

Engage the Mission of God
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This past Wednesday afternoon, I received a very random text message from a member of our church family. It was a screenshot. When I opened it up, it was a photograph of the opening page of watkinsville.org - the very first thing that comes up - that's what this was a picture of. The statement that first appears when you open our website is this, "We glorify God by making wholehearted followers of Christ." I looked at that picture, and then a written text came right behind it that said these words: "So thankful that the mission of our church is on the first page of our website. Not the 16th, but the first." I responded back by saying, that's a boost to my afternoon, especially thinking about today's message, which is "engage the mission."

So for the next few minutes, I want to share with you from God's word this call, this challenge for you, for every one of us to engage the mission of God. Specifically the mission of God that we believe passionately about here at Watkinsville First Baptist. It's that statement: "We glorify God by making wholehearted followers of Christ."

Will you today make a fresh commitment to enthusiastically engage the mission of God? We took this phrase, "making wholehearted followers of Christ" as a summary statement from a lot of passages of Scripture that we read, both from the Old Testament and New Testament. For more than a decade it has been printed, it has been posted, it has been memorized. It has reached the point where I can walk up to many people in our church and they say it in response to the question: "What are we about?" They say, "We're making wholehearted followers of Christ."

"What's our word?"

"Wholehearted." It comes from a study in the Old Testament and the New Testament. Many years ago, we worked chapter by chapter and verse by verse through the Old Testament Book of Numbers. We probably won't do it again. You'll have to go somewhere else, or I can send you the notes. In that study through the book of Numbers, we kept coming across the life of Caleb. As an old man, Caleb had an encounter with God where God said to him that he had blessed him because he followed the Lord wholeheartedly. That word connected with us. We said, "That's the way we want to follow the Lord. We don't want to be casual. We don't want to be complacent. We certainly don't want to be half hearted. We want to be wholehearted in our relationship with Jesus Christ." So when you come to the New Testament, you see this commission from Christ in the Gospels in Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, especially in Matthew 28:18 to go make disciples.

We see that the closing words from Jesus to his disciples were that we are to go and make disciples. And then again in Acts 1:8 He said, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you in power and you will be my witnesses." We took that Old Testament and New Testament value, and we put it together and said, "Here's our mission: We glorify God. That our purpose, and the best way for us to fulfill our purpose is to make wholehearted followers of Jesus Christ."

So today, let me cut right to it. I want to give you this statement that I want to persuade you of today. I don't say this flippantly or casually, but intentionally with conviction. The best use of your life is to engage through the local church in a mission that leads to wholehearted followers of Christ, bringing glory to God.

You may be a mechanic, you may be a teacher or a businessman. You may work in the stock market, or maybe you're a builder. Maybe you're an accountant, a bookkeeper, or an administrative help to someone. Maybe you're a worker from the home or in the home, or a coach. Whatever it might be, a teenager, college student, retired - whatever's going on in your life, the best use of your life in the midst of that is for you to be engaged in the local church in a mission that leads to wholehearted followers of Christ bringing glory to God.

I want to show you this from God's word. I want to show you the picture of the local church, the work of the local church, the mystery of God and the work of the Gospel. It really comes together from Ephesians 3. Paul is writing to believers that are Gentiles. He's writing to those that are outside of the Jewish culture, outside of the Jewish race, and he's showing them that the Jewish Messiah did not come just for Jewish people, but that all people could be saved and they would come together in what we refer to now as the church. Both Jew and Gentile gathered under the name of Jesus Christ.. I want us to read the whole chapter:

For this reason I, Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus on behalf of you Gentiles— assuming that you have heard of the stewardship of God's grace that was given to me for you, how the mystery was made known to me by revelation, as I have written briefly. When you read this, you can perceive my insight into the mystery of Christ, which was not made known to the sons of men in other generations as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit. This mystery is that the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel.

That is a massive statement in the history of our faith. Here's the mystery. It includes every single person - red, yellow, black and white. Every race under one name, one banner, one Good News - Jesus Christ. Let's continue in verse 7:

Of this gospel I was made a minister according to the gift of God's grace, which was given me by the working of his power. To me, though I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, and to bring to light for everyone what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God, who created all things, so that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places. This was according to the eternal purpose that he has realized in Christ Jesus our Lord, in whom we have boldness and access with confidence through our faith in him.

