

WE ARE CHURCH

VALUES AND OPPORTUNITIES

WE ARE CHURCH: Why Mission Matters

November 21, 2021

Ken Flower

Matthew 28:16-20

Good morning, church. Hey, my name is Ken. If I don't know you I'd love to meet you. I'm a part of our elder team here and get to serve as a part of our team on staff and very excited to be opening God's word with you this morning. We are in our last week in the series called We Are Church, which means believe it or not next week, we enter advent season, which is crazy. Very exciting though. I know Grace is excited about that. Really excited about that. And I'm so excited for today because today we wrap up the series and talk about the reality that God has given us as his people, a mission. He's given us a mission.

That's so gracious of him. He didn't have to include us in what he was doing in this world. And yet he did. So he's given us a mission. I'm excited for us to talk about this together this morning. Have you ever felt like you didn't have a purpose? You ever felt aimless or stuck? Maybe you're in the season right now where you just feel like you don't know what life is supposed to be about, or where you're supposed to be going, or what you're supposed to be doing. You're trying to figure out maybe what your calling is. And you may be able to answer the big picture question of like, here's why I'm here. And I can answer that, but frankly, I'm coming out of a season where I have felt in a lot of ways, aimless. I'm coming out of a season, myself, where I have felt in some ways like I'm not sure God, what do you have for me?

What is my purpose? I know that sounds like a lot of naval-gazing, but it's real, right? We feel that sometimes, like, God, what do you have for me? What am I supposed to be about? And if you feel aimless, if you feel stuck, if you feel like you don't know what your purpose is, it affects you in very real ways doesn't it? It affects how you feel about life. It affects your happiness. It affects how you think about the future. And the reason for that is because we were created as humans to need a purpose and to know clearly what that purpose is. To know our purpose or to have a mission is part of what it means to be human.

Now, some of you may be familiar with Abraham Maslow as a 19th century psychologist, pretty well known, who came up with this thing called The Hierarchy of Needs. And you'll see on the screen, this probably fairly well-known triangle. Probably seen this before. He actually didn't

create this triangle. Someone else did, but it really does capture really what he was talking about. And at the end of the day, what Maslow was trying to describe was that all humans, no matter where you live, no matter what culture, what time you live in, all humans have the same core basic needs, that we, as part of being human, we need these things. At the bottom of this triangle, you'll see this term physiological needs, right? We need food. We need water. Above that, safety needs, right? We need shelter. We need to know that we're safe. And these bottom level needs are basic survival.

By the way, my favorite version of this, which I saw when I was trying to like, find depictions of this, was right underneath physiological, it just said, "good wiFi." Right? And how true that is right now, isn't it? Like if we have good wiFi, we're good. We're set. So good wiFi, shelter, food, water, but that's not all we need as humans, right? The next level up, and these are not levels of importance, these are just describing where we start, right, you can get by for a while with only your physiological and safety needs being met, but that's not your only need. You have a need for belonging and love. You have a need for esteem, right? I combine these to talk about our emotional and our relational needs, that every single one of us needs to know that we belong and that we matter. And that we're loved. We need relationship. At the top of this pyramid then, or I guess I shouldn't call that a pyramid, this triangle is the need for what he calls self-actualization. Self-actualization.

Now a current modern-day psychologist, Scott Barry Kaufman describes Maslow's idea of self-actualization this way. Stick with me. I'm not trying to give a psychology lecture, but follow with me. He says self-actualization is becoming all that we could possibly become, the best aspects of yourself fully developed. He says, we have these potentialities within us that we feel deep inside would offer so much to the world around us. And self-actualization is then bringing these potential realities to as full of an expression as possible to serve those around us. Basically, Kaufman describes this idea as our need for purpose and transcendence. That we need to know that our life has meaning beyond ourselves. In his New York times article, which this is a great title, The Universe Doesn't Care About Your Purpose, Joseph Carter writes this, "purpose is a universal human need. We all need purpose without it we feel bereft of meaning and happiness".

And then he goes on to cite a recent study that correlates our need for purpose, with happiness. In other words, when we have purpose or meaning, then we're going to be happier and healthier. And he even says, there's studies that show that when we have purpose, it helps us overcome substance abuse and addiction. When we have purpose, it helps us heal from trauma and from tragedy. When we have purpose, it helps us achieve success. Purpose tangibly, like scientifically, has been shown to be a part of us being healthier and happier as humans.

