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Essentials.

Am I a Christian?

It's easy to believe in justification by death, especially at funerals. We want to assume the deceased, no matter how they lived their life, are in Heaven. To think anything different is uncomfortable and awkward. If we can prove they were a generically decent person, we'll find a way to get just about anybody into Heaven.

The Bible reveals a drastically different reality about how a person gets to Heaven. The road to Heaven begins and ends with Jesus, who clearly says of Himself, "I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6).

To reach Heaven, you must embrace Jesus as the only way to Heaven and follow Him by faith.

So, do you trust Jesus? Are you following Him? The Bible calls those who follow Jesus, Christians. So, are you a Christian?

"By this we know that we abide in Him and He in us, because He has given us of His Spirit. And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent His Son to be the Savior of the world. Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God" (1 John 4:13-15).

The Christian Has Restored Fellowship to God Through the Spirit.

In this letter, John illuminates the divine relationship that exists for a Christian. We're assured by the word "know" that we can have certainty and confidence in our relationship with God. We are not left guessing because we know the Father by the gift of His Spirit, the third Person of the Trinity who unites us to God and intertwines our identity with Christ's.

The fellowship between God and man was severed in Eden when Adam rejected God's authority by breaking the one negative command God gave him – "but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die" (Genesis 2:17). From that time on, people have constantly rejected God as King, including us. But, God's plan was always to restore this relationship, and the whole Bible unfolds God's plan to rescue

mankind. Now, that fellowship is restored in the gift of the Holy Spirit when we trust Jesus.

The Christian Tells the Truth About Jesus

But, how do we receive the gift of the Spirit? John says we testify, or tell the truth about Jesus. What is the truth about Jesus? He is God's King.

The Bible reveals this by using the term "Son." When Scripture refers to Jesus as God's "Son," two things are being communicated:

1. Jesus is like God, meaning He is of the same nature and essence of the Father.
2. Jesus is God's King. Biblically, the firstborn son is the one who has rights to the father's kingdom. God the Father has given Jesus the right to rule over everything in the universe.

The Christian Believes Jesus is the Only King Who Saves

If Jesus is God's King, He is the only one who can save us from our sin and the effects of sin in the world – death. It's for this reason that God sent Jesus into the world, to be the Savior of the world. Our rejection of God as King and desire to rule ourselves results in sin. Sin brings about death (Romans 6:23). Jesus saves us from our sin because He endured the penalty of our sin on the cross. Because of our sin, we deserve to be separated from God in judgment forever. On the cross, Jesus endured the wrath of God. He was separated from all of God's goodness and endured only God's wrath. To unveil that the penalty had been satisfied God raised Jesus from the dead and seated Jesus at His right hand.

The Christian Lives in Love

When we trust Jesus, we're immediately indwelt by the Holy Spirit, and know that we "abide in Him and He in us" (1 John 4:13). We have the assurance that God's love is on us, always, because we're eternally "in Christ," seated "with him in the heavenly places" (Ephesians 2:6). Our relationship with God is forever secured through Jesus, and so we can confidently live in the love of God.

When you trust in Jesus as King, you're reconciled by the Spirit to a relationship with God, Himself. Because God is love, in Christ you'll never be unloved.

A lot rests on answering "are you a Christian?" Do you believe Jesus was forsaken by God for you? Do you believe He was raised from the grave and is now seated at the Father's side? Do you believe that through trusting in Jesus you have the Spirit and can enjoy eternal fellowship with God? This is more than a religious survey or a Facebook profile status. It's not something that can be imitated from the outside to cause internal change – even if those actions are something spiritual, like attending a Bible study, going on a mission trip, or getting baptized.

