

WHAT IS OUR MISSION?

By Andy Manning

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- The title of this sermon is “What is our mission?”
- I grew up in Lafayette Parish. Until I was ten years old my family belonged to First Baptist Church in Lafayette, and then after the fourth grade my family moved to Youngsville and so we joined First Baptist Church in Youngsville – both still great churches. And when I was in the tenth grade I sensed that the Lord was calling me into vocational ministry – to make ministry my career. When I was in college at ULL the Lord made it clear that the kind of ministry He wanted me to do was to plant and pastor a church. So Lydia and I got married in my last semester of college, and then that summer we moved to Fort Worth, TX, so that I could attend seminary. And while we were there we had two main goals: Figure out where God wanted to send us to plant a new church, and second, finish seminary in three years or less. We had no desire to spend six to ten years in seminary, which is what many of our fellow students seemed to be happy to do. I did finish in three years, thanks to Lydia pushing me. She told me that she was going to be leaving seminary and Fort Worth after three years, with or without me. And God did show us where to plant a new church: South Lafayette Parish. So in 2005 we packed up our two babies, Mari and Carter, and we moved to Lafayette to plant Church Acadiana. At first we met in a living room in Youngsville, and then we moved to Remington College in Lafayette, and then we moved to our current location at Celebrity Theatres in Broussard.
- When we started Church Acadiana, one thing we didn’t have to was to figure what our mission was going to be. We never had to spend any time praying and brainstorming about what the purpose of the church was going to be. We never had to drive around town looking for problems to solve. From the very beginning our mission was clear, because every Biblical church has the same mission. Jesus gave the church its mission, its purpose, its assignment, its marching orders, in a passage called **The Great Commission.**

- It's found in **Matthew 28:18-20**. Let's take a look.

18 Then Jesus came near and said to them, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. 19 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, 20 teaching them to observe everything I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age."¹

- What is the Great Commission? **The Great Commission is the central mission of every Christian and every church, to go and make disciples of all the nations. This is the mission of every church.** Now every church's mission statement might be worded a bit differently, but it ought to be based on the Great Commission.
- This is the mission statement of Church Acadiana: **We exist to help people far from God become fully devoted followers of Jesus Christ.**
- That's our mission. That's what we're trying to do. That's why we meet on Sundays. That's why we meet in Home Groups. That's why we do everything we do. It all connects to that mission.
- Now in order to accomplish our mission we have to answer two important questions.
 - First, what is a fully devoted follower of Jesus Christ?
 - And second, how do we accomplish our mission? So let's take some time to answer these two questions.

What is a fully devoted follower of Jesus Christ?

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- Another way to put this question is what does a fully devoted follower of Jesus look like? If our mission is to make fully devoted Christ-followers, then what does that mean? What is the definition of full devotion?
- **A fully devoted follower of Jesus is becoming like Christ, loving God and others more and more.** That's full devotion.
- First of all, a fully devoted follower of Jesus is becoming like Christ. Christianity is all about imitating Christ. That's what a Christian is – an imitator of Christ.
- **Ephesians 5:1** says, "Be imitators of God."
- **1 John 2:6** says, "The one who says he remains in Him should walk just as He walked."
- **Philippians 2:5** says, "Make your own attitude that of Christ Jesus."
- **Colossians 3:23** says, "And whatever you do or say, do it as a representative of the Lord Jesus (NLT)."
- The goal of Christianity is to become like Christ in our beliefs, behaviors, attitudes, and actions.
- Now on a more practical level, what does that mean? **Loving God and others more and more.**
- One time Jesus was asked to name the greatest, most important commandment.

- His answer is found in **Mark 12:29-31**.

29 “This is the most important,” Jesus answered:

Listen, Israel! The Lord our God, the Lord is One. 30 Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.

31 “The second is: Love your neighbor as yourself. There is no other command greater than these.”