This reminds us of last week when we looked at Hebrews. The author said that because we have such a high priest that you and I can enter into the presence of God. We can come confidently before the throne of grace. And Paul is speaking to that again in verse 12:

in whom we have boldness and access with confidence through our faith in him. So I ask you not to lose heart over what I am suffering for you, which is your glory.

For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith—that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may have

strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

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.

Paul reveals this mystery. The mystery is that salvation through Jesus is not just for Jews, but that salvation in Jesus Christ is for Jew and Gentile alike. It is for anyone who places their faith in Jesus. That's good news for most of us in this room today, because we fall in the category of being Gentiles. By the time he gets to the end of this chapter, he says that God is able to do abundantly more than we could ever ask or imagine, and it's all for His glory. It is for His glory in the church. It is a picture that all races and all people come together in this body of Christ, this body of believers, this family of faith. Regardless of Jew or Gentile, male or female, we come together in the church for His glory through Jesus Christ.

Now, I say to you again, based on this revealed mystery of bringing Jew and Gentile alike into the body of Christ we call the church, that the best use of your life is to engage the local church in a mission that leads to wholehearted followers of Christ bringing glory to God.

How can it be the best? Let me give you four reasons. One, it's the best use of your life because it's biblical. If you're still there in Ephesians, turn a page over to Ephesians 2:1. These verses show us this biblical use of our life and what we were made for, what our purpose is. Paul says:

And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience—among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind

He's just expounded on what Romans 3:23 says. Paul had written to the church at Rome "for all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God." And now he is writing here to the Gentiles, saying, "Look, you know Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior. You're a believer. You're a follower of Christ. Don't forget where you came from. Don't forget what you used to be. Don't forget what God has brought you out of. Don't forget that you were just like all of mankind."

We're all on level ground when it comes to the cross of Jesus Christ. We are objects of God's wrath. Because of our sin nature, we are children of wrath like the rest of mankind. But here in verse four is this amazing two-word hinge that begs for an amen every time you read it. Those first two words of verse four are: "But God." That is the hinge. That is the testimony in our life where we look and think, "Here's what I used to be, but God. I used to be an object of God's wrath, but God..."

But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved— and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace

in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

Listen - our life, your life was given to you by God, created by God, fashioned together by God. He saved you by the blood of Jesus Christ. And then it says here that He, being rich in mercy and rich in love has saved us by His grace. Look at it in verse 10: for we are his workmanship. That word there means "handcrafted poetry." It's something that God has formed and fashioned, something God has written, something God has designed. We are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.

Are you looking for purpose or looking for the reason that you're alive? Do you feel kind of empty in your job or relationships or as a teenager? Do you feel like something's missing? Maybe those things that you're involved in are perfectly fine, but you've maybe seen them as your purpose for being alive instead of seeing that it's through those things that God carries out His purpose for you being alive.

Paul is writing to people from all walks of life, from male and female, all different ages, different careers, different skills, different hobbies. He says to all of them, "because of Jesus Christ, you are his workmanship created in Christ Jesus for good works."

Matthew 28 says, "Go and make disciples." Acts 1:8 says, "You will be my witnesses." Ephesians 2:10 says you are "his workmanship created in Christ Jesus for good works." If you and I get something new and we try to figure out how it operates or functions, we ask, "What are the directions?" We grab the owner's manual, look through it and see what the instructions are. It's not so much the owner's manual, but you and I are grabbing the Creator's manual. We read, look, and study here to see what God has said. We see that biblically, He has commissioned us to be involved in making disciples.

How can I say this is the best use of my life? It's biblical, and number two, it's eternal. Have any of you gotten to the age where you're beginning to think, "I hope this is the last one of these I have to buy?" Are you there yet? Where you start thinking, "I'm just tired of buying \$99 leaf blowers. I'm just going to spend a little bit more and maybe this will be the last one I buy." Several years ago, we got a White Mountain ice cream churn. It's been good for four or five sermon illustrations over the years. When I got that, I thought, "I just want one ice cream maker for the rest of my life. I don't want it to wear out." Maybe you've got things in your life like that. When we talk about gifts around the house, you're probably thinking, "Let's just pay a little bit more and maybe it'll be the last one." But things break, don't they? Things wear out. Things get holes in them and fall apart.