Questions

1. What do you feel is your greatest need?
2. What does the Bible teach is your greatest need?
3. How has Jesus met this need on the cross?
4. To confess Jesus as King means to agree with God that Jesus is the only King who can save you from your sins. How have you disagreed with God concerning this reality?
5. How have you lived as your own king?
6. How have you tried to save yourself from your sins?
7. How has the love of others failed you? How has your love failed others?
8. How does God love never fail?
9. What steps will you take to know more about God's love for you in Jesus?

Am I a Member?

The gospel was moving into the Gentile world, into places like Ephesus, which played host to all kinds of paganism, witchcraft, and idolatry. There was a great deal of culture shock as the church, which sprang up in heavily Jewish areas, spread and encountered populations who could not be more different than what they knew. As these populations believed the gospel and sought to join the church, the sinful tendency to exclude and reject those who are different came to the forefront.

Paul responds to this division by stressing the supremacy of Christ, one that overshadowed both Jew and Gentile. Paul reminded the church of the past work of Jesus: his death and his resurrection. He then connects that to the present rule of Jesus. Jesus is above every realm of power or person or entity with all things under his feet. He will be the endpoint of history with a rule that lasts forever.

Because of Christ's supremacy, our eternal destiny is vaulted in the person of Jesus. No matter the fleshly identity, background, heritage, race, nationality, or religious upbringing, believers are secure in his life, death, and resurrection.

Why Join a Local Church? Jesus is Head of the Church

Paul clearly articulates that God gave Jesus as head over all things, specifically the church. His rule and authority have already begun in the church. We are told that whatever the future may hold, the church will not falter and will remain secure in the person of Christ. The promise that Christ will build His church and that the gates of Hell will not prevail against it echoes strongly here.

Whether we gather in multimillion-dollar mega-churches in Texas, warehouses in Kentucky, huts in the South American jungle, or basements in China, we witness the fellowship of the church. The church is eternal and will rule in Christ forever.

Why Join a Local Church? The Church is the Body of Christ

Jesus is described as the head of the church, but the church is described as his body – the two are inseparable. Christ has decided to unite His existence with her.

He has made Himself a groom with the church as His bride. Together, they are one flesh, and you cannot say that you love one but hate the other.

Why Join a Local Church? We Can't Join the Universal Church

We do not join the universal church. The universal church, which is worldwide, over 2000 years old, and composed of genuine followers of Jesus, is described as the invisible church. It is only the local church that makes the church visible. If you reject the local church and say, "I am a member of the invisible church", then you are an invisible Christian, too.

Why Join a Local Church? Beliefs, Mission, Ordinances, & Discipline

A church is not just a generic group of multiple Christians. Local churches are covenanted together to define and display the gospel, and it's through the local church that we also display our commitment to Jesus. Together in a covenant, the local church:

- Defines belief in the Bible and teaches doctrine
- Partners in preaching and mission in light of what we agree Bible says
- Believes the same gospel and celebrates it through the Lord's Table and Baptism
- Holds one another accountable and practices church discipline

In total, we covenant to one another to believe the same, celebrate, obey, and share the same message.

Why Join a Local Church? The One Anothers

As an individual, you cannot obey the New Testament apart from the local church. There are over 23 "one another" commands given in the context of the church. We must love one another as we speak through mouthfuls of food at BFG. We must forgive one another as our kids tussle, fight, and generally disturb the peace. We must encourage one another through moments of weakness, depression, and grief. We need these "one anothers", and we need to be bound together in the local church.

Why Join a Local Church? Jesus is Incomplete Without the Church

Jesus is incomplete without the church. How can this be? The text described Jesus as the one who fills all in all. And yet, He has made Himself inseparable from the church, and until the church is gathered to Him spotless, Jesus is incomplete. We experience similar incompleteness, too. Without meaningful church membership, we drift from the promises Christ makes to those who believe in Him.

Why Join a Local Church? Because We Love Her

Our covenant relationship to the church is like marriage, especially when it comes to the grace and commitment we are called to display. We love the church despite her flaws, we will suffer and sacrifice to be with her, we will be inconvenienced to serve and meet her needs, and we will be committed until the end. We also know that the church is not a maid slave who gives us what we want. She is not to be treated like your mother who picks up after you to make life easier. She is the living breathing body of Christ for whom Jesus died.

