

A Church on Mission

John 20:21-22; Matthew 28:18-20; Acts 1:8

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April 26-27, 2025

It's common for businesses, ministries, and churches to develop mission statements. I'm going to share a few of them, and if you know what company they represent, stand and shout it out (if you read this manuscript ahead of time, you can't play the game). We'll also informally assess how they're doing at accomplishing their mission.

- “We genuinely care, so every guest leaves happy.” (Culver's)
- “To organize the world's information and make it universally accessible and useful.” (Google)
- “To offer a wide range of well-designed, functional home furnishing products at prices so low that as many people as possible will be able to afford them.” (IKEA)
- “To be earth's most customer-centric company, where customers can find and discover anything they might want to buy online.” (Amazon)
- “To refresh the world and make a difference.” (Coca-Cola)
- “Providing customers with an enjoyable experience and delicious food.” (McDonalds)
- “We aim to do some things in a generally acceptable manner, striving to meet basic expectations while maintaining a presence in our industry. We believe in doing work that is fine, most of the time, and maybe making a difference eventually, if convenient.” (ChatGPT)

One person had this to say about his company's mission statement: *“I have no idea what our mission statement is, and at this point I'm too afraid to ask.”* Some are skeptical about the value of a mission statement, like the guy who said, *“I find the entire concept of mission statements to be one of those wonderful and pointless expenditures of time that organizations yearn to waste.”*

Last fall, Gerad Hall coached the pastoral staff and deacons through a process of discovery and definition related to our values and our mission. Here's how the Lord led us: *Living on mission by glorifying God and making disciples of Jesus among our neighbors and the nations.*

Our mission comes out of the commissions given to us by Jesus in three passages of Scripture. I appreciate what one church leader said, *“A proper theological diet needs a healthy portion of missiology, and perhaps the best way to do so is by examining the commissions of Jesus.”*

Let’s begin by turning to John 20.

1. We are sent to live on mission. On the same day Jesus rose from the dead, He appeared to His frightened followers while they were cowering in a locked room. He offered them proof that He was alive, and He gave them peace so they would live out His purpose for their lives. In verse 21, Jesus gave them confirmation *and* a commission: ***“Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you.”***

Jesus entrusted His disciples to go with the gospel. I’ll never forget when my dad tossed me the keys to his truck for the first time. It was his way of saying, *“Son, I trust you. Take the truck and go where you need to go.”* Incidentally, I had to give those same keys back a short time later when I lost my license because of a couple speeding tickets.

Jesus gave us His peace so we will be about His purposes. We are saved so we can be sent out. The word **“sent”** means to *“be dispatched”* and the word **“mission”** comes from a Latin word meaning, *“to send.”* The disciples were given a message that could not be kept behind closed doors. Likewise, we can’t get too comfortable within the walls of this building or our own homes. The gospel must go out, not stay within. Someone put it this way: *“Christianity doesn’t simply put out its sign and say ‘come.’ Christianity puts on its shoes and goes.”*

The first use of the word **“peace”** in verse 19 was given to quiet their hearts. The second **“peace”** was given to prepare them for a fresh statement of their purpose as initially given in John 17:18: ***“As you sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world.”*** Faced with God’s global glory, we should be like Isaiah and respond by saying, ***“Here I am. Send me.”*** (Isaiah 6:8)

Jesus not only commissions us, but also gives us the Holy Spirit as a companion so we can embody His presence and do the job He has for us to do in verse 22: ***“And when He had said this, He breathed on them and said to them, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit.’”*** We have an assignment and we’ve been empowered to accomplish it.

Brothers and sisters, we've been sent. *Let's live on mission by glorifying God and making disciples of Jesus among our neighbors and the nations.*

2. We are sent to make disciples of all nations. Turn now to Matthew 28:18-20, which is known as the Great Commission: ***“And Jesus came and said to them, ‘All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 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 that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.’”***

Three main words propel us to participate in His mission.

