

A little boy was busily engaged in building something out in his backyard. His Dad, observing his passion and effort in whatever he was building, went out to see what was going on. He said, "What are you building, son?" His boy said, "Sh, sh...I'm building a church and we must be very quiet." His father was impressed and also eager to encourage this sense of reverence in his son, asked, "And why must we be so quiet in church, son?" The little fellow quickly looked up, astonished that his father didn't know, so he retorted, "Because all of the people are asleep!"

As a church, God has not called us to sleep. Instead, we must have a firm grip on our mission. We must know why we are here and what God has called us to do. Our Grace Church mission statement says: "***Grace Church exists to glorify our Heavenly Father by continually making more disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ.***"

If you've been through our New Members' class, then you may recognize the material today. Periodically, we need to review: Why are we here? What's our purpose?

It's by our mission statement that we evaluate and choose to do or keep or abandon ministries. It's by our mission statement that we evaluate where we'll invest the funds God has entrusted to us. It's by our mission statement that we evaluate where to invest our time and spiritual gifts. So this is crucial. It's important! We find the church's mission in a familiar passage. Please turn to Matthew 28:19-20 (p. 835).

1. Let's dissect our Mission Statement. Our mission statement is not profound. There are many, other ways we could say essentially the same thing. Let's take the microscope in for a closer look. We want to focus in on why we have chosen these particular words for our mission statement.

a. Our Heavenly Father – Our God has many names, why this one? Why not just "God"?

We feel that it's important because we are at a unique point in American society. The term "God" has lost much of its significance. If later today you were to ask five people at a local grocery store, "*Do you believe in God?*" And then asked them to define what their concept of God was, you would probably get five very different answers.

The word "Father" referring to God is distinctly a New Testament word. Prior to Christ, the Jews never referred to God as the *Father*. That's because after Calvary, our relationship with God totally and forever changed. We're now His children, His sons and daughters. Because of the Cross, every believer is now adopted into God's Forever Family.

The words "Heavenly Father" also communicate the loving face of God... that God wants a lost, Hell-bound world to see so that they will accept His Son, so that He will not have to be their Judge and condemn them to Hell. It's the Father's face that we see in John 3:16, "*For God, (the Father) so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life.*"

Then, if there ever was a point in human history where there is a cultural absence of the sense of fatherhood, it's today. If you keep up with social statistics, you know we've turned a sad corner in America. Broken, divided, single parent homes now outnumber traditional two parent family homes. God designed the home to have a loving and committed mother and father.

Sadly, too often even in "normal" families, Dad's role is distorted. What makes this very problematic for the church is that studies show that much of our view of God comes from our view of our human father. If you had a bad relationship with your biological father, you will have to re-learn from Scripture that your Heavenly Father is not like your human father.

Jesus alludes to this picture of God in the Sermon on the Mount. "*Which of you, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake? If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask Him!*" (Matthew 7:9-11). We want to clearly communicate that our God is not the "force," but He has a face, a face that smiles on His children because the price for our sin has been paid – He is "*Abba, Father.*"

b. Exists – Why does our church exist? Our mission statement simply gleans from the broad amount of teaching regarding the local church's purpose in the New Testament and then fine tunes it, applying it to our particular situation. Down the road, our mission statement may be altered or completely changed. But if our church ever veers from the New Testament church's purpose that we believe is represented in our mission statement, then we also believe our church at that point should cease to exist. And every church member ought to vote for its disbanding and dissolution.

Some churches need to be buried...because they're already dead. It's just that no one has had the courage to give them Last Rites. Even in our own community, there are churches which were once Bible-believing, Gospel preaching churches. They are now little more than social clubs with some religious rhetoric thrown in.

Leith Anderson, in his book, *Dying for a Change* (picture), talks about the cycle of an institution. When an organization has lost its mission, then the mission often becomes just to keep the institution alive.