Why Join a Local Church? We Need to be Uncomfortable

Church membership is meant to shape you into the image of Jesus. We need accountability to grow, which doesn't happen when we can run. We make a covenant to work out our differences in grace and mercy. We need people who are not like us, who disagree with us, but who will love us anyway. Jesus does not grow us in comfort. Thank God he doesn't!

Questions

1. The church's eternity is secure in Jesus as her leader, protector, and provider. Why does this give us hope for our mission as a church?
2. How does the church's security in Jesus change the way you think about your pursuit of personal status and the agenda you have for your life?
3. Jesus has promised to build His church through loving, serving, and protecting her as a husband does his bride. How should this inform the hope we often put in government and politics when it comes to the future of our country and the world?

4. Why is it important to make a distinction between the universal church and the local church, especially in relation to community, accountability, and responsibility to love and serve one another?
5. What is a local church? What makes a local church distinct? (Doctrine, ordinances, mission, discipline)
6. Jesus doesn't see himself distinct from His church. How should this affect the way we see our life in relation to the church? How should Jesus' love for the church help you love the church despite her flaws?
7. Why is covenant membership in a local church vital to your growth as a Christian? Why is the uncomfortableness of church vital to your growth as a Christian?
8. How has local church membership helped you grow as a follower of Jesus? What do you love most about the church? What kind of struggles have you had to work through in relation to the church? How have you experienced joy in doing so?

Am I Engaged in Worship?

We see a situation in Hebrews that is similar to those of persecuted Christians in closed countries today. At the time, the church was enduring Jewish persecution for moving away from the synagogue. Yet, this passage in Hebrews reminds us that Jesus is the completion and fulfillment of God's story. To go back is to act like there's more to come and that Jesus needs to be crucified all over again. We are exhorted to look to Jesus and hold fast to our confession in Him. One way we do this is through corporate worship.

"And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near." (Hebrews 10:24, 25)

Corporate Worship Saves Us from Self Focus

We are commanded to consider others, to give them our focus and attention. Gathering with others in corporate worship naturally forces us to do this each week. This gathering is a call to pursue the freedom of other-centeredness. We get the chance to lift our heads to see that our greatest miseries are rooted in our belief the world revolves around us. When we see others worshipping despite their illnesses, finances, or broken relationships at home.

Corporate Worship Saves Us from Selfishness

Corporate worship saves us from selfishness. The word "stir" in verse 24 means to agitate. Think about the action of a paint mixer at Lowes or Home Depot. We gather with others to agitate love and good works. Amidst the struggles and celebrations of each week we tend to drift toward self focus. As we do, the good gospel stuff like kindness and love settles at the bottom of our hearts. The act of corporate worship stirs us and reminds us of our existence in a community under the authority of Jesus.

Corporate Worship Saves Us from Worshiping Ourselves

We assemble together on a day that is set apart, a sabbath, that we may rest. The word Sabbath means to cease or stop. After six days God ceased from his work. He then commanded that Israel stop their work and rest one day out of seven as an

act of worship. Ceasing work to worship was a statement of faith saying, "I can stop working because God will provide."

Corporate Worship is a Call to Rest in Jesus

After Jesus was raised from the dead, the early church applied this Sabbath principle to Sunday, the Lord's Day. In principle we say "I can stop working because Jesus, on Easter Sunday, finished the work for me." Each Sunday, we stop to be reminded that Jesus rules, not the hustle and bustle of our week. As we gather together, we are told to submit to the rest that God has set apart for us and bow before God's King and the Savior of mankind.

Corporate Worship is a Corporate Witness

The passage in Hebrews also warns us against failing to meet together, "as is the habit of some." To fail at this affects our witness, as the gathering of the church is a sign and witness to Jesus. It is the visible expression of faith.

