

Wednesday, January 17, 2018 -- Discussion Guide for "Love God. Love People. Change the World." — Sermon preached by Chuck Webster on Sunday, January 14

Text: Ephesians 3:20-21: "Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen."

Brief summary (what's the point of this text/sermon?):

Every organization must constantly reexamine its reasons for existing, why it "does business," so to speak. If it doesn't, it'll wake up one morning engaged in frenetic activity that has little to do with its purpose.

A company that provides products or services may find itself on the wrong side of changes in the market and may be left behind its competitors. Sales fall off, revenue decreases, and the company goes out of business.

A similar problem faces churches. We're not interested in "making sales," of course, but we do face pressure to stray from our Founder's original intent. Presented with millions of good opportunities, how do we choose? What questions do we ask when we decide what we're going to do, who we're going to be?

At first glance, we might assume that the church's purpose is obvious and that every church member knows it. We might point to passages like this one and suggest that our purpose is clear: "Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen" (Ephesians 3:20-21, emphasis added).

The church—the congregation in Hoover we call home—should bring glory to God. That sounds simple enough, but what does it mean? And are we doing it? Is "glory to God" something we can measure? If so, how? We've selected a theme and presented it already: Love God. Love People. Change the World.

God still shapes his people, and he works powerfully among those who are interested in submitting to his leadership. Jesus was once asked the question that we're asking this year: What's most important? Why are we here? How do we glorify God?

His answer was simple: Love God. Love People. This, he said, is why we're here. This is how we glorify God. This is how we fulfill our reason for waking up every morning.

How do I live out the implications of this sermon/text?

1. Love God sounds like a simple command, but what does it mean? What does loving God look like?
2. How does loving God relate to obedience? Is it possible to love God and not obey him? Is it possible to obey God and not love him?
3. It's easy to love some people (e.g., family members), but surely it means more than positive emotional feelings, even at home. What does it mean to love the people closest to you? What does love look like there?
4. It's important to explore how we love people who are difficult to love, so consider these:
 - a. Read the story of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37). What makes the love of neighbor so remarkable in this story? How do we do Good Samaritan love today?
 - b. How do you love people who are different from you (racially, culturally, socio-economically, etc.)?
 - c. How do you love the disgruntled, unlikable coworker who rubs everyone the wrong way?
 - d. How do you love the vocal atheists whose life goal is to undermine all faith in God?
 - e. How do you love those whose primary ambition is to remove all restrictions on abortion?
 - f. How do you love the person who lives next door to you and has no religious inclinations?
 - g. For you, who is hard to love? (Not a specific person, but a *kind* of person) How do you overcome that?
5. The last part of our theme this year is **Change the World**. That sounds quite noble, maybe even too ambitious. How can any of us actually change the world?
6. How does God change the world today? What instruments/tools does he use?