What's really incredible about this article-I doubt anyone here would argue with what Carter's writing and what these studies show. We probably all intuitively understand this, but here's what's incredible about this article. Ultimately, Carter writes that the universe, and that's why he titles it, The Universe Doesn't Care About Your Purpose-that the universe doesn't answer our desire for purpose. There is no great designer. We're on this planet as a result of chance and our lives are not headed toward any ultimate goal or telos, only to the grave.

He concludes, "we create purposes to establish happy endings in a universe where endings are simply that- endings." In other words, Carter's point is there is no transcendent reason outside of ourselves, why we're here on this earth. So there really is no grand purpose for our life. But we're tangibly happier and healthier, scientifically, when we have a purpose, when we have a mission and a goal. So even though there is no transcendent purpose, we should find one anyway, because we'll be happier. That's incredible.

Mark Sayers, who is an author and pastor in Australia, we actually had him speak remotely in our Voices Series in 2020, he often writes that our world wants a kingdom without a king. In other words, we want the benefits of getting to be a part of God's kingdom, but we don't want the king who rules over it, right? We want our desire for purpose and meaning and transcendence to be met, but we don't want a king outside of ourselves telling us what our purpose actually is.

And here's the problem with this. Without someone outside of ourselves, giving us a mission, then what we're left with is individualized pursuits towards self-actualization. We're left with no reference point outside of ourselves telling us what kind of self we actually need to actualize. We just need to figure it out by ourselves. And our communities, our neighborhoods, the east side, this room is full of people who are seeking purpose, trying to figure out who they are and what life is about.

And what happens is we put so much weight on these pursuits, right? Because we were meant to, we were designed and created to need purpose and meaning, and mission. And so we put so much weight on these pursuits and they never ultimately can satisfy and fulfill. We put weight on this idea of my purpose is to raise well-educated kids who are kind and succeed in life. We put weight on this idea that my purpose is to provide a comfortable life for my family, or maybe my purpose is community service and civic engagement or political engagement. Or maybe my purpose is to pursue this passion or this hobby. Or my purpose is to find a career maybe, that feels like a calling.

None of those are bad things, but we look to those things to be ultimately what is our individual pursuit of self-actualization, of purpose, Of mission. And ultimately our kids don't succeed the way we hoped they would. Our careers end with retirement and life completely changes. Health forces us to change our hobbies and our passions. Elections are lost. And death comes to us all. In the end none of these things ultimately can give us the purpose and the transcendent mission that we're longing for. And we all know that. I know I'm not saying anything new in this moment, but let's just remember this. And here's the problem. We have a whole generation now, and I include myself in this of young men and young women. Yeah, I'm young. Turning 40 this year. Technically I'm a millennial like by a year. We have a whole generation though of young men and women with no vision of who they were created to become. Because they've been told their whole life that it's up to them to get to figure out who they want to be. And they're seeking purpose with no one to guide them.

And so why would we be surprised when so many are deconstructing their faith or walking away from the faith that maybe they grew up with. They've grown up in a world telling them that they need to find their individual purpose. And faith is just one option among many of the possibilities that they can build their life around. And so why are we surprised then when they

decide to build their life around another thing other than their faith. And here's the reality though, with deconstruction itself. I mean, we've been talking about this each week, but deconstruction can be helpful at times. It can be helpful to tear down things that maybe you weren't supposed to be a part of the building to begin with. But to do that, it requires actually understanding what the building is supposed to look like. Right? We have to have a blueprint outside of ourself that tells us here's what this is supposed to look like. So that when we tear something down, we can rebuild in the way that it was supposed to be. And deconstruction that has no blueprint outside of ourself that says here's what we were made for, and here's what our purpose is, and here's what is supposed to be about, without that blueprint, all we do then is we tear down and we tear down and we never rebuild and we're left even more aimless and purposeless than we began.

Here's the big question then for us this morning, what if we were created for a transcendent purpose? The reason we desire it, and need it, and long for purpose beyond ourselves is that- what if we were made for that? What if there's someone outside of ourselves that's given us a mission. And our need for self-actualization, for transcendence, for our life to matter, what if that need has been met? And here's the headline for this morning, that the mission of God that he has given us as his people, that he's graciously given us, his mission meets the deepest longings of our human hearts. It's not a burden.