- **Authority.** We see this in verse 18: ***“And Jesus came and said to them, ‘All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.’”*** The word **“all”** refers to **“totality”** and **“authority”** speaks of omnipotence. Jesus has the right and the might to do whatever He decides to do, and to tell us whatever He wants us to do.
- **Assignment.** Once we've submitted to His authority, we're ready to receive His assignment as found in verses 19-20a: ***“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 that I have commanded you.”*** Jesus is not giving a suggestion, but rather a command, though for many of us, we could call it the “Great Omission.” Let's unpack this passage phrase-by-phrase.

“Go...” This participle literally means, *“to go from one place to another”* or *“in your going.”* In other words, we are to make disciples in the natural course of our lives, wherever we go. To go is a given – as we go, and we will go, this is what we must go and sow. It's not accident the first two letters of “Gospel” are “G-O.”

Because God is a going God, going means crossing boundaries – going across the street to connect with a neighbor, going to have dinner with an unbeliever, going to the west end, going beyond one's comfort zone, and going cross-culturally to another country.

“Make disciples...” A disciple is literally a *“learner,”* one who is being mentored by the Master. It also denotes *“one who follows another's teaching.”* Thus, a disciple is a life-long learner who lives out what he or

she is learning from the teacher. *A disciple loves Jesus, learns from Him, lives out what he learns, and leaves a legacy to others.* Here's the definition Pastor Kyle and Pastor Tim came up with: *A disciple is a believer who lovingly follows Jesus and intentionally helps others follow Him.*

Our commission is more than just evangelism – we must make disciples by equipping, edifying and enfolding new converts into reproducing churches. There is one main verb, one main command in this passage and that is to ***“make disciples.”*** We are to go so we make disciples. If you'd like to learn more about our Intentional Discipleship ministry, go to our Facebook page or YouTube channel and watch our recent 4G podcast featuring Angie Juenger and Julie Klauer.

“Of all nations...” The task of making disciples must extend to the ends of the earth. The word ***“nations”*** is the Greek word *ethne*, where we get the word ethnic and refers to “people groups,” not just countries. Our task is not just to make disciples in the 195 countries of the world; but to go to over *17,000* distinct people groups scattered across the continents! As we've been learning, 7,000 of these groups are still unreached. We're to make disciples of everyone, everywhere, at all times, especially among those who have not yet heard the gospel. We want to see every nation, tribe, people, and language worship Jesus as Lord and Savior.

This requires dedicated disciples who will go and others who will stand behind them who will give. *We need those who will stay and pray so sent ones can go and sow.*

“Baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.” Baptism is a sign of separation from the world and identification with the triune God, where we pledge allegiance to the Almighty. It's an outward expression of an inner confession. Our next time for baptism will be May 17-18.

“Teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.” We are not interested in just filling heads; we want filled up hearts and faithful hands and feet that obey. We're to teach people to ***“observe”*** all that Jesus has commanded. *Now that we know, we must grow and go so we can make Him known to those who don't yet know.*

- **Assurance.** Since this task is overwhelming, Jesus promised His presence in the last part of verse 20: “...and behold, *I am with you always to the end of the age.*” While Jesus gave what seemed like an impossible assignment, He did so with His authority and with His faithful assurance. We can count on the presence of Jesus throughout the entire discipleship process.

Because we have His assurance to be with us, we can complete His authoritative assignment to go and make disciples. In that sense, we don’t go *for* Him, we go *with* Him, and He goes *with* us.

This entire commission is bookended with Jesus’ explosive power (“all authority”) and His eternal presence (“I’ll be with you”). Jesus will be present with His people, wherever they go, no matter how far they go, to the ends of the earth, to the very end of the age.

Every time you go with the gospel, every time you strive to live out the Great Commission, every time you have that awkward spiritual conversation, every time you seek to disciple someone, Jesus is there with you, and He’ll be with you until the end of the age. You can count on the promise of His presence! *We are never closer to Jesus than when we’re doing what He commanded us to do.*

In summary, the Master’s mission statement comes with three challenges:

- “*Be convinced of my full authority.*”
- “*Be committed to follow my assignment.*”
- “*Be comforted by my faithful assurance.*”

John 20 tells us we are sent to live on mission and Matthew 28 tells us we are sent to make disciples of all nations.

Let’s live on mission by glorifying God and making disciples of Jesus among our neighbors and the nations.

