



**GOD'S PURPOSE
—OUR MISSION**

God's Purpose - Our Mission

Text: Selected Scriptures

Series: *Catch The Wave!* (#1)

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Introduction

This morning we begin a series of messages which I have titled *Catch The Wave!* This series will touch on some key truths about the church...

- What is the church about? Why does it exist?
- What is the church supposed to be doing?
- What is our role as individuals?
- What is the future of the church?

The idea for the series title came from an author who lives in an area with mile after mile of beautiful beaches and some great waves for surfing. He reminds us that surfers don't build the waves, they ride them. Good surfers learn how to spot a *surfable* wave, how to catch it and ride it as long as possible.

Sometimes in the church we try to *build* blessing and growth. But blessing and growth come from God. Our task is to recognize the *waves* of God's truth for the church and of God's moving in our times, and then to ride the waves God has created.¹ In this series we are looking at the waves of God's truth for the church. We will reserve recognizing the waves of God's moving in our day for another time. During these weeks Pastor Jared and I want us to *catch the wave* of God for the church, for our church.

As we begin let's catch a wave that is true for every church in every place, in every period of time. This wave is the *purpose* of the church, *God's purpose* for the church. Before we get to plans and strategies, we need to know and be riding the wave of God's purpose for the church. That is because whatever God's purpose for the church is should also be our mission.

What it's all about.

Question: what is the purpose of the church? Why did God create it? Why does Christ keep on building it? Why do we get together, fellowship, pray, plan and serve together? Why do we have this building? Why do we support missionaries? Why do we cooperate in ministries such as Eagle's Nest? Why are we here right now, doing what we do?

I'm sure we could quickly list some good reasons ...

- To have a group with which we can praise and thank God.
- To reach out to people with the gospel.
- To encourage, support, care for each other.
- To learn more about God, ourselves, and what God wants us to be like, what He wants us to do.
- To help those who are hurting and needy.
- To help prepare our children to live for God.

All of these are good and important. When we boil it all down, what is the one, key, essential purpose of the church? What is its one basic reason for being here, for existing?

We find that one basic purpose of the church clearly stated by the apostle Paul as he wrote, "Whether, then, you eat or drink or whatever you do, *do all to the glory of God.*"² There it is. God's purpose for all of us, for the church of Jesus Christ, is *to bring glory to God.* Again, Paul wrote,

"Now may the God who gives perseverance and encouragement grant you to be of the same mind with one another according to Christ Jesus, so that with one accord you may with one voice *glorify* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ."³

God's purpose for the church is to bring glory to Him. But, what does that mean? And, how do we bring glory to God? The basic idea of the word glory is brilliance or radiance. Used of God it speaks about the brilliance, the radiance and splendor of His perfect character and actions. We bring glory to God as we point out His perfection; as we point to His greatness and goodness; as we lift Him up with the praise and thankfulness of our worship and all that we do; as we radiate His character in us that the Holy Spirit is building and maturing. And so it requires that we keep learning about God, about what He is like, what His desires and expectations are for us; and that we frame of our thoughts and actions with the questions, "*Can I bring glory to God in this?*" "*Am I bringing glory to God in this?*"

What it involves.

There are four foundational pillars of the church bringing glory to God. Each of them points us to how we can fulfill God's purpose which is our mission. Today we will do a brief overview of each, and then zero in on details as we go on in this series. The first one is worship.

What is worship? We've been looking at worship in the adult Sunday school class. *Worship is my active response with all my being to God, declaring the honor and worth that*

is due Him for all that He is and does. It is my *active* response. It is not passive. It is not a feeling that somehow I come to, am led to, or comes to me. It is my active response *to all that God is and does.* He is the one and only eternal God; He is holy; He is righteous; He is love; He is faithful; He is true; He is the Savior. He hears, answers, intervenes, guides, provides; He instructs and blesses; restrains and judges. So the Psalmist gives us the call:

“Ascribe to the LORD, O families of the peoples, ascribe to the LORD *glory* and strength, ascribe to the LORD *the glory* [the brilliance, the radiance] of His name.”⁴

Now let’s move to worship in practice. Listen to Dr. Luke’s description of worship in the first days of the church in Acts 2:42, “They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.” They were *devoted* to coming together to worship. We go on to verse 46,

“Day by day continuing with one mind in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they were taking their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart, praising God and having favor with all the people.”