- So if the goal of the Christian life is to become like Christ, then what is Christ like? In a word, love. Christ was all about love. And so becoming like Christ means loving God and loving others more and more.
- That’s our mission at Church Acadiana. We are trying to help people who are far from God, people who don’t have a relationship with Jesus and who don’t even go to church, and then help them become fully devoted followers of Jesus. Want to help them become like Christ, loving God and others more and more.
- So we’ve answered the “What?” question. What does a fully devoted follower of Jesus look like?
- Now we need to answer the second question: How? How do we get it done? How do we accomplish our mission? How do we take someone who is far from God and help them become fully devoted?
- **We help people become fully devoted by leading them through a discipleship process.**
- At Church Acadiana we have designed a step-by-step process that we are trying to lead people through to become fully devoted to Christ.

- Our discipleship process had nine steps. Every once in a while when I don't have many fill-in-the-blanks on your worship guide I'll print out the nine steps to full devotion as a reminder to people.
- Let's go over these nine steps, and as we do I want you to ask yourself, "What is my next step to full devotion?" Spiritual growth is as simple as taking your next step.

9 Steps to Full Devotion

1. Attend church on Sundays.

- Usually the first step a person takes to Christ is to attend church on Sunday. For most of you in this room, this was the first step you took toward Christ. You received a card in the mail, or someone invited you, and you said to yourself, "I'm going to check this thing out." And you started attending church on Sundays.
- What is the purpose of the Sunday worship service? **Sunday worship is the weekly gathering of believers for worship through singing, preaching, giving, and the Lord's Supper.**
- **Colossians 3:16** says, "Let the message about the Messiah dwell richly among you, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, and singing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, with gratitude in your hearts to God."
- That's a good summary of the Sunday worship service. Studying the message of Christ, and singing praises to Him. That's not all we do, but that's a good summary.
- **Hebrews 10:24** says, "24 And let us be concerned about one another in order to promote love and good works, 25 not staying away from our worship meetings, as some habitually do, but encouraging each other, and all the more as you see the day drawing near."

- Even in the early church in the first century it was tempting for Christians to get too busy for church. But the writer of Hebrews says, “Don’t get in the habit of missing church.”
- Let me make this very clear to you. If you want to have a healthy relationship with Jesus Christ, and if you want to lead your family to have a healthy relationship with Jesus Christ, then you need to be at church on Sundays.
- Make it a priority. Write it on your calendar that Sunday mornings are for God.
- It needs to be the norm and not the exception. It needs to be a habit, not an option.
- You know for many Christians it is the opposite.
 - The average church attender in America today attends church about once a month.
 - In other words, the habit is to miss church, and the exception is to attend.
 - Most Christians attend church if there is nothing else to do.
 - They miss church if they stay up late; they miss church if they feel bad; they miss church to catch up on housework or schoolwork; they miss church to go fishing and camping; they miss church to go to play baseball.
 - But if they don’t need to do anything else, or if there is nothing more fun to do, then they go to church.
- But study after study shows that weekly church attendance makes a big difference in your life.
- I’ll just give you one example. The divorce rate in America is about 50%. Sociologist **Rodney Stark** of Baylor University found that if you don’t attend

church or only sometimes attend church, then your divorce rate is about the same as non-Christians. But for those Christians who attend church weekly, the divorce rate drops down to 14%.

- I'm not telling you this because I want to boost our church attendance.
- As your pastor I want what is best for you. And I want to be as clear as possible. For your own good and for the good of your family, your marriage, your kids, your emotions, don't miss church. Attend on Sundays.