Our mission is not to maintain the existence of this church. Our mission is to reach our world and make disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ. That's Matthew 28:19-20 in a nutshell.

c. *Glorify – The purpose of our church must be to glorify God.* When Jesus began His earthly ministry, as He was baptized and came up out of the water, the Father spoke from heaven, “*This is my Son, whom I love; with Him I am well pleased*” (Mt. 3:17). Ephesians 3:21 says, “*to Him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever!*”

Some years back W.W.J.D. (*What Would Jesus Do?*) was very popular. In a sense, that's how our church must function. We must think and work through this grid, “What Would Jesus Do?” Yet, it's much more than that, the Pharisees of Jesus day were the top doers of all history. There needs to be a Grace Church mind set of “*what would Jesus be?*” How would He think? What would His attitude be? Many churches “do” the right things, yet they don't fully please God because they have the wrong attitude.

God's not satisfied if we do the “right things.” More importantly we must have the right attitude. Our world is intoxicated with pride. One of the greatest temptations for a church is pride. Yet pride is Satanic and one of the most abhorrent sins to God. It's easy for a church to become arrogant.

What will motivate us to please our Heavenly Father, is when we begin to truly grasp how much He loves us and how much He has blessed us, then we will be consumed with pleasing Him. Because when you love someone, you want to please them. When a child begins playing sports, you'll often see them if they make a good play, turn their face toward the sidelines to see if Dad or Mom saw it. *Why?* Because that child loves his parents and wants to please them. That's how we must be toward our Heavenly Father. We want to please Him!

d. *Continually making more – This is not a one-time action.* You'll notice an overemphasis here. Obviously, this is a referring back to the Great Commission. It's direct obedience to the command, “*go and make disciples.*” The “go” is a present participle, which indicates continuous action. This is not a one-time action. It's a continual, unceasing, endless, perpetual, incessant, uninterrupted, unremitting...so why is it that so few churches do it? *Why is it then that so few Christians do it?*

Satan is a vicious enemy. He will do anything to get the church to stop seeking to make more disciples. Read the book of Acts. They knew their mission and sought to fulfill it, but don't miss the incredible persecution that Satan hurled at them. Read the pages of Church History. They drip with blood whenever the Church sought to fulfill its mission.

If we honestly, passionately seek to do this, we'll be attacked. We can count on it. But how can we not, in light of Calvary, in light of Christ's command? To not be seeking to continually make more disciples is sin and disobedience.

How does Satan get us to abandon this part of the mission? The trend in evangelicalism in recent years has resulted in a narcissistic church – where everything is about us. What do we like? Ministries, music, even the coffee. Or we reason that it is the pastoral staff's “job.” That's what they're paid to do. We've subcontracted out our part of this Great Commission. Or we rationalize that this is not “our gift” but if we support missionaries and pastors, and those who have the “gift,” then we've done our part.

Satan also gets us to abandon the mission by getting us to focus on numbers rather than making disciples. We work on getting other Christians into our church. If they're saved, it's easier and feels safer to talk to them.

At Grace we're thankful for other Bible-believing churches in our area. We're not in competition with them and don't want their members to come to our church because “we have the best show in town”! Our focus must be on lost people. There are enough of them out there for every Bible-believing church in our area to grow ten times larger...and we still would not have done the job! Our mission is not about believers or some other church's sheep. We're not poachers! So please do not try to get people to leave a good church to come to Grace Church!!

Then, Satan often distracts us to focus on the trivial. Ed Dobson (**picture**) said, “*The average Christian gets all bent out of shape about what he shouldn't get upset about and doesn't get upset about what he should get upset about.*” Many churches and pastors waste tremendous amounts of time and energy putting out small fires.

Think about it. How many Christians have you heard passionately or even angrily discuss how they feel about versions or music styles or programs or the fact that the church doesn't do this or it doesn't do that, etc., etc? Yet how many times do we talk about building a bridge or sharing the gospel with a lost neighbor or co-worker? How often is that true? How often has that been true of you? When was the last time that you asked an unbeliever something as simple as just to visit our church, to be your special guest? Not even a gospel presentation, just an innocuous invitation?

Again, when we are talking about “*continually making more disciples,*” we're not talking about getting other Christians to come to our church. We're talking about seeing lost people who are going to Hell and will suffer for all of eternity under the wrath of God, we're talking about them coming to Christ and having their lives transformed and becoming part of the our family, but more importantly God's Forever Family.

e. *Disciples – We are making disciples not converts.* Please notice our mission statement does not use the word “converts.” God has not called us to just lead people to the Lord. It's not enough to see that someone has his “ticket”

punched for heaven. Jesus commanded us to *“teach them to obey everything I have commanded you.”* Our Christianity must radically affect every single sphere of our being. We must be Christlike spouses, parents, employees or employers, gracious neighbors and citizens.