Yes, some specifics were required by the situation of most of them being visitors in Jerusalem, but notice their devoted, active response to God, *their worship*. To glorify God we must be worshiping Him individually and together, and always from the heart.

A second foundational area is teaching. In those first days of the church, “They were continually *devoting themselves to the apostles’ teaching.*”⁵ They were doing what Jesus had directed, “teaching them to observe all that I commanded you.”⁶ Teaching both to learn and live the truth. Later, as recorded in Acts 6, the apostles realized this was central to the leader’s role, and so they stepped aside from almost everything else, saying, “we will devote ourselves to prayer and the ministry of the word” (4). The teaching, learning and living of God’s truth is essential to giving glory to God as we should, as well as for our growth and stability.

The evangelical church in North America has been struggling and slipping in this area for some time. I dug into my files and found an article about a poll of Canadians done almost twenty years ago. That poll found that 80% of Canadian born again Christians agreed with the statement “The Bible teaches that God helps those who help themselves.” Four out of five people who called themselves born again Christians thought that came from the Bible. 39% of the born again Christians agreed with “If a person is generally good, they will earn a place in heaven.” And 29% of them agreed with “Jesus Christ was human and committed sins like other people.”⁷

Things have not improved since then. A fair number of polls and studies have been done on the faith of teens and young adults in the last few years. One tells us six out of ten young adults who were actively involved in a church in their teens have dropped out. And the evidence is that this dropping out is not short term.⁸ *Let that soak in:* 60% of teens involved

in church today will drop out as young adults. Young adults see the Bible as less sacred, less accurate, have more doubts about its origins and are less engaged in reading it than the other age groups. On the positive side, 70% of young adults who were engaged in their faith and church said that their faith came alive on a missions trip.⁹

Why did Pastor Jared and the youth sponsors plan the Vancouver missions trip? Yes, for the youth to see and be involved in different forms of ministry. But also to help them see the reality of God working in others and themselves, to be challenged and inspired to deepen their relationship with God, to help their faith come alive. If we are to fulfill God's purpose and our mission as a church we must catch the wave of bringing glory to God by teaching, learning and living His truth.

The third foundational area is caring. Let's go back to Acts 2 again. They shared their resources to help each other, verse 45, "as anyone might have need." Again, their situation was unique, but the response of caring is universal. Later in chapter 6 they developed a whole ministry specifically geared at just one area: meeting physical needs. Paul describes the church as a body in 1 Corinthians 12 with all the different parts needing to mesh and work together "so," he writes, "that there be no division in the body, but that the members may have *the same care for one another*" (25). It's not just physical needs here, but the whole range of needs. We see it again in Galatians 6, "Bear one another's burdens and thus fulfill the law of Christ" (2). When we truly care for each other we are meeting needs, fulfilling our mission and giving glory to God.

The last foundational area is outreach. The objective is clear. Jesus commands us,

"Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you..."¹⁰

The first part of this *Great Commission* deals with outreach, evangelism, reaching others with the good news of Jesus Christ. Jesus tells us, "As you go on your way, wherever you are, make disciples, reach people with the gospel so that God may transform their lives also."

Go back to Acts 2 one more time. We see that 3,000 came to faith on the *birthday* of the church on the day of Pentecost. Then, we are told, God kept adding new people as the believers lived their faith and reached out to others. And so, by chapter 4, just a matter of days later, this group had grown from about 120 to about 5,000 men plus the women. I don't think any of these believers stopped and said, "You know, I don't think evangelism is my thing. I'm just not gifted in this area." Or, "Evangelism? That's the job of the apostles!" No. They all were actively involved in their own way. And so the impact was great. God changed many people forever through their witness, *and they gave great glory to God* through all of this.

Question: Who has God chosen and placed to reach the people of High Level and the area around? The answer, of course, is the church, which includes our church and each one of us. The impact, the results? Again, lives changed forever. And *glory to God!*

What we can enjoy when we catch the wave.

What can we enjoy when we catch this wave? Let me be clear, I am *not* slipping into the quicksand of a “What’s in it for me?” or consumer mentality. It *is* all about God! It is only as we have our focus on God and His glory that Christ will truly build and bless a church, truly build and bless our church. And God blesses churches that fulfill their mission.