2. Trust in Christ for salvation.

- As you keep coming back on Sunday mornings we hope you will make the life-changing decision to trust in Jesus Christ as Savior and King.
- You might think that this should be the first step in the discipleship process, but in reality it is not the first step. Usually before someone decides to become a Christian they start attending church on Sundays. And then after they've had time to investigate they decide to trust in Christ for salvation.
- But I would say that this is the most important step. This step is when you are born again; it is when you get saved; it is when you begin the Christian life.
- Trusting in Christ for salvation involves **ABC**.
- **A – admit that you are a sinner in need of a Savior. You need to realize that you are a sinner and you deserve to go to hell.** If you think you are a good person, then are not ready to begin the Christian life. The first step in following Christ is realizing that you are a hopeless sinner deserving of eternal punishment in hell.
- **B – believe in Jesus Christ as God's payment for your sin.** Another word for believe is trust, or rely, or faith. To get saved and begin the Christian life you need to believe that Jesus is the Son of God, that He died to pay the penalty

for your sins, and that He rose again. You need to believe that Christ's death actually paid for your sins so that you could be forgiven.

- And then **C – call on Jesus Christ to come into your life to be your Savior and King**. You need to tell Jesus that you are ready to repent of sin and hand the steering wheel of your life over to Him, and invite Him to save you.

3. Be baptized.

- The third step to full devotion is baptism.
- What is baptism? **Baptism is the immersion of the new believer in water, symbolizing the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.** Let's break that down.
- First, it is the immersion in water. The Greek word in the Bible for baptism is to immerse or dunk or plunge or sink under the water – not splash or sprinkle. And that's how Christians were baptized for the first few centuries of Christianity. It was only later that some Christians started to sprinkle.
- Second, baptism is for the new believer. In the Bible baptism always came after a person decided to become a Christian. There is no infant baptisms in the Bible. And baptism was always done immediately after a person became a Christian. Baptism is not something you should wait to do. It should be the first step of obedience you take as a Christian.
- Third, baptism is a symbol. It is a picture. Baptism doesn't save you. It is something you do after you get saved. It is like a wedding ring. A wedding ring doesn't mean you are married; and taking it off doesn't mean you aren't married. A wedding ring symbolizes your unending commitment to your spouse. Baptism is a symbol of the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. It also symbolizes the Christians decision to die to their sins, and start a new life following the teachings of Christ.

- One more thing about baptism. Baptism in the Bible was never private. It was always done in front of other Christians, and there is a reason for that. Baptism is an announcement. It is a public declaration of your new association with Jesus Christ and with His people. Baptism is your coming out party as a Christian.

4. Connect with other believers in a Home Group.

- What is a Home Group? **A Home Group is a small group of believers who meet weekly for prayer, Bible study, and fellowship.**
- Why is Home Group necessary? Isn't Sunday worship enough? **No.** I'll tell you why.
- The Bible says that spiritual growth happens best in community. We need to be in intimate relationships with other believers.
- That's why **Acts 2:42** says that of the early Christians, "They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching, to the fellowship...."
- The word fellowship is the Greek word "koinonia," and it means doing life together.
- A few verses later, in Acts 2:44-46, we see a little of what this fellowship looked like. "Now all the believers were together and held all things in common. 45 They sold their possessions and property and distributed the proceeds to all, as anyone had a need. 46 Every day they devoted themselves to meeting together in the temple complex, and broke bread from house to house. They ate their food with a joyful and humble attitude."
- The early church wasn't just devoted to the teachings of the apostles; they were devoted to fellowship; they did life together. They were intimately involved in each other's lives.

- And that's what we need for spiritual health and growth. We need that intimate fellowship with other believers.
- And you can't get that on Sunday mornings sitting in rows. To get the fellowship you need for spiritual growth you need to sit in circles in Home Group.
- The New Testament has approximately 59 "one anothers" and "each others" that Christians are supposed to provide for each other. Love one another; teach one another; serve one another; carry each other's burdens; admonish one another; encourage one another; build each other up; motivate each other; pray for one another; etc."
- Why does it tell us to do all these things for one another? Because we need these things from each other.
- Can you receive all these things just about attending on Sunday? No. Sunday is just an hour long, and there's not much social interaction happening; it's really not a time of fellowship; it's a time of worship. For the fellowship, the sharing of life, the accomplishing of all the "one anothers," that's what Home Group is for.
- In Home Group you build relationships, and if people know you they can care for you.