Today, it can be especially tempting to forgo the assembly of the church. By most indicators, identifying Christians attend corporate worship about twice a month. Our culture has become increasingly secularized, and many parts of the daily routine (work, practices, other obligations) have bled into the traditional Sunday timeframe.

Consequently, it looks somewhat radical to prioritize the church – but that's exactly how our commitment to worship together will speak to our culture. They will see the expression of our faith outlined by all of the sacrifice we practice just to meet together.

Corporate Worship is Flesh and Blood

Yet, corporate worship is more than just a way we can express our faith, it is also our way to experience the flesh and blood of Jesus. Hebrews tells us to encourage one another, and we are reminded of the Holy Spirit, the Comforter, who comes alongside us to point us to the presence of Jesus. Since the church is united by the Spirit, the presence and reality of Jesus is most fully realized when we are gathered together.

As we gather, we experience a relationship that cannot be provided through digital means. Not only is our digital life a source of misery for most, but a pixelated community cannot mediate the reality of Jesus. By the Spirit, we literally walk alongside each other. We share our grief, our worries, our joys, and we are physically pointed to Jesus in the church.

Corporate Worship is Our Kingdom Identity

Hebrews tells us that there is a “Day drawing near”; this day is the Second Coming, and as time spirals down, we will need the church all the more. Church attendance is a study of eschatology. We gather to be reminded of what we are: an outpost of the coming kingdom. We are also reminded of who we are: citizens of that kingdom. Our gathering is a sign of our victory over persecution and death.

Corporate Worship Reminds Us of Heaven

The worship we practice together shapes our kingdom life. It reminds us that heaven is not just ourselves and Jesus on a little cloud. We will experience Jesus and His Kingdom with His people forever. Our spiritual health is determined by how we train ourselves for eternity. It is not summed up individually, but it is summed up in the church. This worship is a microcosm of eternity. It’s one we cannot ignore.

Questions

1. What are some practical ways you can consider others at church on Sundays?
2. How does corporate worship provide rest?
3. What can causes us to see church attendance as drudgery? How should we fight these things to find joy in gathering with the church?
4. What are practical ways in which you can personally speak the gospel into people’s lives on a Sunday?
5. What are some practical steps you and your family could make to be more consistent on attending corporate worship on Sundays?
6. What are some practical ways in which you can make Jesus the focus of Sunday for your family?
7. Why should corporate worship be a catalyst for our spiritual growth? How should it affect our witness?

Am I in a Bible Fellowship Group?

"And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. And all who believed were together and had all things in common. And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved." (Acts 2:42-47)

The passage begins by noting the devotion of those who gathered together. Not only were they intent upon the study of God's word, the apostles' teachings, but they were also devoted to each other in fellowship – breaking of bread, prayer, praise, and worship. It was in this context that their fellowship experienced something remarkable to the point that it inspired a sense of fear and reverence. They bore witness to many miracles by the apostles. These were signs that the Kingdom was at hand.

Biblical Fellowship Begins in Sharing In Worship

Just as the Kingdom of God is compelling, our worship should also be compelling. Unbelievers should be drawn to the kingdom through witnessing our worship services. However, Lord's Day worship can be merely attractational. It's possible to love the music, love to serve, love the experience, but to forget what actually binds the church together. The focus of corporate worship should be the intentional sharing of the gospel. In corporate worship, we publicly hold the gospel in common through the preaching of the word, as well as the ordinances of baptism and the Lord's Table.

We are not individuals practicing private devotion in public. We are bound together as one people: economically, through sin struggles, through grief and joy, in all situations. It is in this common fellowship that we say with one voice that Jesus is worthy. We are cosmically bound together in an other-worldly fellowship.