One of the telltale signs of true discipleship is our attitude. Have you ever noticed that all of the fruits of the Spirit are *attitudes*? Disciples don't just “do” the right things; they will *be* the right kind of people. Acts 11:26 says *“The disciples were called Christians first at Antioch.”* That simply means that lost people knew that they were followers of Christ. That's what our mission is, to produce followers of Christ. If all God wanted was to do, was to make sure that people got saved but not growing committed Christians, He'd just take us to heaven as soon as we trust Christ.

Everyone is someone's disciple. You're either a follower of the world or of Satan, or even yourself. Or, you're a follower of Jesus Christ. Our mission is to continually be making more disciples of Jesus Christ. That demands that we first be disciples ourselves. It's nearly impossible to lead someone else to be what you are not. A parent who smokes usually has kids that smoke even though they told them over and over again not to. The *model* is a more powerful teacher than the *message*.

f. Of the Lord Jesus Christ – It's not enough to know Jesus as Savior. Many Christians want to know “Jesus” as Savior. That is not our mission. It is not enough to just know Jesus as Savior. You can't be a disciple, unless Jesus is Lord. Jesus Himself said *“no man can serve two masters.”*

Literally, disciples, so that they will truly be disciples, must make Jesus the sole monarch of their lives. Jesus must be King of all if someone is going to truly be a disciple. That's the only way that as believers we will have joy and peace and meaning. Our mission then is to spiritually nurture people until Jesus Christ is the Lord of their lives.

2. Who is this mission statement for? It's not just for the pastor or deacons. It's for all of us!! If you are a believer, if this is your church, then this is your mission.

One church had this as their slogan, *“Our church has two pastors but hundreds of ministers.”* The point was that every believer in that church was a minister of God. We've been saved to serve Him. We've been saved so that we might please our Heavenly Father. And we do that when we seek to accomplish His mission. When we're committed disciples ourselves and seeking to lead the lost to also become disciples, we please the Father and we fulfill the mission. John Piper (**picture**) said, *“God is calling us above all else to be the kind of people whose theme and passion is the supremacy of God in all of life.”*

3. The local church is God's plan. Should we obey the Bible? Is the Bible our road map? Please study your Bible for yourself and you will have to conclude that the local church is God's plan. God knew exactly what He was doing. But what does being committed to God's plan, what does being committed to a local church look like? Josh Harris (**picture**) describes it in *Seven Ways*.

You join. You officially join the church so that the pastor and others there know that you're part of the team. Here at Grace, this means going through the New Member Class, filling out an application, and being interviewed by the Leadership Team to share how you came to Christ. Joining expresses your commitment to be here and serve together. The New Testament knows nothing of non-member Christians. It's so much a part of the early church, it's assumed.

You make the local church a priority. Each of us builds our lives around our priorities, so that other things take a back seat. Harris advises you to think carefully before you move for a better job or go away to college, if it means leaving a solid church to do it. You may or may not find such a church in the new location.

You make the church leaders' job a joy. Hebrews 13:17, *“Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they keep watch over your souls as those who will give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with grief, for this would be unprofitable for you.”* Josh Harris advises you to embrace, obey, and love God's Word. Also, pray for your Pastor, church staff and Deacons and refuse to engage in pettiness, gossip or slander against them. I like that advice! There are to be no armchair quarterbacks in the church.

You find ways to serve. Harris says, *“Serving is the fastest way to feel a sense of ownership in your church. It's also the best way to build relationships.”* Don't wait to be asked to serve. Look for ways to serve. How sad when church leaders have to beg for folk to serve.

You give. Harris writes, *“Because the local church is where you are nourished spiritually, it should be the first place you invest financially.”* It's a sin to be a “free lunch” Christian.

You connect with people. Being married is a relationship. Being committed to the local church means getting to know other members on a level that you can't do just in passing on Sunday mornings.