His mission is not a burden. It's a gift. It meets the deepest longings of our hearts. And we believe, and this is the point that God has given us his church, a mission. And it's very clear and meets the longings of our hearts and it meets the needs of our neighbors. So my hope this morning is we'll be reminded of what this mission is and why it's so good for us. I want to talk this morning specifically about what is our mission and why does it matter? I'm going to start with the second question though. Why does our mission matter? And I want to answer that with just two ideas. Our mission matters because it's what we were made for. It's what we were made for. The second reason our mission matters is because it's the hope of our world. Our mission matters because it's what we were made for and it's the hope of our world.

As we talk about these two realities, then I hope that we will then be reminded of what our mission actually is. Now, first of all, our mission matters because it's what we were made for. Christopher Wright in his book, *The Mission of God*, and follow along, I think this will be on the screen, he says this, "It's not so much the case that God has a mission for his church in the world, as that God has a church for his mission in the world. Mission was not made for the church. The church was made for mission-God's mission."

Guys, this is what we were made for. We were created and designed to carry out the mission of God in the world. And until we live into that design or that purpose, we're not experiencing what it means to be fully human. From the beginning God created man and woman, Adam and Eve with a mission, right? He told them to fill the earth, to multiply and to fill the earth and subdue it. In other words, as his image bearers, that they would represent him to the entire world, and they would fill the world with his presence through having babies who have babies, who have babies, and as they go, they would fill the world with the presence of God. But instead, they rebelled. They wanted the kingdom without the king, right? And so, they rebelled. And instead of bringing his presence to the entire world, they were separated from his presence.

But God wasn't done. He then calls Abram out of Ur, who we know later is named Abraham. And to Abraham he says, I'm going to, through you, make a great nation. You and your like 99-year-old wife are going to have a son. And this son is going to become a great nation. I will bless this nation and through this nation, I will bless all the families of the earth, right? Genesis chapter 12, that God would take a people and that he would fill the world with his presence through this people, that they would be a light to the world around them. But like Adam and Eve, Israel, the nation that God promised, also failed in their mission. And instead of being a light to the nations and bringing God's presence to the world around them, instead, they became just like the nations, right? They didn't live faithful lives. And so, they too then, God separated his presence from them as his glory left the temple.

But God wasn't done. God then sends his own son Jesus as a light to the world, as the perfect image bearer, the image of the invisible God, the one that would bring God's presence perfectly to this earth and Jesus came and did what his people had failed to do.

And he brought God's reign to this earth and he brought God's presence to this world. And through his death, he atoned for the failure of God's people and covered their sin and their failure. And then he gave his people that were forgiven through his death, the spirit of God, to go with them, to empower them. And he sent them out with a mission now that they would go and bring God's presence to the world around them. And he would be with them his spirit would go with them and fill them.

And so, God creates his church, his people, and in John chapter 20 verses 21 to 22, Jesus, we hear him specifically talking about what he's calling them to, this mission. He says, peace, be with you. This is right before he's about to ascend and leave his disciples at the end of his ministry. He says, peace be with you. As the father has sent me, right? As the father has sent me to come and to bring his presence to this world and to rescue his people and gather a people, now I am also sending you. And when he said this, he breathed on them and he said, receive the Holy Spirit. And that's important, right? He doesn't just send us out to bring his presence to the world on our own. He gives us his Holy Spirit to fill us and go with us so that as we go filled with the Holy Spirit, filled with God himself, we bring his presence to our friends and our neighbors and our world.

In Matthew 28, Jesus, in a different setting is talking about the same thing. And he tells his disciples in verse 18, all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. In other words, I reign as king over this kingdom. I'm the king over this kingdom. And I give you now authority. He says, go therefore and make disciples of all the nations-gives them a clear mission. And how do we do this? He says, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I've commanded you.

And behold, what does he say again? I am with you always to the end of the age. Again, he creates a people. He has rescued a people. And he has called them to go and make disciples to help others experience the presence of God and to know God. And it would happen through them. And they're not going by themselves. He says, I'm with you. And he later tells them, wait in Jerusalem. Wait till I send my spirit to clothe you with power from on high to fill you so that you go out with my presence and bring my presence to the world around you.

And so now we have this thing called a church, a gathered people that have been rescued by Jesus, that have been forgiven for our failure, that have been called to a mission, that had been filled with the presence of God, so that we can bring his presence to our neighbors and to our world. And we can be a light to the nations, the way that God always intended us to be from Genesis Chapter One. We get to actually live into the mission for which we were created, church. This is what we were made for. This might sound utilitarian. You might feel like, man, so God's just using us to accomplish his mission. But this isn't utilitarian. This is love. God could have accomplished this mission without us, right? He didn't have to invite us into this. He didn't have to include us in this mission.