Let’s look at one more passage.

3. We are sent by the Holy Spirit to our neighbors and the nations. Turn now to Acts 1:8: “*But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.*”

The word “**but**” is a term of contrast suggesting a “*change of direction.*” In context, the disciples wanted insight into the second coming, but Jesus wanted to reinforce their commission. The word “**you**” shows *who* He will use as this is a personal command for every follower of Christ. J. Vernon McGee says, “*It’s our business to get the Word of God out to the world.*”

Jesus not only told them they were the people He wanted to use; He also informed them *how* they would be able to do it in the second part of verse 8: “**...you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you...**” The promised Holy Spirit gave them everything they needed to do all they were called to do. Don’t miss how important this is. Without the power of the Holy Spirit, we are powerless and without His help, we are helpless.

Acts 1:8 represents the passing of the baton between the Son and the Spirit regarding the divine mission. After Jesus left physically, the Holy Spirit now dwells within believers who are commissioned to be His witnesses. The book of Acts is the story of what Jesus Christ is continuing to do on earth through His Spirit working in and through His church.

In the next part of verse 8, we see *what* the disciples are called to be: “**...and you will be my witnesses...**” This is both a command and a commission. A witness is one who has seen and heard and experienced the explosive life-changing power of Christ in their life. Our job is not to be prosecutors or even defense attorneys – our work is simply to be witnesses who report what we have experienced and know to be true.

In the last part of verse 8, Jesus makes it clear *where* He wants His witnesses to witness: “**...in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth.**” While He wanted the disciples to wait in Jerusalem for the power of the Holy Spirit and then to be His witnesses there, Jesus never intended for the gospel message to stop there.

In a similar way, we’re to start in our neighborhoods and then scatter to the nations. It’s not an either/or but a both/and because we’re responsible to reach all four spheres – our Jerusalem, our Judea, our Samaria *and* the ends of the earth.

- **Jerusalem.** This was the Jewish capital and was where the gospel was to penetrate first. The first followers of Jesus did such a great job their enemies said this about them in Acts 5:28: “**... you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching...**”

- **Judea.** Since most of the Israelites who returned from the exile were from the tribe of Judah, they were called Jews and their land was known as Judea. In New Testament times, Judea made up the southern portion of Israel.
- **Samaria.** This area to the north of Jerusalem was where the hated half-breed Samaritans lived. On an earlier mission described in Matthew 10:5, the disciples had been commanded to avoid Samaria but now it is included in the missionary mandate. I'm reminded we're to take the gospel to people we don't like. Evangelism must always include our enemies. Who might that be in our world today? Muslims? People from the opposite political party we're in? People from different races? Refugees and immigrants? Chicago Bears fans?
- **End of the earth.** The word "*end*" means, "*remote or extreme.*" We're to cross all regional, cultural, linguistic and geographical barriers to share the gospel of grace as witnesses to the whole world, especially to the unreached and the least reached. Sadly, over three BILLION people live in areas with little or no access to the gospel. From Genesis to Revelation, God's plan has always been global. In Genesis 12:3, God told Abraham, "*In you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.*" BTW, the Deacon Board just sent \$5,000 to Arnold Belasco, our missionary in Spain. This will go toward the completion of Phase 2 of their church building project, in honor of his wife Leslie, who died suddenly a couple months ago.

It's helpful to apply Acts 1:8 this way:

Jerusalem	Our <i>community</i>
Judea	Our <i>counties</i>
Samaria	Our <i>country</i>
Ends of the earth	The <i>continents</i>

We start with our neighbors and then we spread out to the nations. Speaking of our community, are you aware that Rock Island, Moline, and Davenport come in at #15 on Barna's "Most Post-Christian Cities" in the U.S.? Sadly, we are 52% post-Christian. That means if the metro QCA has a population of about 400,000, approximately 200,000 are lost.

I had lunch with a pastor friend this week and he shared with me some research he and his staff recently conducted: "*To move our hearts and give us a sense of*

urgency, we need to understand and keep in front of us that in the QCA every year 5,242 people die, which using the 52% post-Christian data as a baseline that would be 2,726 people in the QCA every year. On average, seven people per day die and head to a Christ-less eternity.”