But isn't there something in us that longs for something to last? Here's what I want to say to you: If you use your life in the mission of God by making followers of Jesus Christ to His glory, it lasts forever. Listen to how Jesus put it in Matthew 6:19. He's talking about things that matter. He says, "Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."

Let me remind you of this - your heart follows your treasure. If you will invest in eternal things, do you know what will happen? Your heart will become passionate about eternal things. Give your talents, give your skills, give your time, your career and see if there is some way for that work to become an eternal investment, a way for you to lay up treasures in eternity. We say it in college ministry often like this: "Do what you're good at for the glory of God, somewhere strategic for the mission of God." I'm calling you today to let the best use of your life be investing in the eternal work of making disciples. Do things that last forever.

It's the best use of your life because it's biblical. It's the best use of your life because it's eternal. It's also the best use of your life because it's satisfying. Maybe you're getting into retirement age and you think, "I've never really been satisfied. I've never tasted contentment." You look at your life and say, "There is something missing here. It doesn't add up."

In Philippians 1, Paul is writing about the end of his life, this mission that he's on. Don't forget, Paul was a tentmaker. He would often work and be able to eat based on building tents, but look at what he says in Philippians 1:19. There is no mention here of making tents. Here he says:

for I know that through your prayers and the help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ this will turn out for my deliverance, as it is my eager expectation and hope that I will not be at all ashamed, but that with full courage now as always Christ will be honored in my body, whether by life or by death. For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me. Yet which I shall choose I cannot tell. I am hard pressed between the two. My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better. But to remain in the flesh is more necessary on your account. Convinced of this, I know that I will remain and continue with you all, for your progress and joy in the faith, so that in me you may have ample cause to glory in Christ Jesus, because of my coming to you again.

Paul had decided that the best use of his life was to be involved in something that led to the glory of Christ. What led to the glory of Christ was him discipling these believers at Philippi. So Paul says that in his life, "For me to live is Christ. Therefore for me to die is gain." He was describing contentment. He was describing satisfaction. He was describing a life that had found the best use of his time. It was satisfying.

Let the search be over today. Today, under the conviction of the Holy Spirit, say, "Lord, from this day forward, let me be absolutely satisfied in You and however You would use me. In whatever work, whatever career, whatever calling it is, let it be all for Your glory. Just show me what's next." That's engaging in the mission of God.

Fourth, it's timely. There's an urgency to using our life in this way. The Apostle Paul writes in Titus 2:11:

For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age, waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works.

Paul is saying that we're living godly lives because of Jesus. We're zealous for good works because of Jesus, and we're waiting on Jesus. There's timely work going on here. What's the urgency? Listen close. Jesus Christ is coming again. He is coming again. He is returning. We may never see a piece of brick or mortar or wood put together on that new building out here to my left. Jesus may come back before we meet again. We may never know what it's like to put in another 10 hour day or 12 hour day or 15 hour day. Jesus Christ has made a promise. We don't know when. We just know that it's a promise He will keep. If Jesus doesn't return, it will be the first promise that God has ever broken, and God is not a liar.

God promised to us hundreds of years before the Messiah came that there would be a Messiah born in Bethlehem. There was a Messiah, as we just celebrated during Christmas, born in Bethlehem. Jesus Christ promised that He would go to Jerusalem and He would die. He died on a cross to pay for our sins. Jesus Christ said, "I will die, and on the third day I will be raised back to life." And on the third day, the stone was rolled away and He was raised back to life. He appeared to hundreds of witnesses, then He ascended to heaven and took a seat beside the right hand of the Father.

Today we wait for our blessed hope. He is coming again. Now, here's why it's so timely for us to use our life in making disciples. You and I can gather in this room celebrating in song and prayer and giving and devotion to the Good News of Jesus Christ. But we are surrounded by people today who are still by nature objects of God's wrath. We are surrounded by people whose destiny is an eternal place called hell, a place of torment, separated from a holy God. It's the best use of our life while we still have time to make a way for our friends and our family and our neighbors and our world to know Christ. So today, I'm asking you to engage with me enthusiastically in the mission of God in the mission of our local gathering.

Let me give you some questions to evaluate whether or not you are engaged. Ask yourself this. Am I engaged in gathering to worship corporately? As a local body of believer, this is who we are. We gather together. There is no substitute for that. From time to time, you may miss a Sunday like I miss a Sunday. So what do we do? We have the ability now to listen to a sermon that's posted online. We can kind of catch up. Friends, the body of Christ is functioning and in good health when the body of Christ is meeting together.

