

Kingdom Outpost: What is Our Purpose?

I'm no handy man. I have very little ability and knowledge of how to work on household projects in such a way as to fix things. Normally when I work on a household project things take a long time, end up looking worse than they did before and costing more than they should have. One of the reasons for this is that I very often am not aware of what tools I should use in a given situation. Let me give you an example of this.

When we were in the process of selling our house in Virginia to move here I had to replace some rotting boards on our back deck. Now, there were only a few rotten boards so I didn't want to pull the whole deck up and I tried all morning and into the afternoon to get these boards up but it was so difficult. Part way through the afternoon one of my friends and I were texting and he suggested I get a tool called a sawzall. I won't bore you with the details, but it was exactly the tool I needed. It's as if it was designed for the very work I was doing.

One of the things about working around the house or on your car is that if you have the right tool and you know the purpose of the tool, what it was designed to do, it makes the job much easier. A hammer has been designed for certain tasks and if you try to pull up weeds using a hammer you will end up frustrated.

We have this institution of the church and we need to wrestle with the question, what is its purpose? What was the church designed by God to do? If you wrongly answer this question or don't even think about the answer to this question we will end up using the church for a purpose at odds with God's design.

Last week we began our series on the church and we asked the question, what are we? We answered that we are a kingdom outpost, a little preview of the coming kingdom planted in this world. Today we want to ask the question, what is our purpose? Why has God placed these kingdom outposts all over the world? What is our goal? What sort of tool are we and what sort of work are we to do?

So today we are going to study **4 components of the church's purpose that motivate us to participation.**

1. Charge

Obviously keep in mind that our series is called Kingdom Outpost, based on the understanding of the church we discussed last week. If we are an outpost, then we have been placed in this world for a reason. And within the larger purpose of the church we have a mission or a charge to accomplish. Why do we have a mission?

Our mission or task to do is given to us because of the authority of our King, Jesus Christ. He has the right or authority to give us a mission to accomplish. He is the head of the church. And this position as king or head makes sense to us because of the entire concept of the kingdom in the ministry of Jesus and the understanding of the church as a kingdom outpost. Jesus comes into the world with authority and he solidifies that authority when he conquers sin on the cross and death by rising from the dead. Remember what he says in Matthew 28:18. All authority has been given to him. He is the victorious king. Listen again to Philippians 2:9-11.

So, Jesus has the authority, but we don't yet see that authority realized in his full kingdom throughout the world. So, he exercises his authority in his people, his kingdom followers who gather in assemblies called kingdom outposts. Christ's authority over the church flows from his authority over the world. Listen to a couple of passages. Ephesians 1:22-23; Colossians 1:15-18.

He is the head of the church and so he sends his people out into the world with a mission. What is that mission? Listen to the full Great Commission in Matthew 28:18-20. If you weren't here you can go back and listen to the very 1st message I did here at WBC from March on this very text. But, the heart of our mission, what separates us from every other institution on earth is that we are to be all about making fully formed disciples of Jesus Christ. And that leads us to our 2nd component of our purpose, the content of our charge. We have overarching mission and we need to know the content of what it means to be a disciple or follower of Jesus.

2. Content

When you read the words of the Great Commission, do you ever wonder why making disciples is so key? Why is this the way Jesus chose to advance his kingdom? To grasp that we need to understand a little bit about God's original plans for mankind and the true nature what it means to be a follower of Jesus.

God's overall plan for his creation is for man to rule and reign over it as image-bearers, reflecting his rule and likeness. Of course, this reign was broken and the image was shattered at the fall in Genesis 3. But Christ comes to earth to reinstitute that reign in Himself, a man, and to gather a group of people who will reign with him.

His kingdom has arrived and he calls men and women into that kingdom for the purpose of remaking them into the imager of their creator so they are prepared to rule and reign with Him over the earth. (Rev. 5:9-10)

So, entering into this discipleship process is being given new life, becoming a new creation, and entering this new life as a citizen of the kingdom. But it's also a growth process of becoming the type of person who is fit to reign with Christ. It's following Jesus to the point where my character reflects Him. In other words, it's a turning from self-authority to humbly submitting to God's authority by obeying his word and imitating Jesus as the true, fully formed, ideal human being. What does this imitation look like? Listen to Mark 8:34-35. I imitate the disposition and character of Jesus. This is what it means to be a follower of Jesus.

"The call to discipleship is thus a call to reliance on Jesus for restoration of life with God rather than on autonomous human effort." - Hans Bayer

So, this is the content of our charge. We are to make disciples or followers, and this is what a disciple looks like; an imitator of Jesus who humbly submits to Christ's words and copies his life. This brings us to our next component of our purpose, the course of how we accomplish this mission.