That’s why we’re committed to reaching our community with the gospel. BTW, 543 people attended our two Good Friday services while 1,323 gathered with us for one of our four “Awe of Easter” services. Many of you invited family and friends to join you. I’ve followed up with several people who indicated they were saved, or they surrendered to Christ in a fresh way.

The Spirit is moving, isn’t He? On Tuesday of this week, I shared the following in a devotional on Moody Radio.

- Our Edge student ministry is exploding with growth. That’s why they’re moving to Thursday nights. It was cool to hear so many of them cheering during Awana Awards Night on Wednesday. They stood several times and clapped loudly to show their support for those who completed their books. BTW, next weekend is Youth Weekend. Pastor Chris will be preaching a message called, “Students on Mission.”
- Fellowship of Christian Athletes is growing and expanding in our community. BTW, the Moline FCA served dinner at CR Friday night!
- Our Mainspring ministry is growing in devotion and discipleship. Gen Z is hungry for truth, seeking an anchor to put their hope in, and ready to give their lives to the only One who can set them free. I call them the “Jesus Generation.”
- According to a recent Barna Group report, weekly church attendance among Millennials jumped from 21% in 2019 to 39% in 2022, a near doubling. This even surpasses Baby Boomers (25% in 2022). Young men are especially taking their faith seriously.
- Over 22% more Bibles were sold last year than in the year before! This means about 2.8 million more Bibles were sold in 2024 than in 2023. Researchers have discovered that this was fueled by first-time buyers!

THRIVE IN 2025

Sometimes all we can do is survive, but God’s intention is for us to thrive. I think of John 10:10: *“I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.”*

The word “thrive” means to grow vigorously. In the Bible, *thriving* means loving God and others, living life on purpose, loving life, and progressing toward a goal despite circumstances. The Bible calls followers of Jesus Christ to thrive, not just survive.

To Thrive in 2025, I’ve been praying two things for us.

1. **For God to REVITALIZE us.** To revitalize means, “*to restore something to life or give it new life, energy, or activity.*” Psalm 85:6: “***Will you not revive us again, that your people may rejoice in you?***” Let’s ask God to revitalize our lives, our marriages, our parenting, and our relationships. Let’s plead with God to revitalize our church and every ministry within the church.

God wants us to thrive, not just survive in 2025!

2. **For God to MOBILIZE us.** To mobilize is the “*idea that God’s people will work together to fulfill God’s mission in the world.*” We won’t sit around, because we’ve been sent to serve! God wants each one of us involved in ministry to our neighbors and to the nations, either by going or by giving so others can go! One pastor said it well: “*We must cease measuring success by ‘seating capacity,’ and view ministry success as ‘sending capacity.’ Seating capacity is comfortable. It’s safe. But sending capacity is risky and frightening.*” The strength of a church does not lie in its seating capacity, but in its sending capacity.

Questions to Ponder

Here are some questions to ponder:

1. **If Edgewood suddenly vanished, would our neighbors and the nations even notice?** I heard one pastor say these stunning words this week: “*We don’t want to be the best church in the community; we want to be the best church for the community.*”
2. **Do we love our methods more than our mission?** We must be willing to change our methods so we can best accomplish our mission. *Churches that love their methods more than their mission will die.* Here’s something I shared at our annual meeting in January: “*For the past 120 years, our mission and message have remained the same, while our methods have changed to reach our neighbors and the nations.*”

3. **How are we doing at making disciples among our neighbors and the nations?** Let's pray for the lost to be found and for the unreached to be reached. We have an unreached prayer focus the first Monday night of every month at 7:00 pm. There's a time of prayer for the Quad Cities on Sunday night at 6:00 pm at Bridge Cities Church in Bettendorf. In addition, the National Day of Prayer is on Thursday, May 1. Groups of people will be meeting at noon at courthouses in our community.

