

Christ Formed Lives on Mission

The Calling of the Church — Then and Now

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I. There Is Nothing New Under the Sun — The Unchanging Calling of the Church

A. The calling of the capital-C Church has not changed across generations or traditions

- Ecclesiastes 1:9 (NLT) — Nothing under the sun is truly new. “History merely repeats itself. It has all been done before.”

B. Most churches carry a variation of the same mission

- At Gate City Buckhead, we describe it simply: Christ-formed lives on mission

C. Every word carries weight

- Formed — not just informed, but transformed into the image of Christ

- On mission — formation propels us outward, from neighborhoods to nations

II. The Mission: From Neighborhoods to Nations

A. The Great Commission — the last commandment of Christ

“Jesus came to them and spoke, saying, ‘All authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth. 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, teaching them to observe all things that I commanded you. Behold, I am with you always, even to the end of the

age.’”

—Matthew 28:18–20 (WEB)

B. The expanding geography of witness

“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you. You will be witnesses to me in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the uttermost parts of the earth.”

—Acts 1:8 (WEB)

- “Uttermost” (Greek: eschatos) — the farthest in geographic distance and all of history
 - We get the word “eschatology” from this root
 - The commission is: go until the end, preaching the gospel

C. God’s mission moves outward — from the familiar to the farthest reaches of history

D. Key principle: mission without formation collapses under its own weight

III. Formation Before Fruitfulness

A. Abiding in Christ — the source of all fruitfulness

“Remain in me, and I in you. As the branch can’t bear fruit by itself unless it remains in the vine, so neither can you unless you remain in me. I am the vine. You are the branches. He who remains in me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for apart from me you can do nothing.”

—John 15:4–5 (WEB)

B. Beholding and becoming

“We can see and reflect the glory of the Lord. And the Lord — who is the Spirit — makes us more and more like him.”

—2 Corinthians 3:18 (NLT)

- We behold Him, and we therefore become like Him

C. The call to Christlike wholeness

But you are to be perfect, even as your Father in heaven is.

—Matthew 5:48 (NLT)

D. The fruit of the Spirit — evidence of walking with Him

1. Galatians 5:22-23 (WEB) — “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Against such things there is no law.”

E. Summary: we are conformed to the image of Christ as we walk with Him, and that formation propels us outward on mission

IV. The Goal of Discipleship: Conformity to Christ

A. The end goal of discipleship is not behavior management — it is transformation

God knew his people in advance, and he chose them to become like his Son.

—Romans 8:29 (NLT)

B. Personal illustration: a mentor’s pivotal question

- Context: struggling to disciple a young person ensnared in sinful patterns
- The mentor’s question: “Have you defined the outcome of your discipleship to be conformity to Christ?”
- If the goal isn’t Christ-likeness, we’re talking about life improvement, not transformation by the Spirit

C. True discipleship flows from Scripture, prayer, fellowship, and obedience — not human willpower alone

- It comes by beholding Christ in the Word
- By His Word abiding in our hearts

- From the place of meditation, prayer, and fellowship — we become like Him

D. Jesus is still discipling His disciples by His Spirit

- We are making disciples of Jesus Christ by His Spirit
- Our mission: to call people to be Christ-formed

“My little children, of whom I am again in travail until Christ is formed in you.”

—Galatians 4:19 (WEB)

1. The labor of discipleship is not behavioral compliance — it is Christ formed in us

V. This Is the Mission of Every Believer

A. The mission belongs to every follower of Jesus — not just pastors, missionaries, and ministry professionals

“You are the salt of the earth... You are the light of the world. A city located on a hill can’t be hidden... Let your light shine beforen people, so that they may see your good works and glorify your Father who is in heaven.”

—Matthew 5:13-16 (WEB)

“You must worship Christ as Lord of your life. And if someone asks about your hope as a believer, always be ready to explain it.”

—1 Peter 3:15 (NLT)

B. Every believer’s mission: make an impact in the world for the gospel

- Leading people to Jesus
- Praying for people
- Inviting them to church
- Discipling them
- Becoming more like Jesus ourselves

C. The call to self-examination

- How is my spiritual transformation serving as a bold witness?
- How am I a lamp set on a lampstand?
- How am I salt and light in my domain?