Something that prompted my passion for doing this series of messages was a set of statistics and trends and patterns that we're seeing in the church in Georgia, the churches in our community, and the churches of the Western culture. People who identify as followers and believers of Jesus Christ are becoming less and less and less engaged in gathering as a body. Statisticians tell us today that those who consider themselves regular attenders of corporate worship regularly attend one to two Sundays per month. That's 12-24 Sundays a year out of 52. Yet the very nature of who we are as a church means to gather!

Listen, don't give in to the trends of this world. Don't give in to the patterns of the Western church. Set your course based on the passion of those early believers who regularly met together. Are you engaged in gathering to worship corporately?

Number two: are you engaged in connecting with others in relationship? You need it. We need it - to be connected in relationships with others. The plot and plan of the enemy is to isolate you as a family or to isolate you as an individual, to keep you separated from relationships in the

body of Christ so that he can come harder with temptation from every angle, without any accountability, without any encouragement, without any strength or fire from other believers.

Number three: are you engaged in serving the church to advance the mission? Are you engaged in gathering to worship corporately? Are you engaged in connecting with others in relationship? Are you engaged in serving the church to advance the mission? It is my conviction that you ought to be able to write down on a piece of paper the way you serve in a local church. What does that look like? What is the task? What are the good deeds that you are doing? How are you using the gifts that have been given to you in salvation? I grew up all of our life hearing this number, that 80% of the work is done by 20% of the people. I don't understand that. Honestly, I don't get that. It just seems like to me, if there's a mission to be accomplished, that if you know Jesus Christ, that 100% of us would be involved in the mission of Christ, and we would all be serving. I mean, who gets the excuse? Who gets the separate letter that says you're exempted from serving? I don't know who writes that letter. Are you engaged in gathering? Are you engaged in serving? Are you engaged in connecting?

Number four: are you engaged in supporting the mission with your finances? Money's not everything, but money is something. What we do as a church takes resources. As you read through the New Testament, they were collecting offerings. What we do as a church, it takes resources for us to do ministry. Are you engaged by supporting the mission?

Number five: are you engaged in telling others about the Good News of Jesus? The mystery's out. There are no secrets to keep. The Good News of Jesus Christ is not for us to hoard. We're not an aquarium, we're a river. We are to get the good news of Jesus Christ out to our friends and our neighbors. I want to ask you today as you think about being engaged in this mission, are you telling others about the Good News?

On the front of the Sunday paper you received today, it has a picture of gears. It's been there all month. That picture speaks to me of what it looks like to be engaged. Every cog, every gear rolling, working together to accomplish a task. I'm asking you to come gear up, to link in, and to engage.

I want to share some words that were written to me by hand. I got this handwritten letter right at the end of December. Listen to this as you think about the mission we are a part of:

Pastor Carlos,

You were there at the hospital when my children were born and prayed over our family. You and the church were there when I got laid off and paid our electric bill. I never was a real follower of Christ, just a fan. I prayed, I went to church when I felt like it and I said grace, but I never let Him deep into my heart until now. It took for me to lose everything I cared about on this earth to find love and follow the Lord above. You see, I had everything backwards and upside down.

I put work first, putting in anywhere from 60 to sometimes 80 hours a week. This behavior went on for years. Work, drink, family affairs, and the occasional time in church, but never in the Bible. My wife tried to sit me down and talk to me about how things needed to change - work less, family time, more attention to her, and get back to the Lord. I never got

it. I thought wrongly that if I worked and took care of things on this earth, I should be allowed to relax and drink to my heart's desire.

It wasn't until fall of this year that I hit rock bottom. I just couldn't go on any longer. I was now killing myself one sip at a time. Not only had I lost my wife, my kids and my home, I was losing my grip to want to live. I'm now four weeks into my spiritual rehabilitation. I have a Bible. I'm learning to build my relationship with Jesus and I'm turning all control and trust over to Him. My past is in the past and no longer defines the man or father that I'm going to be. My hope going forward is that other dads and husbands don't wait so long to seek Him out. All I had to do was reach out earlier and ask for forgiveness and help, but pride got in the way.

See, when we're talking about the mission of God, there are people out there like this that need a relationship with Christ. There are people in here that today need to engage a fresh commitment to making sure that dads like this get the Good News.