And yet he chose in his love a people that he would fill with his presence. And he would send out to bring his presence to the world. He included us because he loved us. So, the mission of God, church, it's what we were made for. You know, like something, if you've made something or designed it, is it really living its fullest life until it does what it was made to do? Cause when we talk about our mission, so many of us, I know we hear different things. Some of us are filled with guilt. Some of us with apathy, like I've heard this a million times before, I'm tired of hearing about this. Some of us filled with longing, but at the end of the day, this is good news. This is an invitation from God to be the humans that he created us to be, to live out the calling that he has for us as his people. So it's good news for us because this is what we were made for.

Now here's the second reason our mission matters. It's the hope of our world. This is the hope of our world today. Today talking about this mission is not about asking you to place a burden on your friends and your neighbors. That's not what this is about. This isn't that you have this Debbie Downer kind of stuff you just have to share with your neighbors because God told you to do it and I just got to share this with you. This isn't a burden that you're placing on your neighbors. This is what they long for and what they need more than anything else. This is what they need. They were created just like you as image bearers of God. And they need this more than anything else. And so don't forget friends that we have the good news.

We have good news. We don't need to make apologies for the gospel. We don't need to defend the gospel. This is what our friends long for. Now certainly this gospel can be a stumbling block and offensive and hard to hear. But at the end of the day, at the bottom of their hearts, this meets the deepest needs and longings of their heart. This is good news. Jesus didn't send us to make disciples as some kind of oppressive colonization plan for the Christian Church. That's not what our mission is. He sent us with good news. Remember Jesus says that he came to seek and to save the lost. He came to seek and save the lost, the aimless, the hopeless, those longing for life. Those that desire purpose and meaning.

In Luke Chapter Four, as Jesus stood up in the synagogue, you may remember this, he stood up and said, the spirit of the Lord is upon me because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives, recovery of sight to the blind, liberty, to those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor. This gospel is good news to those who have come to an end of themselves, to those who are impoverished in spirit, to those who have nothing left, to those who feel stuck in a downward spiral, to those who feel lost and in the dark, to the broken, the hurting, the lonely, the needy, the gospel is

good news. And I think for me, at least, so maybe for you as well, I don't see the gospel as news for my neighbor because I've stopped seeing the gospel as good news for me.

Now think about that. Maybe we don't see the gospel as good news for the people around us because we've stopped seeing it as good news for us. We've stopped seeing how needy we are. The more you come to see your own need for this good news the more you'll be convinced it's the good news that your neighbor needs.

Anyone ever tell you about their CrossFit routine? Sorry, Sarah, or how about their diet, their latest diet? I found myself doing that lately. I got roped into, in a good way, trying this new diet-Elimination Diet. And I found myself being the guy who's just telling people about it wherever I go. Why is that? Why do we feel compelled to just tell people about our workout routines and our diets? Well, I think part of it is this. When we've experienced something that actually is helping us and we feel better and we see others that then have a similar need, why would we not tell them about it. When we've experienced the transformative effect of something like a workout or a diet, and we feel healthier and happier, then when we see someone else in need, why would we not share that.

Yet I think for a lot of us, we've stopped seeing our need for the gospel and so we don't see the good news that we have to offer our neighbor. Friends, we were made for this mission. This isn't a burden. Guilt is a terrible motivator. No one leave today feeling like you need to go on mission because you have to be or because you'll feel guilty if you don't. That won't motivate you. That's not what God is inviting you into. He has something so much better for you. He's inviting you to be human the way he meant for you to be human from the very beginning, to get to carry his presence with you wherever you go. That's good news friends. It's good news.

So here's the opportunity for us. And we'll close with this. Bring your transformed presence into every sphere of your life. Here's what this looks like. Bring your transformed presence into every sphere of your life, and then be ready to give an answer for the hope that's in you. How do we get to live out this mission then of bringing God's presence to the world around us and make disciples through that? We do it through bringing our own transformed presence into every area of our life. And as we do that, we do it ready to then give an answer for the hope that's in us. The primary way that the world will experience the presence of God through you is not your proofs or your presentations, but through your transformative presence. It's not going to be through your proofs, as airtight as they are. It's not going to be through your presentations, as good as they are. It's going to be through your transformed presence.

I had a friend this past week sharing with a few of us that he had gotten last week to actually have an amazing conversation about the good news of Jesus with one of his neighbors. But you know what led up to that conversation? Three years of him bringing his transformed presence into that neighbor's life. Three years of him showing up and just caring about the guy.

