

## Following Jesus Together

### Our Mission

Ephesians 4:11-16

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*"And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, 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, 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. Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, 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." (Ephesians 4:11–16, ESV)*

We've had an outstanding season of ministry this summer, and I'm excited to see what kind of fruit is going to be born from the seeds that we've planted. Our staff worked really hard to help us think through how to be intentional with people around us. Let me give you a few highlights:

- Last weekend we hosted Summer Fest, a bridge-building event to help us with our "neighboring." We had over 1,200 people attend, and we were able to connect with 90 families who were guests.
- Prior to that, we wrapped up Spring Hill Day Camps and Extreme Teens. We had 370 kids between these two events. We estimate that 20 percent of the kids were unchurched, and we know of a number of important conversations about the gospel that took place with kids in Extreme Teens.
- The last few weeks have been some of the most fruitful weeks that I can remember in terms of thoughtful and intentional connecting with people in order to talk about the gospel.

What's more, last week we wrapped up a seven-week series on how to share the gospel with conviction and compassion. It has been wonderful not only to be challenged about how to share the gospel, but also to have been blessed by the preaching of our younger staff members and Pastoral Residents. I've heard such encouraging comments from many of you as you've seen the value of our intentional investment in emerging leaders.

Thank you for engaging in ministry this summer. Thanks for giving to the church so that we can host Summer Fest and Back-Yard Bible Clubs and so we can have a Pastoral Residency Program. Your involvement personally and financially really makes a difference.

**For August: *Following Jesus Together***

Today we are starting a new four-week series on the discipleship culture of our church. We've spent the summer talking about an external focus, and now we need to talk about what is happening inside the church. The series is entitled "Follow Jesus Together." It is designed to help us understand what we mean by igniting a passion to follow Jesus. In other words, how do we actually do that?

I think it was in the fourth grade that I learned how plants germinate. I have fond memories of an experiment where I took green bean seed, put it in a plastic bag with a moistened paper towel, and sat it in sunlight. I remember watching with amazement as my little "greenhouse" set in motion the growth process for that green bean. With the right ingredients, the seed split, a tiny green shoot emerged, and it wasn't long until a plant was clearly growing. The right environment and the right ingredients set in motion a process of growth.

I want you to think of this sermon series like that experiment. Think with me about the key ingredients that help create an environment of spiritual growth. What makes a church a place where real spiritual growth takes place? That's the question.

You need to know that this is not a new question for us. Since its founding in the 1980s this church has always been focused on this. But when we built this new facility five years ago, our Elders and Pastors intentionally focused on how to fulfill the calling of Colossians 1:28 – to present everyone mature in Christ. We didn't want the gravitational pull of running a large church to take us away from the mission of discipleship. We wanted to watch out for a "cruise-ship" mentality when we should have a "battle-ship" mindset.

Behind the scenes, this focus has been the driving motivation behind a number of focal points at College Park:

- Development of the Pastoral Residency Program
- Training in Soul Care for counselors and Small Group leaders
- Launching the Next Door Mission – our vision to multiply churches by mobilizing our church
- New emphasis on covenant membership and covenant renewal / update
- Prioritizing shepherding for our Elders and Pastors
- Developing our parish model

All of these have been a part of our focus on the internal disciple-making culture of our church. And as we made progress, it became clear that we needed a simple framework that communicates our church-wide strategy for making disciples.

In other words, when someone comes to faith at our church, what is our strategy to help them grow? And how do all the programs at our church connect to one another for the purpose of making disciples?

Over the last few months, our Community Team and our Pastoral Staff have been working diligently on trying to answer that question. And this four-week series is designed to help us understand and think about our disciple-making strategy. Let me give you an overview via a helpful video that the team developed.

For the next four weeks, we are going to explore the key ingredients for a disciple-making culture in our church. Today, we start with our mission.

### **Mission: How to create a culture of passionate followers of Jesus**

Every gospel-centered church essentially has the same mission, given to us by Jesus in Matthew 28. After the resurrection of Jesus, He told His disciples that they were to go and make disciples of all nations. That is the charge of the Great Commission: make disciples.

At College Park, our expression of that disciple-making mission is “igniting a passion to follow Jesus.” That is the mission of our church. And every Sunday that we gather, we are re-engaging in that mission. The church is God’s chosen vehicle for that disciple-making mission.

When we think about how the church fulfills that mission, there is probably no better text than Ephesians 4 to help us understand what the church is to be. It sets the framework for a how we should think about the church.

