



NAC-USA
DEVELOPMENT
INSTITUTE

**Our
Mission**

**A
Functioning
Church**

**MIDWEEK
SCRIPT**

**A Unified
Church**

2018

April

Session 1 – Our Mission

Welcome to our first midweek session for April. This month, the focus of our discussions will be our mission. Let's utilize these upcoming sessions to better understand our purpose and place in carrying the gospel of Jesus to our world. We've just journeyed through the days of Holy Week and the celebration of Easter. Hopefully, you have been re-ignited in your resolve to live the mission for Jesus. In this first session, we'll focus on the Great Commission and our role in reaching out to all people to teach the gospel.

The Great Commission was given by Jesus to His disciples after His resurrection and before His ascension. In Matthew 28:16-20, the Bible reads:

Then the eleven disciples went away into Galilee, to the mountain which Jesus had appointed for them. When they saw Him, they worshiped Him; but some doubted. And Jesus came and spoke to them, 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 have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."

In this clear statement, Jesus provided His disciples with a detailed plan of how they were to continue the work He had started. The Great Commission is a command that is founded on the authority of Christ. The apostles and other followers of Jesus took that command and, empowered by the Holy Spirit, set out to fulfill their task. Living out this command and sharing it with the congregations made this commission real for the church. They, too, were commanded to go and share the gospel. Since then, the message of Jesus has been shared throughout the nations. Followers of Jesus are expected to go and make disciples by sharing the true and life-giving message of Jesus with all, whether or not they know they are in need of a Savior.

In the Great Commission, there is a three-step process: go, baptize, and teach. You can see how the first part of our Church's mission statement correlates directly to these three steps:

Reaching out to all people in order to teach them the gospel of Jesus Christ and to baptize them with water and the Holy Spirit...

That's right – as a believer in our church, you have a role to play in carrying out this great command of Jesus! We are to go and be witnesses of Jesus through our actions and words. Not all of us are gifted to evangelize or teach. But all of us can be witnesses of Jesus. He is uniquely present in each of our lives, and we each have our own personal grace story. All who believe in Jesus Christ are choosing to live a life that is set apart and sanctified by the work of the Holy Spirit. That means we should act and speak differently. Those around us should be able to see our works of love and hear our words of kindness. Are your actions evidence of your faith? Do your words reflect the love that has been given to you by the grace of God?

We are commissioned to reach out to all people. That means we are expected to be open-hearted and willing to share what we know about Jesus with everyone we meet. The ministry of Jesus and the works of the apostles in the book of Acts show us that they didn't withhold the gospel message from anyone. Jesus showed love and compassion for those who had been forgotten or set aside by society. A person's occupation, stature, or sinful nature never prevented Jesus from showing him or her kindness. The apostles followed Jesus' example by showing love to the sick and the broken, and after their eyes were opened to the Gentiles, they brought the good news to all, even those who held them captive and sought to do them harm. Our mission statement says, "reaching out to all people." That's a call to action – not passivity. Every day, remind yourself that the gospel of Jesus Christ has set you free from your sin, stand in awe of Him, and then seek opportunities to open the door of the Kingdom to whoever the Holy Spirit leads you to. Overcome your fear to reach out to coworkers who sit at the desks around you, the students who walk into class with you every day, or the neighbor you meet at a restaurant or grocery store. Our mission field is vast, but we can start acting on this mission in our communities...How can you share the gospel wherever you go?

Our prayer is that those who are introduced to Jesus through us will start a relationship with Him and begin to walk on a new path as one of His disciples. That's often not something that happens overnight. It takes time. Trust the power of the Holy Spirit to work in their hearts. If they ask to learn more, share God's Word from the

Bible, so that the Spirit can begin to teach, and then invite them to your small group and to a service. Know that God is the One at work in their hearts. He is the One who can change their lives by leading them into a new faith relationship.

The gospel is the message about Jesus and what He accomplished through His life, death, resurrection, and ascension – all leading to the hope of His return. Apostle Paul echoed the words of the prophet Isaiah in Romans 10:15 (ESV) when he wrote, *How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news! We are called to be witnesses and share the greatest news one could ever hear. It's beautiful when this life-giving news is shared with the lost, broken, and hungry. Go and be a witness, and share the good news of Jesus Christ!*

Session 2 – A Functioning Church

Hello again! Continuing our discussion on mission, today we'll explore what it means to be a functioning, contributing church member.

Each one of us is an integral part of the congregational life in our church. God has placed us into this church, as a necessary part of the congregation. As Apostle Paul explained to the Corinthians: *Now you are the body of Christ and individual members of it* (1 Corinthians 12:27). Paul further explains that members can be compared to individual parts of the body; some are feet, some are hands, and others are ears or eyes. Each is responsible for performing its own task. The hand does not want to become the foot, and the eye is not interested in becoming the ear. We do not need to imitate others, but rather, serve in our unique, individual capacity.

This means there will be a diversity of backgrounds in culture, education, and origin. Yet everyone has a role or a function as an active member in the congregation. We might be different, but we are a necessary part of the whole body. As in Paul's analogy, each part must function to support the body. The foot is to walk, the hand is to grasp and hold, the ear is to hear, and the eyes are to see.

Sometimes, we may take our membership in the body of Christ for granted. Life becomes so busy that we forget the principles of a witness of Christ, which are: giving rather than receiving; responsibility rather than individual preference; and sacrifice rather than entitlement.

The Bible makes it clear that if one part does not do its job, the whole body does not function well. However, if one part of the body does its job well, the entire body rejoices and becomes stronger. Paul explained it so clearly in 1 Corinthians 12:26: *So if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it, if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it.* There are no great or small tasks – ALL tasks are important and necessary to the survival and strength of the body! As Paul admonishes in 1 Corinthians 12:21-22: *The eye cannot say to the hand: "I have no need of you", nor again the head to the feet: "I have no need of you."* No, much rather, those members of the body, which seem to be weaker, **are not**, because they are also necessary.