3. Course

As we talk about the course of discipleship and what it means for the church to make disciples we need to be careful about how we talk about the commands of Scripture. Commands are not bad and sometimes people think that calling on believers to obey commands is legalistic. But simply checking a box of "not murdering" and "not stealing" does not mean you are a fully formed disciple of Jesus Christ. God's goal in giving us commands is not just so we can avoid violating them. The commands help to train us to become whole human beings and full formed disciples.

When we think about our mission of making disciples I want to use two sort of old-school words to describe this process in our lives and in what our goals as a church should be. The words are virtue and character. A virtue is a quality that becomes a part of who I am over time and through right practices and right thinking. So, the virtue of patience is not something I get by knowing I need patience or even wanting patience. I acquire the virtue of patience by repeatedly being patience in the circumstances of life until patience becomes second nature to me. And patience is not just obeying a list of commands or simply the avoidance of law-breaking. It's a disposition and a quality that guides me in the plethora of circumstances I will face in life.

Now, the combination of the various virtues, or vices that you possess makes up the sum total of your character. Your character is your natural self. It's what comes out of you no matter where you are cut open.

Maybe you are sitting there wondering, why is he using all these old words like virtue, vice, and character? Because, the goal of our discipleship is not just to create people who check a box of a list of rules. Our goal is to become new people who have different loves, affections, desires, and virtues. Discipleship is a slow process of putting on these character qualities. And this way of talking about discipleship is exactly how the New Testament talks about it. It talks about acquiring qualities of heart and life that form you into a new person.

And what sort of person are you and I becoming in this process? And what is the ultimate goal the church should have for every member? Listen to Colossians 3:9-11. So, how do we become little Christs? How do we follow him to become like him? Look at verses 12-14. These are character qualities. This is how one author put it.

"Jesus does not only teach a defined 'curriculum,' but intends to reshape their thinking and heart-attitude toward themselves and God, thus affecting every aspect of their lives. Jesus pursues nothing less than the complete reshaping of the disciples in mind and heart." - Hans Bayer

We are becoming like Christ and being reshaped and remade into citizens of the kingdom. We are already citizens of the kingdom now, but we are also becoming who we already are.

So, a disciple is someone being formed into the image of Jesus to look like a citizen of the kingdom. How do we make this happen as a kingdom outpost? One author has said that we are ambassadors and apprentices. Here's what he means:

"Disciples represent their king by bringing terms of surrender to rebels and the good news of victory to God's people." – Jason Hood

This is what Jesus means by Go in the Great Commission. This is why in Acts 1 we are to spread out over the earth and bear witness to our King and his kingdom. Not only are we ambassadors, but we are also apprentices. The same author said this:

"As apprentices, disciples follow an expert and absorb their master's mindset and practices until they become capable on their own." – Jason Hood

This is exactly what we mean by the course. We apprentice ourselves to Jesus so we can be ambassadors for Him.

Let me show you quickly how we plan to accomplish this mission at WBC. Some of you were at the communication meeting in September and some of you were unable to be there. But I announced a re-working of our mission statement to try to highlight the importance of this mission, making disciples. We wanted to clarify our goals and give some very practical guidelines for the direction of our discipleship. So, the elders worked on this over a period of several months and here is what we have:

Woodhaven Bible Church exists to make followers of Christ who worship God, connect with one another, and serve the church and the world.

We are here to make disciples and we believe every disciple is formed in the local church by participating in these three things, worshiping, connecting, and serving.

So, our mission has taken up the first 3 components of our 4. Keep in mind we are trying to uncover biblically what our purpose as the church is. When we pursue this mission, according to the content of what it means to be a disciple and by the course of imitating Jesus, we will make disciples who ultimately fulfill the purpose of the church, which is the crux of the matter.

4. Crux

Discipleship is our mission and we must understand it and pursue it in the right way, and when this happens it will lead to God receiving the honor and glory he so rightly deserves as the head and king over the church. Listen to these words from Ephesians 3:7-13.

Notice how Paul ends this section in verse 13 with a very practical encouragement to not lose heart. His practical encouragement comes from knowing the big picture and overall purpose for the church. We are brought to salvation and placed in this body for the purpose of showing off the wisdom of God.

So, let's finish this morning by asking this question: are you personally involved in this mission of discipleship, which culminates in the glorification of God? Are you currently involved in a relationship with one or more other Christians where you are helping them to become more like Jesus Christ? Are you involved with another person who is helping you to be more like Jesus? To develop virtue and character that makes you fit to be a citizen of the kingdom?

Let's keep this purpose front and center in our thinking and in every aspect of ministry that we do here at WBC. And when we do this, God will be glorified.