5. Have a daily quiet time.

- The fifth step to full devotion is to get into the habit of a daily quiet time.
- What is a daily quiet time? **One pastor put it this way:** "A daily quiet time is a daily time of personal fellowship with God through the Word and prayer. More specifically, it is a period of time you set aside to be alone with God, usually in the morning, to talk to Him and to listen to Him as you prepare to be used by Him that day."

- Notice what the Bible says about Jesus. **Mark 1:35** says, “Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house, and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed.”
- **Luke 5:16** says, “But Jesus often withdrew to the wilderness for prayer.” Jesus was in the habit of withdrawing from others to spend quiet time with the Father. And if it was important for Jesus, then it is important for us.
- What we would like for every person in our church to do is to get into the daily habit of spending alone time with God, reading the Bible and praying. That’s all.
- Pick a time that works for you. For me, it is 3:15-3:45 every morning but Saturday.
- Pick a place that is free from distractions. For me that’s my office.
- Choose a Bible reading plan from our church website. And then get started.
- I usually start out with journaling and prayer, telling God what I need and praying for others, and then I spend the rest of my time reading the Bible, letting God speak to me.
- Let me put it this way. What would happen if only ate once a week? You’d grow very unhealthy and eventually die. But most Christians only eat spiritual food once a week on Sundays. But a daily quiet time allows you to feast on God and His word every single day.
- A daily quiet time is all about learning to feed yourself. When you are a new Christian you need to be spoon fed by the preacher on Sundays. But eventually if you want to keep growing you need to get to the point where you are feeding yourself. And that’s what you are doing in a daily quiet time. You are spending personal, alone time with God in prayer and the Word.

6. Attend the Newcomer's Lunch and join the church.

- To be a mature Christian you need to join the church and become a committed, participating, contributing member.
- Remember that full devotion is all about becoming like Christ. There are two facts about Christ that many Christians either don't know or they ignore.
 - First, Matthew 16:18 says that Jesus is building the church.
 - And second, Ephesians 5:25-29 says that Christ loves the church and cares for the church. If you want to imitate Christ, then you need to be building, loving, and caring for the church.
- Many Christians have this attitude: "I love Jesus, but I don't like the church." I agree that sometimes the church is unlikeable. But think about this.
 - The Bible calls the church the Body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:27); it calls the church the Bride of Christ (2 Cor. 11:2-3); it says that the church is God's dwelling place (Eph. 2:22); it says that the church is the family of God (1 Tim. 3:15); and it says that the church is the pillar and foundation of the truth (1 Tim. 3:15).
 - Now it doesn't matter if you like the church or not, obviously the church is extremely important to God.
 - And if you want to be a healthy, fully devoted follower of Jesus, then you need to join the church and become a contributing, participating member.
- That's what the Newcomer's Lunch is for. The Newcomer's Lunch simply teaches people what our church is all about, and it teaches people what a healthy church member looks like, and then it gives them the opportunity to make a formal declaration that this is going to be their church.

7. Serve on a ministry team.

- The next step is really just an extension of church membership.
- Being a member of the church means finding a way to serve in the church to contribute to its health.
- There are two ways people look at the church.
- The wrong view is that the church is like a country club. I pay my membership fees, and the country club meets my needs. And if the country club doesn't serve me well, then I will take my money elsewhere.
- The correct view is that the church is like a body, and every Christian is a different body part. One person is a foot, another is a toe, another is a leg, another is an elbow, etc. For the body to be healthy and productive, each body part needs to be healthy and do its part.
- Look at what the Bible says in **Ephesians 4:16**. "He makes the whole body fit together perfectly. As each part does its own special work, it helps the other parts grow, so that the whole body is healthy and growing and full of love (NLT)."
- Every member of the body has a special work, a special function, a special job to do. And as each part does its job, it helps the whole body to be healthy and growing and full of love.