Biblical Fellowship Happens on Mission Together

The passage communicates how those who gathered had “all things in common” and actively sacrificed to meet one another’s needs. This grinds against our radical individualism. Is this socialism? Is this unconditional charity? No, this is not a government program; rather, it is the life of the church. The cost of the Kingdom causes us to need one another. Our devotion to the Kingdom may cost us a job or may alienate us from others, and the church is bound together in this cost and sacrifice.

Biblical Fellowship is Sharing Life Together

As the passage continues, we see that this fellowship extends throughout the lives of the believers. Day by day, they gather to eat and worship. In this way, we see that fellowship around meals is a sign of sharing life together. We see a biblical model for mealtime fellowship in both the Lord’s Table and in references to the coming Kingdom, the banquet feast of the Lamb. Families eat together, and the church is a family forever, so we eat a lot.

It is through fellowship that we share the Christ life that we hold in common. It creates in us a “glad and generous heart.” This gives us the joy of thanksgiving and creates contentment with one another. We pursue contentment in a life shared together, with the height of joy being a life shared with Christ. Joy is living before God and others in the gospel, to be forgiven and accepted. It’s because of the gospel that we can share our lives without fear of losing anything, only with the promise of more life to gain.

Biblical Fellowship Is Witness

Fellowship is also crucial to our evangelism. The church should contain a vibrancy and hope that draws others to Christ. Acts reminds us that the Lord “added to their number day by day who were being saved.” The church is a compelling witness to the kingdom.

BFGs at Ashland

We seek to extend the model of fellowship we see of the church as a whole in the book of Acts through our Bible Fellowship Groups (BFGs). They serve as a microcosm of the Kingdom activity that binds us closer together as a church.

Our BFGs worship together by sharing the word we have in common. We respond to and reflect upon the word we have heard preached and push each other to be doers and not hearers only. When we experience the word of God and do not respond, our hearts grow calloused to it. In BFGs we are compelled to life-change and respond because we have accountability in our communities.

Our BFGs provide a target group for the "one another" commands we find in the New Testament. When we love one another, forgive one another, be merciful to one another, and consider one another, the faces of those in our BFGs are the ones who come to mind. As we respond to the word, we have a living, breathing platform for grace, forgiveness, and restoration in our daily lives.

When we aim only for fellowship, we miss both fellowship and mission. When we aim for mission, we get both fellowship and mission in full. A church that aims for mission will have good fellowship. We will call our BFGs to serve together, pray together, and witness together. By being on mission together, they exhibit biblical fellowship.

Questions

1. Why is corporate worship on Sunday vital to a church's fellowship? What binds us together in worship every Lord's Day? How does corporate worship help you feel closer to your church family?
2. Sharing life together in the gospel brings contentment and joy. Why is the true? Why do we tend to choose otherwise? How has this kind of fellowship helped you understand the acceptance we have in Jesus before God?
3. The early church's fellowship was crucial to their witness and spread of the kingdom. How have you seen your church's fellowship lead to others coming to faith in Jesus? How can we be more intentional in cultivating this kind of fellowship?
4. How will you be more intentional in sharing the Word, Mission, Life, and the gospel in a Bible Fellowship Group?

Am I Serving?

To get to the moment in our Sunday worship service when we hear the preaching and teaching of God's word on behalf of the risen Christ, it takes literally hundreds of acts of service by a few hundred people each week. All of these gifts and skills are signs of God's goodness to His church.

Service Begins by Applying the Word of God

"11 And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, 12 to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ" (Ephesians 4:11, 12)

These verses teach that Jesus has given to His church leaders who deliver the word of God. The apostles delivered the teachings of Christ to the first churches as their foundation. Before the Bible was completed, the early church prophets declared the will of God to the churches. Evangelists were the first church planters and missionaries who took the word where it had yet to be heard. Shepherds or pastors were those who led each local church with the word of God.

The word is given to lead each member to serve the body to health. It's not enough to just have the word, but for each believer to be a doer of the word (James 1:22). The phrase "to equip...for the work of ministry" is a call to action in light of the word.

