opportunity to share about Jesus and His great love for them. We want everyone to know Jesus as their personal Savior and Lord.

Helping people know God also happens as we gather week by week to worship Him together as a church. We spent several weeks this past year thinking about different aspects of our worship services – looking at reading the Word and singing the Word and preaching the Word and praying the Word and seeing the Word in the ordinances.

I'm so thankful for Pastor Alex and his leadership with our band and the tech team. They work hard to help us praise God together week after week. And they do a great job. We want to help people know God in worship.

Grow Together

We also want to help people grow together. We believe in what's sometimes called relational learning, that is, learning and talking and growing in groups where we are known and learn to know each other.

We want to learn from God's Word and encourage each other to grow in our walk with Jesus. We call our small groups 'grow groups' for that reason. They're not just social clubs or times to hang out with friends. We want to help each other grow. The Bible word for fellowship is *koinonia*— or 'sharing.' We want to share with each other and pray with each other and love each other around the Word of God. I hope that you're involved in a grow group here. You can find out when they meet online or talk to one of the pastors and we'll try to help get you connected.

We also offer equip classes. How many have been a part of an equip class over the last year? Joe Lyon, one of our deacons, heads up our equip classes, and he's done a fantastic job at getting those organized so that we can learn more about the Bible and the Christian life. They'll be starting again soon, and I hope you take advantage of them.

We have ministries aimed at different age groups and seasons of life – young adults in the Gathering and older saints in the Classic Seniors. We have a vibrant youth ministry, and we love serving families and kids.

You know, a lot of things that we do around here need work – but I can say that we're trying. And if you are desiring to grow in your walk with Jesus alongside other believers, then we're trying to help you do that.

Serve Others

The third part of our mission is to help people Serve Others. If you're a follower of Christ and you are participating in our worship services and have joined a grow group, that's great. But Jesus taught that following Him isn't just about learning and developing for ourselves. We are to serve others. We are to love God and love our neighbors.

The NT is clear that every person who is a follower of Christ has been gifted by the Spirit of God with a spiritual gift meant to help build up the body of Christ. You have a gift intended to encourage the brothers and sisters in Christ around you. Do you know what yours is?

The NT gives some sample lists with things like serving, exhorting, wisdom, faith, teaching, helping, administration, and giving. That's not all of them, but I think that's part of the point. These are the types of gifts that you have through the Spirit in order to serve others.

So are you using your spiritual gift? If you don't know what it may be exactly, then try something! Get busy serving. If you are interested in teaching, volunteer to help teach the Bible to kids. If you're inclined towards organizing events or leadership, look into getting involved in our missions team or the men's or women's ministries. If you have the ability to see what God is doing or could do – then use that faith to encourage others away from apathy and seek to inspire faith in them. Maybe you have the gift of giving, and you have the ability to invest finances into ministry that will build up God's church.

But we don't just serve each other. Remember God's mission is to bring glory to Himself by redeeming a people for His own possession – from every tribe, nation, and tongue. We want to be right in line with God's mission. So we want to do all that we can to get the gospel to the ends of the earth. We want to raise up and train and send out missionaries and pastors and church planters to the whole world.

Pastor Will Massaro, who served here for a few years, will be here next week to talk about their vision to plant a church in Ohio. That is so exciting!

Our missions team meets on the first Tuesday of each month. They do some really important things near the heart of our church. They do fun things like help plan our missions fundraisers and hear reports about what God is doing through our missionaries. And they also help us make decisions about how to invest the church's mission dollars. How do we best love the people in Haiti? How do we get the gospel to the unreached peoples of the world who have never heard the name of Jesus and don't have the Word of God in their own language? If you want to join the missions team, all you have to do is show up. Come on in the water's great!

This Tuesday we'll be spending the whole missions team meeting hearing from our sister Whitney about what God is doing in her life and in her ministry with the children in Bolivia. I guarantee you'll leave encouraged if you make the effort to be there.

Missions exists because God deserves to be glorified by every person on earth. We want our mission to be in line with God's mission. Jesus wants us to make disciples who make disciples of the whole world.

What does God want from you specifically?

So we've talk about what God is doing, and what our church is doing. So what about you? What does God want from you specifically?

How can you be a part of bringing glory to the name of God? Listen to what Jesus says...

John 15:8

By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples.

Jesus says, do you want to bring glory to God? Here's how you do it – bear much fruit and show that you're a disciple. Bear fruit as you follow Jesus. In other words, follow through with helping people know God, grow together, and serve others. That's how you will prove to be my disciple and so bring glory to the Father.

So what faith step do you need to take to bear more fruit in 2024?

How can you help someone in your life know God? Who can you commit to pray for and talk to about the gospel this year?

Maybe you need to commit to be more faithful in participating in worship with our church family? You may need to commit right now to being at church ready to worship God alongside your brothers and sisters every week unless the Lord's providence hinders you for some reason.

Maybe for you it's giving. If you've never given to God before, start somewhere. Maybe for you the next step is to be a regular giver or to increase your giving and invest more seeing the church's mission advance.

Maybe for you the step is growing in your faith. Try a few grow groups and see how you can be helped and help others follow Jesus. Or maybe you could sign up for an equip class and seek to learn more of God's Word or how to share your faith with others.

Maybe the step for you is serving. Are you using your spiritual gifts? Do you have the ability to serve with our kids or in the band or with the livestream team? Maybe you want to get involved with our missions team and serve that way?

So what's your next step?

I don't know what questions you're asking of yourself in your particular season in life.

If you're younger, you may be thinking "What do I want to do when I grow up?"

Or maybe you're in the middle of life and you're asking yourself – how do I flourish in life and not just try to survive when the kids are young or the finances are tight?

Or maybe you're thinking questions about what your contribution to the world might be? How can you serve your family or your community? Or maybe you're asking yourself questions about what it means to leave a legacy for the future? What will live on after you're gone?

I don't know where you are in particular today. I don't know what New Year's resolutions you are considering – about your health or your relationships or your finances. But I would tell you this – you should align your mission, your goals, with what God is doing in the world.

God is all about His glory. And here's the amazing, counter-intuitive truth – God has created us such that when we live for His glory, we are also living for our eternal joy. Working for the glory of God means working for our own happiness.

So may your 2024 be lived with God's glory in mind. May we spend ourselves working to make disciples as we help people know God, grow together, and serve others.

C.T. Studd's poem ends this way, and I'll close with these words...

Only one life, yes only one,
Now let me say, "Thy will be done";
And when at last I'll hear the call,
I know I'll say "twas worth it all";
Only one life, 'twill soon be past,
Only what's done for Christ will last. "

Let's pray...