D. Challenge: step out of religion and into real determination — not just playing Christianity but being a Christian among the people around you

VI. The Question That Matters Most

A. We are not called to be fruit inspectors — the response is in their hands; we are called to be faithful witnesses

B. Scripture presses us toward posture, not merely results

“For though I was free from all, I brought myself under bondage to all, that I might gain the more. To the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might gain Jews... To the weak I became as weak, that I might gain the weak. I have become all things to all men, that I may by all means save some. Now I do this for the sake of the Good News, that I may be a joint partaker of it.”

—1 Corinthians 9:19-23 (WEB)

- Paul made himself uncomfortable — voluntarily inconvenienced, stretched, and spent — so that others could encounter Christ

C. The central accountability question: Am I willing to make myself uncomfortable so that someone who doesn't know Jesus can encounter Christ?

- Fasting
- Sharing your faith
- Giving an invitation
- Short-term missions trips

- Consistent outreach
- Talking to your neighbors

D. Personal illustration: the waitress and the books

- Remembered a waitress's prayer request for her mother (an immigrant afraid of ICE)
- Followed up, brought two books, shared with the waitress and the girl at the register
- Principle: always carry two — boldness with one often opens a door to another

E. Challenge: consider where you can be intentional, uncomfortable, and give up self-focus to share the gospel this week

VII. The Distinctives of This Spiritual Family

A. Introduction: different stages of sending required different things

- Jerusalem — preaching the crucified Christ (reproach to Jews, foolishness to Gentiles)
- Samaria — implicit ministry of racial reconciliation to the racially outcast
- Uttermost parts — the commission extends to the eschaton (farthest geography and all of history)

VIII. Distinctive #1: Night and Day Worship and Prayer

A. God has commissioned us to be gatekeepers in night-and-day worship and prayer

"Lift up your heads, you gates! Be lifted up, you everlasting doors, and the King of glory will come in. Who is the King of glory? The Lord strong and mighty, the Lord mighty in battle. Lift up your heads, you gates; yes, lift them up, you everlasting doors, and the King of glory

will come in. Who is this King of glory? The Lord of Armies is the King of glory.”

—Psalm 24:7-10 (WEB)

“I have set watchmen on your walls, Jerusalem. They will never be silent day nor night. You who call on the Lord, take no rest, and give him no rest, until he establishes, and until he makes Jerusalem a praise in the earth.”

—Isaiah 62:6-7 (WEB)

- We ascend into the presence of the Lord and open the gates for the King of Glory to come in
- This is one of the names of the Lord our God over the city of Atlanta — we are commissioned to carry this

IX. Distinctive #2: A Commitment to the Unreached

- We are called not only to reach the nations, but specifically the unreached peoples

“Yes, making it my aim to preach the Good News, not where Christ was already named, that I might not build on another’s foundation; but, as it is written, ‘They will see, to whom no news of him came. They who haven’t heard will understand. ’”

—Romans 15:20-21 (WEB)

“After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no man could count, from every nation and of all tribes, peoples, and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, dressed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands. They cried with a loud voice, saying, ‘Salvation be to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!’”

—Revelation 7:9-10 (WEB)|

B. Personal illustration: the hillside of Moyale, Africa

- Praying over the Gare people, reading Romans 12

- The Lord spoke: “I’ve called others more suited to this work than you. But go back. Plant a church in Atlanta. Build me a church that does not forget the unreached. “

C. The unreached: those living in gospel poverty

- No Bible in their heart language
- No church in their tribal culture
- No missionaries to share the gospel with them

D. Only one penny out of every dollar spent on missions goes to the hardest and darkest places

E. Our response: pray for them, uniquely give to them, build structures to support the sending of missionaries to those remaining places

X. Distinctive #3: Unity for Revival

A. 2 Chronicles 7:14 — the first message ever preached to our spiritual family

“If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves, pray, seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, will forgive their sin, and will heal their land.”

—2 Chronicles 7:14 (WEB)

B. We must be deeply committed to this process

- Walking in unity
- Practicing collective humility and repentance
- Believing God will pour out His Spirit on this land

C. Jesus’ prayer for unity

“I am praying not only for these disciples but also for all who will ever believe in me through their message. I pray that they will all be one, just as you and I are one — as you are in me, Father, and I am in you. And may they be

in us so that the world will believe you sent me.”