As you can see, being a member of the church is not like being a member of a country club where you are required to pay your dues in order to maintain membership. Perhaps we have had a consumer attitude toward being a church member, where we think our offering and attendance are enough. But that is not what the Bible tells us. Church membership, as defined in the Bible, is a functioning membership where we give abundantly and serve without hesitation (1 Corinthians 12-14).

We should never ask if we should be serving our church, but how! We must look at ourselves to determine what gifts and resources God has given us that are necessary and needed in the body of Christ. When we identify and use our gifts and abilities in our church, God will bless our contribution in order to generate joy and strengthen the entire congregation.

Session 3 – A Unified Church

Welcome! Today we'll continue our discussion on our mission by discussing unity in the church. Paul devotes a portion of his letter to the Ephesians to the concept of unity and what that means for us as members.

Unity is vital to the health of the church, and we have a responsibility as church members to be unifying. Christian churches and organizations are often their own worst advertisement because of their internal divisions. Unity doesn't mean that we need to agree with everyone all the time, but it does mean that we are willing to sacrifice our own preferences to keep unity in the church. The gospel ties us together as Christians, and so there, we find guidance and direction.

Let's take a look at the first six verses of Ephesians 4 (NIV) and see what we can learn from them:

As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

How do the people around us know that we profess and identify ourselves as Christians? Our lives must reflect our commitment to Christ. We strive to walk worthy of that calling.

Verse 2 describes all the qualities necessary for unity: humility, gentleness, and patience. What would the church look like if these were our identifying qualities? *Bearing with one another in love* – we might reword that today as “putting up with.” But this verse doesn't ask us to just tolerate each other, because we bear with each other *in love*. The next verse tells us to **keep the unity of the Spirit**. This isn't a one-time goal to be attained and forgotten; we have to constantly work to keep the unity that we have through Christ.

Verses 4 and 5 explain the reasons why we should stay unified: *there is one body and one Spirit*. How many arguments and divisions could be avoided if we asked one question inspired by these verses: Are the reasons for argument and separation greater than the reasons for maintaining our unity – namely, the oneness of our God?

The oneness of *the body of Christ* was discussed in last week's session. We are all members of this *one body* and we all have a function and purpose to contribute to it. Likewise, we all have *one Spirit* living inside each of us. Paul refers to this body and Spirit in his first letter to the Corinthians: *For as the body is one and has many members, but all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also is Christ. For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body – whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free... (1 Corinthians 12:12-13)*. What does this mean for us? It is a call to appreciate each other. We all have gifts to contribute! We all are equal in God's eyes – equal members of the body of Christ.

The verse continues, *just as you were called to one hope*. What is this hope to which we were called? Paul refers to it in the first chapter of Ephesians: *For He chose us in Him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in His sight. In love He predestined us to be adopted as His sons through Jesus Christ...In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins...* (Ephesians 1:4-7, excerpt)

We are heirs to the kingdom of heaven through Christ! We are called to forgiveness and reconciliation. Would your congregation look different if each member served with a spirit of generosity and forgiveness towards each other? What would your conversations sound like? Would there be room for gossip and complaining?

One Lord, one faith, one baptism... these things are central to Christianity and unite us with Christians around the world. As Paul writes to the Corinthians, *there is but one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom all things came and through whom we live* (1 Corinthians 8:6). *Faith* can be interpreted as the foundational doctrine of Christianity. Later in the fourth chapter of Ephesians, Paul encourages us to strive for a *unity of faith* in the knowledge of the Son of God, with maturity (Ephesians 4:13 NIV). What does it mean to mature in our knowledge of Christ? Our District Apostle often talks about a “culture of continued learning.” Are we always

striving to know more of Christ? To know more about the Scriptures? To have deep conversations about our faith with one another?

One baptism does not refer to how one is baptized. The significance in this Bible verse is that baptism, with water and Spirit, is the public act when a person renounces the devil and surrenders themselves to Christ. This act of baptism unifies us! It is something we all share.

The last phrase, *one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all*, points to the pervasiveness and immanence of God in His church. We all have one Father.

These verses from Ephesians paint a beautiful picture of a healthy, unified congregation. Yet we are all imperfect members. We all sin. We have our differences. Paul realized this as well because he addressed it in the second chapter of Ephesians when he talks about the Jews and Gentiles being united into one congregation. How could they possibly overcome their differences? The answer is Christ: *[He has] made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, by abolishing in His flesh the law with its commandments and regulations. His purpose was to create in Himself one new man out of the two, thus making peace, and in this one body to reconcile both of them to God...* (Ephesians 2:14-16).

If two ancient, very different, sometimes even warring, peoples could be united in one congregation, can we not be united with our brothers and sisters who sit next to us in the pew? Our unity is not based on how alike we are, or our heritage, or our ethnicity, but rather has its foundation in Christ and His sacrifice. Through Him, we have the power to reconcile with each other and with God. **Unity in the church cannot happen if members have unforgiving hearts.**

Our mission statement ends with the encouragement to *cultivate a warm fellowship in which everyone shall experience the love of God*. How can we be sure that everyone in our congregation experiences His love? When we seek unity, we demonstrate love. A congregation that practices humility, gentleness, patience, and forgiveness with each other, founded in the universal truths of our faith and in our knowledge of the life and sacrifice of Christ, will be a unified congregation where members experience the love of God.

*This session used material from "I am a Church Member" by Thom S. Rainer