Consider, just two examples. First, unity in the faith. Turn to Ephesians 4 (page 948 in the pew Bibles). In this chapter the apostle Paul is writing about the unity of the church, the gifted people God gives to the church, spiritual gifts in the church, and how the church fulfills its purpose through believers working together. God plans and works this way, verse 13, “until we all attain to the unity in the faith,” or “unity of the faith.”¹¹ One of the blessings of glorifying God together with a balanced life of worship, teaching, caring and outreach is unity in the faith, unity in our God-given diversity. When churches go through periods where unity is hard to find and disharmony and conflict cannot be avoided, you can be sure that the balance of glorifying God through worship, teaching, caring and outreach has been lost at some significant points. There is no exception.

Then, a second example of God’s blessing is maturity and stability. Still here in Ephesians 4, look at verse 13 again. Follow along as this time I read from the English Standard Version.

“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” (13-16).

We don’t hear about Rickets that often here in Canada. It is a disorder in children caused by a lack of vitamin D which causes bones to soften, fracture and be deformed. Normal maturing and stability requires vitamin D.

The spiritual picture in Ephesians 4 is clear, isn’t it. We need a balanced life of worship, teaching, caring and outreach to glorify God and also to receive the blessing of growing into maturity and stability.

Conclusion.

Let me ask a question. Of those four areas—worship, teaching, caring and outreach—which do you think is the most unbalanced in the North American evangelical church, and perhaps ours? (Responses). There are a number of tools that are used to help churches evaluate where they are and how to move forward. They sometimes asks questions about what people think are their greatest needs. One that is at the top in most of the survey results that I have seen is caring or loving relationships. But let me submit that objectively the greatest need in almost every evangelical church in North America is outreach, reaching people with the good news of Christ.

Another question: what percentage of people in High Level do you think are in church this morning? (Responses). Perhaps, if counting in town only, 20%, or the broader area, 10%. God wants us to be balanced. He does not want us to sell out to the current trends and weaken our teaching or worship. He doesn't want us to sell out to the "What's in it for me mentality and weaken our caring our outreach. The point is not to keep statistics and have 25% – 25% – 25% – 25%. God calls us to catch the wave and have balance in these four areas in our individual and church life.

Look at the sermon outline page that is in your bulletin. On the bottom of the outline I've given you a summary statement of God's purpose for the church. The church's purpose is "to glorify God through a Biblically balanced life of worship, teaching, caring and outreach, leading to maturity and unity in Christ." Read it out loud together with me. The church's purpose is "to glorify God through a Biblically balanced life of worship, teaching, caring and outreach, leading to maturity and unity in Christ."

Are we determined to catch this wave? God works through His chosen ways. He uses, blesses, and honors those who truly follow Him, who catch the wave of His truth. Think about this in the next quiet moments. Ask yourself: "Is God's purpose for the church, for me, *my* mission, our mission, really?" Don't rush to say Yes because you want it to be your mission, but it really isn't at this point. Start the process of making God's purpose your mission, and in doing that help make it our church's mission. Decide to keep on evaluating, affirming that daily. The needs and opportunities are great. We all want God's blessing on our church. Determine to catch and keep riding this first essential wave and do to your part in helping our church fulfill our mission. Let's bow our heads and do that now.

¹ Rick Warren. *The Purpose Driven Church*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1995, pages 13-17.

² 1 Corinthians 10:31.

³ Romans 15:5-6.

⁴ Psalm 96:7-8.

⁵ Acts 2:42.

⁶ Matthew 28:20.

⁷ Joe Woodward. "Every man his own church." *Alberta Report*. June 10, 1996, page 35.

⁸ "Most Twentysomethings Put Christianity on the Shelf Following Spiritually Active Teen Years."

Ventura, Ca: Barna Group. <<http://www.barna.org/teens-next-gen-articles/147-most-twentysomethings-put-christianity-on-the-shelffollowing-spiritually-active-teen-eyars>>. 11 September 2006. Accessed 02 April 2013.

⁹ "New Research Explores How Different Generations View and Use the Bible." Ventura, Ca: Barna Group. <<http://www.barna.org/barna-update/article/12-faithspirituality/317-new-research-explores-how-different-generations-view-and-use-the-bible>>. 19 October 2009. Accessed 02 April 2013.

¹⁰ Matthew 28:19-20.

¹¹ εἰς τὴν τῆς πίστεως. "in the faith" (NIV); "of the faith" (NASB, ESV).

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