In other words, this text should shape how you think about the role of the church in the world, in your life, and in the advancement of God’s agenda. So let’s see what this text tells us about the culture of the church.

### **The People**

As we think about a culture of spiritual growth, the first thing that we need to note is the critical role that spiritual leaders play in God’s plan for the church. Without detracting from the spiritual resource of the Word and the presence of the Holy Spirit, Paul identifies the fact that God gives people to the church as gifts.

In Ephesians 4, Paul is talking to this church about their calling (v. 1), their unity in the Spirit (v. 3), their oneness together (“one Lord, one faith, one baptism . . .”) (v. 5), and the individual gifting that comes because of Christ’s victory (v. 7). And in the context of this talk about the body of Christ, Paul identifies that Jesus has given certain people or offices to the church.

Verse 11 lists four different groups: apostles, prophets, evangelists, and pastor-teachers. I take “apostles and prophets” to refer to those who were the foundation of the early church (Eph. 2:20), evangelists to be those who are plowing new ground, and pastor-teachers (probably one office) who are caring for a particular group of people.

Jesus’ strategy is to call out a people for His own pleasure. He is building His church – those who are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God (Eph. 2:19). And His strategy for the growth of the church is the gifting of people to help the church.

Paul sends Timothy to Ephesus to help the church grow. He sends Titus to Crete in order for him to “put what remained in order” (Titus 1:5). Rather than giving them a church manual, he tells both of these pastors about the qualities that they should look for when identifying elders and deacons. The right kind of leaders is essential for the disciple-making culture in the church.

The point here is that the church fulfills its disciple-making mission with people by people. Programs, as helpful as they are, do not create disciples. People make disciples. Spiritual growth, as we'll see in a moment, happens as people are gifted by the Spirit and are given to the church to help lead others to follow Jesus.

This is important for a number of reasons:

1. God may be placing a special calling on your life to be one of those spiritual leaders in the church. If He puts that on your heart at any time, follow His calling, because you are being asked to be a part of the one entity God has designed to change the world: the church.
2. While we are going to talk about strategy over the next few weeks, we have to remember that programs, by-laws, structures, services, etc. are not the sum total of ministry. Those helpful tools create the venue for people-to-people contact that results in more disciples. Without people inside the ministry doing the work of the ministry, there is no ministry.
3. If God brings a godly leader across your path, you should see that as a great gift from God – as a part of God's provision to help you grow spiritually. Church leaders are not perfect, but godly ones are really helpful to your soul, so thank God for them and follow them as they follow Christ (Heb. 13:7).

The first ingredient for a healthy church culture is people who are sent by God as His gift to the church. The right culture is created as godly people at every level see the church as more than a facility, a collection of programs, or a weekly gathering place.

In order for the church to accomplish her God-given mission of making disciples, He gave the church gifts in the form of people. Again, without people inside the ministry doing the work of the ministry, there is no ministry.

### **The Purpose**

The second aspect of the church culture is the purpose behind the ministry. Why have these people been given to the church? What does "real ministry" look like? And who does the work of ministry?

It might be tempting to think that since Jesus has given the church these people, then the ministry looks like them doing the ministry – by themselves, as experts, while most of the people watch. But nothing could be further from the vision of this text.

There are three very important phrases:

- To equip the saints
- For the work of the ministry
- For the building up of the body

The word "equip" means to make fit, complete, or sufficient. It is a word that can mean to set a bone in the right place. The idea is that something out of joint is brought back into joint. Or it can be used for

the mending of nets, as in Matthew 4:21. Ministry leaders are called to identify what is broken and to set things in order.

But this does not simply involve “things” like programs and structures. This primarily involves people. Spiritual leaders are called to equip the saints – to constantly care for the spiritual needs of people so that they are spiritually healthy.

However, this is not just about the growth of individuals. Something greater is in view here. The vision is to set things in order so that the work of the ministry can happen and the body can be built up. The role of spiritual leaders is to help the saints to be equipped in such way that they are healthy enough to care for one another, to talk about the gospel, to exhort one another, and to simply be the body of Christ. And the effect is that the body of Christ is built up. The church is functioning in a healthy way – living on mission – because its people are spiritually healthy.

The vision here is for something greater than just the spiritual health of individuals. The purpose is to engage spiritually healthy people in a purpose that is far greater than themselves and for them to be directly involved in the “work of the ministry” and the “building of the body.” Spiritual health, therefore, is measured in part by the engagement level of people in their body of believers.