Imagine thinking your eyes should do all the work of the body. Picture a church that sees what they are supposed to do, scripturally, but never actually does it. This body will become lazy, weak, depleted, and dead.

Your service begins with hearing and obeying the word. Every time the word is preached, we should respond, "Here I am with my resources and gifts for the health of this body. Who and where do I need to serve?"

We Serve for the Sake of the Gospel

"13 until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, 14

so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes."

In this letter, Paul addresses the major dysfunction between Jews and Gentiles in the church. Their relationship was marked by alienation from one another rather than unification to one another in the gospel. Paul wrote to them to show that the church is the manifold wisdom of God (Ephesians 3:10). God's manifold wisdom is that Jews and Gentiles are in the same family by the same faith in Jesus. Spiritual maturity is recognizing and embracing this reality by serving one another. Maturity in the gospel leads us to serve those that are unlike us like family.

Serving is Loving the Body

"15 Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, 16 from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love."

Your hands and arms are joined to your shoulders, which are connected to your neck, which leads to your head with a brain that's connected to all of your body parts by nerves that tell the body to care for itself. The brain tells the hand to put food in your mouth when you're hungry, and for the stomach to digest the food you're eating for nourishment. The brain tells your lungs to expand and contract, bringing oxygen into the body so that it works properly. Mouth, "chew." Throat, "swallow." Stomach, "digest." Lungs, "breath." Involuntarily, the nerves and muscles connected to the brain work so the body is healthy and functioning properly.

Jesus designed the church, His body, out of love. He's given the church its many parts to care for the whole. He holds the church together by joining her to Himself. He keeps her together by telling her how to love herself. As members respond in obedience to the Head, the body is loved to health. The extent to which we're not serving is the extent to which we are lacking love.

Serving keeps the body healthy. The extent to which every member serves is the extent to which we are functioning properly. Even more, to not serve the body is a choice to not only destroy the body but to harm yourself.

If the stomach goes AWOL, we get sick. If the hand refuses to care for the rest of the body we could get sick and die. In death, the stomach and hand don't just part ways to live as lone parts, but they die along with the rest of the body. Refusal to serve the body is self-centered sabotage of the body.

Serving is Spiritual Warfare

The church is not just a generic, healthily functioning body existing in the world for no reason. As the letter ends in chapter 6, we see that the body is a victorious warrior in Christ on a mission to display the love of God through Christ to a lost and dying world. When one member refuses to serve the body, we're not only in danger of becoming unhealthy, we're in danger of being taken out by the enemy and dying. And this isn't just one of us, but all of us.

Questions

1. How have you seen your gifts and unique abilities help our church fulfill our mission? How have you seen your gifts and unique abilities help our church to function healthily in unity?
2. Are there people different from you when it comes to age, background, and/or ethnicity who you will serve in the gospel at our church? Who are they? How will you serve them?
3. What spiritual gifts do you have that you want to use in the church? How will you take the initiative to use those gifts?
4. How will you help us mobilize others who need to serve the church?

Do I Have Gospel Friendships?

What is friendship? When you think, "friend," who comes to mind? Your buddy? That guy who yells at the TV with you when your team's losing? The gal you meet for coffee? The family you always sit next to at your kids' sporting event? Someone who likes what you like, and thinks as you think? Often, our friends are those with whom we have a lot in common. Our bond is based on mutual interests and relating to them is easy.

But, is that all there is to friendship? What does it mean to have and be a friend? Friendship is far more than agreeableness and shared recreation. If we were to view most of our friendships today against the backdrop of how Jesus communicates "friendship" we would see a stark contrast. We would see that many of our friends are more like good acquaintances. Biblically, friendship is defined by sacrifice, an unveiling of one's soul, and being on mission together.