The conversations that Beth and I've gotten to have around the gospel and talking about how Jesus has changed our lives, those conversations have happened primarily in our kitchen and around our table with people that we have been investing in for years, people that we've loved and cared about for years, that we've built relationship with. And when their lives went sideways and they experienced marital issues, or they experienced health issues in their family or huge life changes, they came to us wanting to know more about our lives and what was

different about us. And it's not like we had it all together. But as we were being transformed by God and bringing our full selves, our transformed selves into those relationships, God was using those opportunities to open up conversations.

And so here's the one thing I just want to ask us to do as a church, as we go out, right? This isn't like go into every conversation trying to see how can you fit a gospel conversation into that conversation? Honestly, I don't think that's helpful. Instead, I think go into every relationship that you have saying, I want to bring my full self into that relationship. I want to bring my transformed self with God working in me and threw me into that relationship. And so as you go to work, you're not trying to sneak gospel presentations into your work presentations, right? You shouldn't do that. Like, that's a bad idea. But instead you're loving the people that you're with. You're listening to them. You're hearing about their life. Maybe you're still remote but you're hearing about their life in the small talk that happens before the real meeting starts. And you see a need and maybe you see that they're feeling discouraged and so you just send them a gift card for coffee and say, hey man, I care about you. Small things like that, that you're caring for them. You're bringing your full self into those relationships. And as you do this, God will provide opportunity after opportunity for you to be able to actually speak the good news of Jesus to these friends. But bring your transformed presence into these relationships.

The clear thing though, is it does require our transformation. If we don't have the spirit of God dwelling in us and changing us, then we have nothing to offer our neighbors. It Does require our transformation and that's the work that God is doing in and through us today.

Now real practically, just a few things and then we'll close. Hospitality is going to be key to this. Hospitality is the tip of the spear of how we live out mission. If we don't engage in real hospitality with our neighbors, then they will not listen to us. Rosaria Butterfield in her book *The Gospel Comes with a House Key* says, "Practicing radically ordinary hospitality is your street credibility with your post-Christian neighbors. In post-Christian communities your words can only be as strong as your relationships. Your best weapon then is an open door, a set table, a fresh pot of coffee and a box of Kleenex for the tears that spill." We don't have time to break this out more, but just to encourage you, hospitality will be key to how you bring your transformed presence into the lives of the people you work with, and live with, and play with.

But you're going to have to open up your homes and your tables to do that. There's a whole guide on our app and on the website where you can dig into that more. The second thing I want to leave you with is this. It's not about adding more. And I just want to encourage you. You're probably already doing this. You're probably already doing this. This is what we're called to and you're probably already doing this, bringing your full self, your transformed self into these relationships and caring about these people the way God cares about them. And so it's not about adding more. It's about identifying where are the places God has already put you, right? What's the job he's put you in? What's the neighborhood and the neighbors that he's put around you? What is the school that he's placed you in?

And then who are the people that God has put in your life right now? And how do you bring your presence into those relationships? How do you as you are being changed by the spirit of God bring your full self into those relationships to help them experience the presence of God in their life, through your presence. Church, our mission matters. This is what we were made for.

This is what we were created for. This is what we've been called to. It's not a burden. This is an opportunity for us to get to live out the calling that God has designed for us since the beginning. And we get to do that together. We don't have to do it alone. And as Doxa church leans into this and we embrace this and we see this as God's invitation for us and we live this out, we will along with many other churches on the Eastside, be a bright light to a hurting and lonely and needy world because our need has been met through Jesus Christ.

So let's do this, guys. Let's do this. Wherever we go, let's do this. And let's commit that we will go together and achieve this mission because it is an amazing invitation that God has for us this morning. Amen? All right, let me pray for us. And then we'll continue on in our time.

Father, I am so thankful for your grace to us. Lord, you did not have to include us in your mission. You could have done this without us and yet you and your love chose to include us and to give us a purpose. And Lord, I pray that you'd help us to embrace that as good news. It's good news for us. It's not a burden for this is good news. This is an invitation that you have for us. And I pray that you would help us to bring your presence to the world around us, through our lives, through how we care for people, through how we listen, through how we show up, through how we speak. And I pray that as we do that, that you will open up opportunities for the good news of Jesus to go out with boldness and with courage from people that have seen our lives change through that same good news.

Thank you, Father, for this opportunity. In your son's name, Amen.