On August 27, we’ll commission the 150 people who are going to be a part of the Castleton Congregation. The starting of new congregations through the Next Door Mission was not only to reach the city of Indianapolis, but also to mobilize our people. We wanted to increase our engagement in ministry by launching new churches and creating new opportunities for growth and service. The Next Door Mission exists to multiply churches by mobilizing our people. Disciples are best created in a culture of mobilization. The church is not an audience but an army.

Is that how you view the church? Do you see the church as a place for your spiritual needs to be met so *that* you can minister to others? Just think of the questions that you ask after coming on a Sunday. What would you ask a friend? If you are a parent, what do you ask your kids? My guess is that you might ask “What did you get out of the sermon? Was the worship meaningful? Did you have a good time in Sunday School?” While there is nothing wrong with those questions, the Bible envisions another set of questions in addition to the ones I just mentioned: To whom did you minister today? Did you pray with anyone? Who encouraged you? What did you learn about the spiritual lives of other people?

Do you see how different the second set of questions are? And I can tell you from personal experience that if you are not embracing an equipping mindset (becoming spiritually healthy to help others become spiritually healthy), it is very easy to slide into a very self-focused, cynical, and critical posture.

The mission of the church is that we follow Jesus together. The vision for ministry is a spiritual growth that makes the entire church look more and more like Jesus.

*“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,”* (Ephesians 4:13, ESV)

As the church lives on mission, she emanates the aroma of Christlikeness. In the same way that the aroma of chocolate chip cookies, cinnamon rolls, or coffee is equated with hospitality, so too the aroma of godliness says something powerful about what Jesus is like.

The purpose of ministry is for leaders to equip the saints for the work of ministry for the building up of the body of Christ.

### **The Prevention**

The previous verses were a very positive vision for the church. But the church is also designed to help prevent the kind of things that create spiritual havoc in people's lives. Paul recognizes that spiritual growth is not only a forward-looking vision, but it is also something that avoids certain ditches. The body of Christ is not positioned in neutral territory, and there are things that must be prevented.

Verse 14 warns us about three potential pitfalls:

**Immaturity** – a healthy church culture helps people move out of spiritual immaturity. Paul uses the word “children” to capture the spiritual concern that he has for them. Unhealthy churches are places where the people resemble the behavior of children in how they think and act. But a healthy church is a place where people are helping one another grow up into maturity. While we all start as spiritual children, we should not remain there.

**Instability** – Paul next uses the analogy of waves that toss people “to and fro.” The picture here is of a person who is influenced negatively by the circumstances. You know the temptation. Maybe it's something very real for you: Around certain people you act one way; around another set of people you are a different person. Or maybe it's a cultural issue. Whatever is trending, whatever is cool and popular, whatever is the prevailing worldview, you are tempted to go along. Spiritual maturity looks like you being so anchored that you are the same person regardless of the situation. And the right church culture can help prevent you from being blown about by every wave of culture or teaching.

**Ignorance** – the final caution relates to an awareness regarding the possibility of being deceived. Verse 14 talks about the problem of human cunning and the craftiness of deceitful schemes. The idea here is on some false teaching or over-emphasis in some area that seems to be right, but it is a scheme to get a person, a family, a small group, or an entire church off-track.

How does this happen practically? Well, imagine you are at work or at school. You have people around you who view your belief in the Bible, in the resurrection of Jesus, and your commitment to follow Jesus as silly or backwards. Perhaps they subtly mock you or talk about the freedom of their “lifestyle” with an arched eyebrow your direction. And when you have to deal with this day after day, it wouldn't be surprising to have this thought race through your mind: *Maybe they're right*. It comes and then it goes. But the next time, it lingers a little longer. And over a few days, doubt starts to take root.

But then you gather with God's people. And as you sing great songs about your beliefs with a congregation of people around you, another thought emerges: *No, THIS is what is true. This is what I believe*. Then you listen to a sermon – you hear the Word of God. And it resonates with your soul: *Yes,*

*that is true. I've been starting to believe lies.* Later in the week you meet with other people in Small Group and you hear about their struggles, how they fight for right thinking, and you pray together. You leave strengthened. It is as if the spiritual gyroscope in your head has been reset.

You may not realize that you were starting to drift. Or maybe a good friend pointed out some area of your life that you couldn't see on your own. You were walking with a spiritual limp and had no idea because it just happened over time. But they were able to prevent spiritual immaturity, instability, or ignorance from taking root in your life.