—John 17:21-23 (NLT)

XI. A Prophetic Warning and Invitation: Elisha and the Arrows

A. Context: 2 Kings 13:14-19 — the last prophecy Elisha shares before his death

- This is a generational transition: Elijah passed the mantle to Elisha, who carried a double portion, and now Elisha is delivering his final prophetic word before he dies
- The king comes to Elisha seeking a word from the Lord

B. Personal note: a family member gave me arrowheads as a gift on Valentine’s Day, and I felt it was prophetic — I went back and asked, “What am I drawn to regarding arrows?” And I was drawn to this story

C. The first action: the bow and arrow (vv. 15-17)

“Now Elisha had become sick with the illness from which he would die. Joash the king of Israel came down to him, and wept over his face, and said, ‘My father, my father, the chariots of Israel and its horsemen!’ Elisha said to him, ‘Take bow and arrows;’ and he took bow and arrows. He said to the king of Israel, ‘Put your hand on the bow;’ and he put his hand on it. Elisha laid his hands on the king’s hands. He said, ‘Open the window eastward;’ and he opened it. Then Elisha said, ‘Shoot!’ and he shot. He said, ‘The Lord’s arrow of victory, even the arrow of victory over Syria; for you will strike the Syrians in Aphek until you have consumed them.’”

—2 Kings 13:14-17 (WEB)

- Notice: Elisha puts his hands on the king’s hands — they do it together
- The prophet and the king hold the bow, draw the arrow, and fire it out the east window

- The picture of the arrow flying forth out the east window is of the deliverance of the Lord going forth on behalf of Israel
- A beautiful picture of ultimate victory — the prophetic and the apostolic joined together, firing the arrow of God's deliverance

D. The second action: striking the ground (vv. 18-19)

- Then Elisha says to the king, "Take the arrows in your hand"
- He commands the king to strike the ground — this is for the deliverance of Israel
- But notice the contrast: where the prophet had invited the king to join him in firing the bow, the king now fails to invite the prophet to join him in striking the ground
- The king strikes three times, and stops

"He said, 'Take the arrows;' and he took them. He said to the king of Israel, 'Strike the ground;' and he struck three times, and stopped. The man of God was angry with him, and said, 'You should have struck five or six times. Then you would have struck Syria until you had consumed it, but now you will strike Syria just three times.'"

—2 Kings 13:18-19 (WEB)

F. Three things the king could have done that would have led to total victory

- He could have inquired — he could have asked the prophet, "You're saying I'm striking for deliverance — how many times? What is at stake?" But he didn't ask. He was too proud to inquire.
- He could have invited — he could have said, "Prophet, strike with me, "just as the prophet had invited the king to join him with the bow. But he was too confident in his own strength to ask the prophet to join his hand.
- He could have struck with zeal — instead of rote, passive obedience, he could have struck the ground zealously, in faith-filled action. But his obedience was routine rather than

wholehearted.

G. These three absences — pride that would not inquire, self-reliance that would not partner, and passivity that lacked zeal — led to only a partial victory

H. Result: partial obedience produces partial victory

XII. The Interpreting Word

A. Zechariah 4:6 (WEB) — ‘Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit,’

B. Do not move forward in apostolic or kingly strength alone

- Had the king invited the prophet to join his hand — partnership
- Had he inquired for the word of the Lord — humility
- Had he done it in the fullness of zeal — wholehearted obedience
- There would have been entire victory for the nation

C. Zeal, humility, and dependence matter says the Lord of Armies

XIII. A Closing Commitment

A. At moments of reflection and recommitment, it is appropriate to constructively evaluate what has come before

- But don’t let constructive critique steal your zeal for what God would call you to do next

B. This requires a great openness of heart and mind

- Zealously participate with what God is doing presently
- Refuse to settle
- Be committed to the mandate that has come before
- Embrace whatever new thing God is doing

C. Psalm 20:7 (NLT) — “Some nations boast of their chariots and

horses, but we boast in the name of the Lord our God.”

D. Closing prayer

- Lord, not by power nor by might, but by Your Spirit
- Form us into the image of Christ
- Send us faithfully into the world
- Give us victory in the places of our unique calling
- Commission us in a fresh way to operate in the strength of the Lord
- In Jesus’ name. Amen.