Recently, I came across a definition of "mission ready" and ran it by a friend in the military to see if it resonated with him. He said it did: *"To be 'Mission Ready' generally means an organization, unit, or individual is fully prepared to effectively execute its assigned tasks or mission. This preparation includes having the necessary resources, training, equipment, and capability to meet any situation and to be ready to accomplish the mission at any cost."*

The word *commission* has several very different meanings, but in its most basic meaning, *commission* is the act of passing a responsibility to someone else, which is what Jesus did when He tossed us the keys.

Co-mission also means, "together with." As believers, we co-mission together with God and with one another to carry out the task of the Great Commission. To use a phrase from our study in Philippians, we are *joint partakers of grace and partners in the gospel of Jesus*. We are called to be mission ready by living on mission by glorifying God and making disciples among our neighbors and the nations.

Action Steps

- This week, take one step to get to know a neighbor you have not met before.
- Begin praying for, and giving to, one Go Team partner.
- Attend the unreached prayer nights.
- Serve with one of our local Go Team ministries.
- Attend the QC Prayer Meeting on Sunday night at 6:00 p.m. at Bridge Cities Church.

By God's grace and for His glory alone, Beth and I have had the privilege of being mission ready with each of you as we have lived on mission together for nearly 12 years. As I look back at what God has been doing here, I remember an illustration I've used at least twice because it captures the core of what this church is all about.

Because God has brought many new people to Team Edgewood, I'm going to share it again. It's from a post called, "Is Your Church a Cruise Ship or Aircraft Carrier?"

People who attend "cruise ship churches," much like cruise ship passengers, often come to be entertained and catered to by the staff. Very little is expected of these church attendees. In fact, they tend to rate the quality of their experience – the music, the sermon and the way it made them feel – much like cruise ship passengers rate their satisfaction with various aspects of their trip.

Cruise ship churches tend to be internally focused on the needs of their regularly attending members. The main goal in these churches, as on a cruise ship, is to keep the "customer" happy and the complaints to a minimum. Leaders in a cruise ship church focus on the existing members rather than pursuing those far from God or encouraging others to do so. Very little of a church's calendar, training or communication is spent on activities to reach the lost or help those in need outside the church.

There are, however, churches that are more like aircraft carriers. These churches are designed to be mission ready, to empower all members to find their God-given purpose in life, to equip them and to send them on missions into the world to reach and serve those who don't know Jesus, much like the crew of an aircraft carrier is all about launching military planes and equipping them well to carry out successful missions.

Did you know an aircraft carrier is the same size as many cruise ships, housing thousands of people? But what distinguishes an aircraft carrier ship isn't its size; it's the efficiency on the flight deck. The crew of an aircraft carrier can launch a plane every 25 seconds—all in a fraction of the space of a typical landing strip. The mission pervades every aspect of the ship. From the pilot to the person who restocks the ship's vending machines, everyone on a carrier knows his or her particular role and how it supports the mission—to equip, prepare, launch and receive aircraft back from their crucial assignments.

An "aircraft carrier church" has a clear mission that stems from the Great Commandment and the Great Commission. Everyone in the church knows why their church exists and plays a role in the mission.

I am so glad Edgewood is an “aircraft carrier church!” Instead of meandering, you are living on mission! Instead of just living for your pleasure or for possessions, you are focused on your God-given purpose. Instead of just cruising through life, you are committed to the Great Commandment and the Great Commission as you commit to gather, grow, give and go with the gospel.

I close with this challenging quote from another pastor: *“Of all the miracles in Acts, 39 of 40 were done outside of the church. We need to expect that kind of ratio today, too. God is calling us to understand our role in His mission, to get off the sidelines and join Him where He is already at work. It won’t be easy. It won’t be safe. But remember that the kingdom of God works on the principle of the harvest: we reap only as we risk; living comes by dying; gaining comes by losing.”*

At the beginning of the service, we had some fun evaluating how different organizations are doing at living out their mission statements. As we consider our own mission statement, the question becomes, *“Am I living out our mission?”*

If you’re ready to make a commitment to the commission Christ has for us, I’m going to ask you to stand. But I only want you to stand if you mean it. Will you make our mission *your* mission? If so, will you affirm these words out loud?

I will live on mission by glorifying God and making disciples of Jesus among my neighbors and the nations.

Closing Prayer