The Sacrifice of Friendship

In John 15:13, Jesus mixes friendship with death: " 'Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends.' " This is exactly what He did. Though He was God, He gave up His life for those whom He called His friends. The call to friendship is a call to die to yourself – your desires, preferences, and ambitions – for the sake of another person's good. It's a call to love: a radical commitment to another's good no matter what it costs you. This self-sacrificial love is the goal of friendship.

The Closeness of Friendship

Biblical friendship also involves an intimate knowledge of another's soul. The Hebrew word for "friend" denotes an unveiling of the soul. Jesus calls us friends because He has unveiled the Father's soul (His desire for His enemies to become His children through His Son).

Jesus is, and will always be, our closest friend. He fully knows us. He knows our darkest desires and most heinous thoughts. And still, fully knowing this, endured the full weight of God's wrath against our sin for us. The way we experience

friendship with Jesus is by embracing the fact that we are more sinful than we understand, and yet more loved than we can ever dream.

Because of this, our friendships with our fellow Christians are the deepest we can have. Why? Because we already know the whole story. We know the other person is sinful, and yet they're fully loved by the Father through Jesus. Because of this, we can look at each other in the eye and say, "Whatever you've got, we can handle it because Jesus already paid for it." Because we're already forgiven by the Father through Jesus, we can honestly bear our souls to one another.

The Mission of Friendship

Finally, friendship doesn't end with us. It has a greater purpose than just being a "friend," but has a world-changing purpose: to "bear fruit" (John 15:16). Our friendships are to be a lighthouse of the gospel to a lost and dying world, illuminating God's love for the world. This ultimately takes place in the church, where gospel friendships are cultivated and flourish. If we're to preach the good news of God's love for the world, we must certainly love one another in the church. So, we out-sacrifice one another for one another, so that other's may see the goodness of God.

Questions

1. How has your view of friendship differed or fallen short of Jesus' teaching of friendship?
2. Why should Jesus be your closest friend? Does this make Him less Lord, Savior, and King in your life?
3. What does friendship with Jesus look like practically in your life?
4. In what ways have you been passive as a friend?
5. How will you be more vulnerable in your friendships? How will you organize your schedule for deeper friendships?
6. Who are you sacrificially pursuing in friendship through radical sacrifice? How are you being inconvenienced for the sake of loving your friends?
7. Who truly knows you, even the deepest, darkest parts?

Serving Addendum: Am I On Mission?

The Missions Essentials relates directly to the Service and Mission Component of the Ashland Essentials. We want every member of our church to provide a faithful witness of Christ to the world.

The Missions Essentials gives us a simple way to answer the question: Am I providing a faithful witness of Christ to the world?

In order to provide a faithful witness of Christ to the world we must be witnesses of Christ who:

- Pray passionately
- Witness boldly
- Give sacrificially
- Go eagerly
- Together with the church for the glory of God and the joy of all peoples

Being a witness is part of our identity in Christ. Praying passionately, witnessing boldly, giving sacrificially, and going eagerly are characteristics of a faithful witness to the world. We are witnesses who pray passionately, witness boldly, give sacrificially, and go eagerly together with the church because it is through the church that disciples are made and the power of the Gospel is put on display to the world. The reason we are witnesses is for the glory of God and the joy of all peoples.

Some questions to ask yourself:

- Am I always embracing my identity as a witness of Christ?
- Am I passionately praying daily?
- Am I boldly witnessing consistently?
- Am I sacrificially giving regularly?
- Am I eagerly going at times?
- Am I on mission as a witness together with the church?
- Am I on mission as a witness for the glory of God and the joy of all peoples?

Be a Witness of Christ

Witnessing is not just something we do, it is who we are as Christians. Jesus told his disciples in Acts 1:8, "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth." Jesus said that all of his disciples would be witnesses. It is part of our identity in Christ. We are to start being witnesses and making disciples of all nations locally where we are and take the gospel from here to the ends of the earth.