You share your passion. When you're in love with God's church, you can't keep it to yourself. You want others to experience the same joy. As John Stott said, *“If the church is central to God's purpose as seen in both history and the*

gospel, it must surely also be central to our lives. How can we take lightly what God takes so seriously? How dare we push to the circumference what God has placed at the center?"

When you see that the church is God's kingdom, His household, and His temple where He dwells, it should motivate you to fall in love and be committed. It's kind of like getting married. Christ loved the church and gave Himself for her. So should you!

Conclusion: It's very doubtful that Grace Church will ever be a megachurch and personally, I don't have any desire for that. What is vital though is that we be a successful church in King Jesus' eyes.

Some years ago a little church on the coast of England was destroyed in a hurricane. The congregation thought they were unable to rebuild. Then one day a representative of the British Admiralty came to the pastor to ask him if they intended to reconstruct the church. The pastor explained why they just could not do it. "Well," said the representative of the British navy, "if you do not rebuild the church we will. That spire of your church is on all our charts and maps. It's the landmark by which the ships in this part of the sea steer their course."

That's a true parable of our church! This community needs our church. Our world is becoming more evil. More and more are shipwrecking their lives. They need the Gospel. They need God's grace and His message of hope! But if our church disappeared, do you think that our community would miss us? Would they notice? I'm not sure I want to know. God has called us to make a difference for eternity. Are we? Are you?

Though the hurricane of hell brought the sins of the world down upon the body of Christ, crushing the life from His limbs, in three days that life would be restored. And the spire of the cross stands to this day for the souls of men and women who need divine help: Stable and secure, strong sustaining, and empowering help!

We always go where people love and care for us. Lost people will always come where they know that they are loved. A shepherd will go to a lot of trouble because he loves his lamb. By God's grace may we demonstrate that same Divine love for one another and to the lambs that God brings our way. May we be a church that shares hope in a hopeless, dying world!

We have no idea how much God is using us, if we'll let Him. 1 Corinthians 3:6-7 came crashing into my life recently. Paul wrote, *"I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth."*

As you know, we have sent out letters to folk who used to attend our church, many of them have moved to various parts of the country, to see if they would give for the Ziebell Classroom Project. I'll be honest. I didn't want to do it.

I don't like talking about money. I don't like preaching about money. And I certainly didn't want to send out a letter asking for money. These folk no longer are part of our church family. It might tick them off...I don't really enjoy ticking people off.

A couple of weeks ago I got a phone call from a couple who received one of those letters and they wanted to chat with me about it, "Could I call them back?" "Chat" is a pregnant word – it can mean anything. In my mind, I convinced myself that they were upset and were going to let me have it. So I got up the courage to call them back. No answer. I left a message but I'm off the hook. But then they called back and God rebuked me for my lack of faith.

You see, years ago I spent several months having an evangelistic Bible study with them. They wanted to join the church but I was concerned that neither of them really understood what it meant to be a Christian. At Grace, we're not looking for church members. The most important thing is that you're part of Christ's church, that you know Jesus. Local church membership is to always follow salvation. The Bible teaches that the church must have a regenerate church membership.

Well, since leaving us, they both came to Christ, got baptized and are now members of Spring Creek. They wanted to give to the Ziebell Project but they also wanted to share with me what God had done in their lives!

Sometimes we're just sowing seeds. Sometimes we're just watering. And sometimes God allows us the privilege of harvesting the fruit. Nothing happens if we don't pray, sow or water or seek to harvest. That's what God has called us to do. That's what we want to do with this new building. Lead people to Christ and make disciples of Jesus Christ. That's our purpose.

Are you? All of us can invite someone to church? All of us can invite someone to lunch? All of us can build bridges? All of us can share a gospel tract. I'm going to make it easy for you but there are strings.

If you're not totally comfortable sharing your story, then you can share my story. A few years ago I wrote my own gospel tract with my salvation experience. Some time back someone encouraged me to make them available here at church, so I'm going to do that today. But I have a condition. You can share them. You can say, "This is my pastor's story." But if you leave one at a restaurant, you have to leave a good tip. I don't want an angry email because you're cheap. So it's 20%.

I truly believe the best days of Grace Church are around the corner. But we have to join together on our purpose. ***"Grace Church exists to glorify our Heavenly Father by continually making more disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ."***