8. Bring your tithe to the church.

- What is tithing? The word tithe means a tenth. From the very beginning, going all the way back to the time of Abraham, God has called His people to bring the first ten percent of their income to Him.

- Look at **Malachi 3:10**, “Bring the full tenth into the storehouse so that there may be food in My house. Test Me in this way, says the Lord of Hosts. See if I will not open the floodgates of heaven and pour out a blessing for you without measure.”
- First there is a command: Bring the tenth to God’s house. Tithing is not optional.
- And then there is the promise: If you tithe, God will bless you beyond measure. You can’t out-give God.
- What’s the purpose of tithing? Well, God uses tithing to fund His work, but the primary purpose of tithing is actually for the giver.
- **Deuteronomy 14:23** says, “The purpose of tithing is to teach you always to put God first in your lives.”
- For most people, the hardest thing to hand over to God is our money. Money is God’s number one competitor. And God knows this. That’s why He set up the tithe. Because if you will surrender your finances to God by giving Him the first ten percent every time you get paid, you will be able to surrender everything to God.

9. Share the Gospel with people far from God.

- The last step is called evangelism.
- **Evangelism is sharing the gospel with people in a way that they can get in on it if they want to.**
- Every Christian is called to evangelism. Some people call it witnessing.
- Jesus said in **Acts 1:8** says, “You will be My witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”

- Every Christian is called to be a witness for Christ.
- A witness is someone who shares what they have seen and heard and experienced. That's what each and every Christian is called to do. We are called to tell others about what Jesus has done for us and what He can do for them.
- And so at Church Acadiana we want every member to learn how to be an effective witness; how to lead their lost friends to Jesus Christ.
- But it begins with the realization that God has called me to do this; evangelism isn't just for the preacher.
- And then it starts with a commitment to be obedient and intentionally look for ways to lead your friends and family to Christ – either by inviting them to church, or by talking to them, or writing them letters, or sending them cool videos and articles online, etc.

CONCLUSION

- So let's do a quick review.
- **What's our mission?** We exist to help people far from God become fully devoted followers of Jesus Christ.
- **What is a fully devoted follower of Jesus?** A fully devoted follower of Jesus is becoming like Christ, loving God and others more and more.
- **How do we help people become fully devoted?** By leading them through a discipleship process – the nine steps of full devotion.
- Now let me make a few quick points.

- **First of all, taking these steps will not make you a mature Christian right away.**
 - In other words, it is possible to take all nine of these steps in a couple of months, if not less.
 - Does that mean you are fully devoted, and fully mature, in just two months? No.
 - Notice that several of the nine steps are not one-time steps; they are ongoing habits.
 - Sunday worship, quiet time, serving, Home Group, evangelism, tithing. These are all ongoing habits that you will do until you die. You might call these spiritual disciplines, or spiritual growth habits.
 - Doing these things once or twice won't make much of a difference, but if you make a commitment to be consistent with these over many months, and you will notice a lot of spiritual growth. And if you take these steps over many years, you will become fully devoted.
 - There are no microwave Christians. You will not become fully devoted over-night.
 - But these nine steps will get you headed in the right direction, and if you stick with them, you will get healthier and healthier, and more and more mature in Christ.

- **Second, you can use these steps to disciple others.** If you are a Home Group leader, your job is to help the people in your Home Group grow to full devotion. How do you do that? Lead them through the nine-step discipleship process. You set the example by taking these steps, and then you encourage your Home Group members to take their next step.

- And if you are a parent with kids at home, then your job is to disciple your kids – to lead them to full devotion. How do you do that? Set the example by taking these nine steps to full devotion, and then lead your kids to take these steps one by one.

- **Third, I want to close by asking you, What is your next step?**
 - This morning was not just about the transfer of information.

 - I wanted to help you understand the mission of our church, but more importantly, I want to encourage you to take your next step.

 - So what's yours? This morning I encourage you to look over the nine steps, and then take your next step. Never stop growing. Take your next step today.