Pray Passionately

As witnesses we pray passionately because we are completely dependent upon God to make disciples of all nations. His Spirit empowers our witness and awakens dead, sinful hearts to repent and believe as we preach the gospel. We are passionate about God's glory and the joy of all nations so we do not pray halfheartedly.

Therefore, we passionately pray for God to use us as effective witnesses for his glory and the joy of all peoples. We pray for the salvation of the lost and for those we have shared the gospel with. We pray for opportunities to share the gospel with our lost family, friends, neighbors, coworkers, and others in our community. We pray for opportunities to share the gospel with the nations that are gathered here in Richmond and the nations spread to the ends of the earth. We pray for God to send more missionaries and we pray for the missionaries that have been sent. We pray for unreached people groups to be reached with the gospel. We pray for disciples to be made, churches to be planted, and pastors to be trained. We pray for other churches locally in Richmond and spread to the ends of the earth to grow into healthier churches. We pray for our persecuted brothers and sisters to remain faithful and endure. We pray for religious liberty here and abroad so that all people groups would have the freedom to hear and believe the gospel and gather to worship Jesus Christ.

These are just some of the requests we bring before God in prayer by faith in Jesus Christ.

Witness Boldly

Witnesses is who we are and witnessing is what we do. The Spirit empowers us to witness to those around us and to the ends of the earth. As witnesses we do not shrink back in fear, but we boldly proclaim the gospel in a loving and winsome manner. We know that we cannot control the results. Our job is to share the gospel and trust God to change their hearts.

As witnesses we boldly proclaim the gospel which is the good news that God is perfectly good and created us good, but we have sinned against him and deserve his eternal wrath. Therefore, God sent us Son Jesus Christ who came and lived a perfect life and died and suffered God's punishment for our sin in our place on the cross. He rose again defeating sin, Satan, and death and now he freely offers salvation and eternal life to all who repent and believe in him.

Give Sacrificially

Our sacrificial giving is a reflection of the gospel that we proclaim. God so loved the world that he sacrificially gave his only Son for our salvation. Jesus sacrificially gave himself for us on the cross. Now, we sacrificially give as an act of worship in response to what he has done for us.

It is through our sacrificial giving that we support pastors, staff, campus ministers, missionaries, church planters, and others so that the gospel may be proclaimed here and to the ends of the earth. Through our Ends of the Earth Offering we give directly to fund our mission work at Ashland Church and to support thousands of missionaries serving across the world with the International Mission Board.

Go Eagerly

In the Great Commission Jesus commanded us all to go and make disciples of all nations. This is not an optional ministry for a certain segment of the church. We eagerly take the gospel to all the nations for the glory of God and the joy of all peoples.

We have many opportunities as a church to go make disciples of all nations in Richmond and to the ends of the earth. In addition to our local opportunities, we have different trips throughout the year to be involved in church planting work in

New Orleans, Peru, and East Asia. We want everyone in our church to eagerly go whether it be short-term, mid-term, or long-term.

Together with the Church

We are not disconnected individual witnesses, but rather we are a united body of witnesses who work together as a church to make disciples of all nations. We pray, witness, give, and go together because it is through the church that disciples are made and the power of the Gospel is put on display to the world. We do the work of the Great Commission together because God has designed us to do this work together. We need everyone involved and working together as a church to be faithful witnesses and make disciples of all nations.

For the Glory of God and the Joy of All Peoples

The reason why we are witnesses and passionately pray, boldly witness, sacrificially give, and eagerly go together with the church is for the glory of God and the joy of all peoples. All peoples from all nations were created and exist for the glory of God (Isaiah 43:7). God gets greater glory when people from all nations recognize his infinite worth and praise him. Fullness of joy is found only in God's presence (Psalm 16:11). Therefore, we invite all the nations to find complete satisfaction in Christ by faith in him. When we treasure Christ together he is glorified before the world.

LINK TO GO GUIDE - www.ashland.church/go



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