

Unexplainable

January 2-3, 2021

1. Mission

Today we start a brand new 6-week series on the book of Acts titled, *Unexplainable*. The book of Acts is filled events that cannot be explained apart from the power of God. And 2021 can be a year in which we see God work in unexplainable ways in our lives... answered prayer, amazing “coincidences”, personal transformation, and more. If you have Bible or app, please turn to Acts 1.

Today’s message is a little different because here at the first of the year we’re going to look at where we’ve been and where we’re going as a church.

Did you ever go to the store for just one item and come home with a bunch of different things instead? I saw a meme that showed a guy with an alpaca on a leash saying, “An alpaca – I got the last one!” Or maybe you went online to look something up but ended up spending 20 minutes on totally unrelated websites. These things happen because we get distracted from our original purpose.

That sort of thing happens to organizations, too; it’s called “mission drift.” An organization starts with a clear purpose, but over time it strays from that purpose and becomes something else.

When Linda and I were college students we sponsored an Indonesian child through the Christian Children’s Fund. The organization was founded in 1938 by a Presbyterian minister, and it grew to become one of the largest charities in the country. But by the 1990’s a former board member said, “This organization has nothing to do with Christianity.” In 2009 it changed its name to ChildFund International. Mission drift.

Drift happens slowly; sometimes it’s not noticeable.

Harvard was founded in 1636 to help people know God through Jesus Christ. Its purpose was to equip ministers to share the Gospel. But it drifted from its mission. Today, Harvard is an incredible university, but it is not Christian. Every Harvard diploma still reads, “Truth for Christ and the Church” but it’s written in Latin so no one pays much attention.

Mission drift can also happen to churches and Christ-followers. Over time we can lose track of what God originally called us to do. That’s why it is good to remind ourselves of our mission regularly. Board members of the Crowell Trust prevent mission drift by taking time every year to pray and to read their founder’s vision out loud.

Today we’re going to do the same thing: we’re going to start the year by reading aloud the mission Jesus gave us, and recommit to living that out.

After Jesus rose from the dead, he gathered his followers and gave them their mission. We call this “The Great Commission”

Matthew 28:19-20 Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy

Spirit, ²⁰ and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely, I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”

Then, just before he ascended to heaven, Jesus gave them more specific instructions for their mission:

Acts 1:4-8: *On one occasion, while he was eating with them, he gave them this command: “Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. ⁵ For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.” ⁶ Then they gathered around him and asked him, “Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?” ⁷ He said to them: “It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. ⁸ But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”*

If we were passing by that gathering on the Mt. of Olives that day, we never would have imagined what that group of rural, working-class people would become. Those 120 residents of Roman-occupied Israel become a global movement that thrived in spite of persecution and changed the world. How did this happen?

It is unexplainable apart from the work of God. In human terms, it happened because Jesus gave them a mission and the power to pursue it.

Acts 1:8 *But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”*

The Church doesn't *HAVE* a mission, the Church *IS* a mission. Jesus told his followers to make disciples everywhere, and the way they'd do it was to be his witnesses, in Jerusalem, Judea Samaria, and the ends of the Earth. That is an ever-widening scope. The book of Acts is a record of how the church advanced into each of those regions. Reading it can help us avoid mission drift.

Crossroads Church began in 1991. We were centered on the Great Commission from day one. I had friends and family who were not followers of Jesus, and I thought, what kind of church would reach them? And that's how we designed our ministry. But the world has changed over the last 30 years; and the world is changing even more now during COVID-19. And since the world we are trying to reach has changed, it is time to refresh *how* we fulfill the Great Commission.

So, in October our senior leadership met for three days to pray and plan for the future together. I'd like to share with you just a bit of what we discerned. My hunch is that will sound like both a major change and no change at all. That's because our vision for the future is built on the same ministry foundations we've always had.

First let me highlight the foundations that aren't changing:

- Mission = to make disciples who make disciples. (Matthew 28)

- Vision focus = multiply disciples (5,000), groups (500), and churches everywhere (100) (Matthew 13:8; Mark 4:20)

Jesus taught that the multiplication is a trait of the Kingdom of God. We are clear on what we are multiplying: disciples, groups, and churches. We have set some numerical goals that help us measure our progress.

- Strategy = to equip and send everyone with love and power to make disciples where they live, work, and play. I end most worship services by saying, "We're done being the church in here, it's time to be the church out there. You are sent with love and power to go make disciples."
- Disciple = one who loves and obeys Jesus

None of those pieces are changing - they are foundations of our ministry. But in order to accomplish those things, we need to emphasize some new parts of our strategy. So, what is Changing: HOW we reach people - from a "Come" to a "Go" strategy.

Crossroads started with a "come" strategy. It went like this: we encouraged Christians to bring their unbelieving friends to worship, and we'd offer a relevant service with contemporary music, drama, and understandable language. The guest would hear the message and choose Christ. Then we'd disciple them, and encourage them to invite *their* friends, and that's the way we'd reach the area. And it worked! Thousands of unbelievers came to Jesus. The reason that strategy worked is that unbelievers were willing to come to church.

But that changed. Today, when I invite unbelievers to worship, fewer accept. People who are already Christians will still say yes, but unbelievers are less interested today – and that is who we are trying to reach. So, since most are not willing to come, that means we need to go. And that is just what Jesus told us to do!

In the Great Commission Jesus doesn't say, "All authority in heaven and earth has been given to me. Therefore, build a nice facility and invite people to come here." No, Jesus said, "Therefore **GO** and make disciples... in Judea, Samaria, and beyond."

Reading the book of Acts, I'm struck by how frequently the word "Go" appears. Most of the time God or an angel speaks, they tell someone to go. To reach our broken world today, we will go and make disciples where we live, work, play, and learn.