That, my friends, is what the church is meant to be in your life. Igniting a passion to follow Jesus means extinguishing the wrong passions. And the body of believers is vital to preventing you from going down the wrong path.

### **The Picture**

This text leaves us with a compelling picture of what God is trying to accomplish in our lives. Verses 15-16 identify the beauty of a church culture. What portrait is God painting?

The miracle of the church is the way in which the life and likeness of Jesus is formed in a people. They "grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ." The church becomes the means by which sinful people, through the gospel, are made more and more into what Jesus is like. The church, therefore, is not a place with perfect people. Rather, it is a place where these people are being shaped into the image of their Savior who died so that this growth could happen.

The culture of the church is marked by "speaking the truth in love." This means the practice of lovingly reconnecting people with the truth of the gospel and its application in their lives. It doesn't just mean lovingly telling people what they need to hear. That may be part of it, but it also means that the entire culture of the church is marked by the kind of grace and truth that was displayed in the glory of Jesus (John 1:14).

The culture of the church is also characterized by something bigger than individuals. The whole body is working together, and when it is working properly, it is building itself up in love. Do you see what Paul is driving at here? Do you get a sense of the mission of God lived out through the church?

As the church grows and matures together, there is a picture that is being sovereignly painted. Do you see it? When you close your eyes, and I say "church," what do you see? Because the picture here is of a church that is more than a building and certainly more than programs. This image is of a church that resembles Jesus.

Our mission is to follow Jesus together. Our aim for these weeks is to think about how we create a culture of passionate followers of Jesus.

### **How's Your Passion?**

Can I invite you to do some soul-searching this morning? It has been a great summer. I know that you've been busy doing all kinds of really good things. Or maybe it's been a hard few months. Perhaps

God is teaching you some things through hard circumstances. Can you take some time right now and consider your passion level?

First, you may be here today and your passions are set on the wrong things. And you know it. In fact, that is why you are in church today. You are searching. Something's missing. Maybe you came to Summer Fest, invited by a friend, and here you are in church today. It may be that God is calling you to turn away from the pursuit of your own passions – to turn away from your sin. And He may be calling you to look to Jesus. Can I invite you to trust Him today? Why not believe in Him? Why not become a follower of Jesus?

Second, you may be a follower of Jesus, but your passion for Him is pretty low. Your heart is stale. It has been a long time since the Lord has spoken to you through the Word. I'd like to issue a challenge to you. In today's bulletin, there is a 30-day Bible-reading challenge through the gospel of John, along with our regular scripture memory program called "Fighter Verses." Confess your stale heart to the Lord, and let the Word do its work in your life this week and in the next and the next.

Finally, being a part of a church is more than just what you "get out of Sunday." Our mission is to follow Jesus together. Over the next three weeks, you are going to see how that relates to three words: *belong*, *grow*, and *multiply*.

Would you pray with me that God would help you know what next step you need to take in your walk with Him? Would you help us create a culture of disciple-making? Would you help us grow up together into the likeness of Jesus?

Following Jesus was never meant to be something you do entirely on your own. The church was meant to be a community of people who are following Jesus together.

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## 30 - DAY BIBLE READING PLAN

### TAKE 30 DAYS TO READ THE GOSPEL OF JOHN

- Day 1: John 1:1-28
- Day 2: John 1:29-51
- Day 3: John 2:1-25
- Day 4: John 3: 1-21
- Day 5: John 3:22-36
- Day 6: John 4:1-26
- Day 7: John 4:27-54
- Day 8: John 5:1-30
- Day 9: John 5:31-6:14
- Day 10: John 6:15-50
- Day 11: John 6:60-7:9
- Day 12: John 7:10-44
- Day 13: John 7:45-8:20
- Day 14: John 8:21-47
- Day 15: John 8:48-9:12
- Day 16: John 9:13-41
- Day 17: John 10:1-21
- Day 18: John 10:22-11:16
- Day 19: John 11:17-44
- Day 20: John 11:45-12:19
- Day 21: John 12:20-50
- Day 22: John 13:1-30
- Day 23: John 13:31-14:18
- Day 24: John 14:19-15:17
- Day 25: John 15:18-16:24
- Day 26: John 16:25-17:19
- Day 27: John 17:20-18:11
- Day 28: John 18:12-40
- Day 29: John 19:1-20:18
- Day 30: John 20:19-21:25