Of course, we'll still come to worship on weekends, it's just that we won't depend on the worship service to be the main way we bring unbelievers to Jesus. And that opens up great opportunities for us to see people come to faith in Jesus Monday through Saturday out in the community! That's exactly what happened in the early church.

Acts 2:47 *And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.*

Maybe I'm passionate about this because of how God changed my life. I came to Christ at a friend's house; I was first discipled in home Bible Studies; I was deeply shaped through doing life with other Christian housemates in college, and I answered

the call to be a pastor -- all before I was a member of an organized church. Of course, it was the church that disciplined and sent all the people who spiritually influenced me, and I became a local church pastor because I realized that's where the action is.

My point is that we *can* reach people where they live, work, play, and learn everyday – not just on Sundays. And that is only way we will reach a lot of people in our area.

One Crossroader I know asked a guy I'll call Jason if he wanted to read a Bible passage and talk about it. Jason was not a church-going kind of guy. He'd been in jail, but he was spiritually curious. So they've been meeting and now Jason is exploring following Jesus – but they're not doing that on a Sunday morning at a worship service.

Now, imagine 1,000 Crossroaders fanning out all across our region reaching out like that. It could change our area! To make that reality, we are re-emphasizing two biblical principles:

Fresh emphasis: Every member is a disciple-maker.

Jesus did not give the Great Commission just to the 12 apostles. He didn't mean it for just the early church. We are all called to be in the game. If you are already actively making disciples, you know how it changes your spiritual journey. If you are not yet, we want to equip and help you do so.

Home Depot has a slogan: "You can build it, we can help." When it comes to disciple-making, for a long time the Church has said, "We can build it, you can help." That is, you bring us the people and we'll lead them to Jesus and help them grow. To reach our area today we need to reverse that. We want you to know that, "You can make disciples, and we can help."

At its core, discipleship is a relationship. It is a friendship with Jesus at the center. Spiritual growth happens best when we share our lives enough to rub off on each other. That's why the 12 apostles lived and traveled with Jesus for 3 years. That's why the 120 were together in the Upper Room. That's why Crossroads is structured around relational groups.

And we also facilitate spiritual growth through the Equipping Track. The Equipping Track is a series of classes that combines with small group and a retreat to help each person grow as far as they sense God leading them.

We've retooled and added to our Equipping Track:

Expanded Equipping Track:

Following Jesus

Making Disciples (MD)1: "BLESS"

Making Disciples (MD)2: Group Leader Training

Movement Makers: Living Your Identity

Making Disciples (MD)3: Coaches' Training

Calling Lab: Identify Your Calling

The parts in purple are new in the last year. We still start with Following Jesus, which focuses on the basics of the faith.

Then we've redone Making Disciples 1 (MD1) so that it is all about how to naturally reach your circle of relationships through the "BLESS" process. If you haven't

taken MD1 in the last year, I strongly encourage you to sign up today. Those who want to be group leaders can go to MD2. And those who want to coach other group leaders are trained in MD3.

We've also added two new growth opportunities for those who have gone through MD1:

- Movement Makers, which is about living your identity.
- Calling Lab, which helps you identify you calling through your gifts, passions, and story.

For example, one Crossroader is working with a friend to turn a farm into a ministry venue, where people from all around can come for activities and friendship, and in the process, see people come to Christ. They have visions of seeing small fellowships developed there with people being baptized in the pond.

That's inspiring, but more people will make disciples as part of a "small group." Rather than developing their own outreach. So, an important part of the "Go" strategy is: Every small group have a Mission.

Every small group needs a mission beyond itself that reaches the community with the love of Jesus. Groups with a mission thrive – groups without one get stale.

Some groups already have a mission:

- One group I know contacted a Day Care to identify 5 families in need, and they are stepping up to meet those needs in the name of Jesus. They can build an on-going friendship that can lead to spiritual growth in everyone.
- Someone else started a group at work.

If your group could use some help finding a mission, we are now offering a Group Calling Lab. Leaders, just contact their coach to arrange it.

In Crossroads' early years we had a reputation for unique and creative worship experiences. Now imagine what it will be like to be known by other Christians for life-transforming discipleship... and to be known by the community as people who love unconditionally. That sounds a lot like Jesus!

We're at the beginning of a brand-new year but the old one might have worn us out. Some of us feel ground down by 2020. We may be hurting, and the idea of reaching out to someone else seems beyond our capacity. I understand that.

But here is what I know: when we reach out to others it renews us personally. If you are stressed or discouraged, find a way to help someone else – it will lift us. That's how God designed us! When we reach out, God's power flows through us. When we reach out, we are built up. So serving in Jesus' mission by Jesus' power will not wear us down, it will fulfill us.

Our world is hurting and divided. "The world at its worst needs the church at its best." Life will not always be like it is right now. COVID-19 will end. We are one day closer to the day we will throw away our masks and go to a family reunion. We will worship in a crowded room again. It's going to happen!

When life opens up again, let's be equipped and ready to let God work through us in new ways. Imagine what can happen when an equipped and prepared people meet a spiritually hungry world that is ready to respond to the Jesus.

Imagine over 1,000 spiritually thriving Crossroaders overflowing with the love of God where they live work and play. When we go to our family gatherings we'll go with a purpose. When we get together with friends and parties, we'll go with purpose.

At the start of 2021, let's ask ourselves, "What new step will I take to join Jesus in his mission?" Maybe it is to take MD1. Or maybe it's to join a small group. If you are part of a group and you'd like help in identifying a mission, let your coach know.

It is a new year, and God will do new things in us and through us, which means a happy new year.