

# THE CHURCH:

## IDENTITY, MISSION, & CULTIVATION

### INTRODUCTION

#### Opening question:

Why does the church exist? And how does the church do that?

*How you answer those two questions shows your understanding of the mission of the church!*

#### Opening illustration: Soccer practice – What’s the point?

#### **Course objective:**

- To explain what our mission as a church is.
- And to show how everything we do as a church does (or at least should) fit into that mission.

We often think of mission as one activity among many that the church does, rather than the thing that brings it all together.

With that, one of my goals in this course is to show you that mission is not one activity among many that the church does, but that it is the all-encompassing purpose of the church.

#### **Course outline:**

- Identity & Mission – week 1.
- Cultivation – weeks 2-4.

#### **Objection:** Is everything we do *really* about mission?

- The question isn’t, “Is everything we do really about mission?” but rather, “Is our mission the right one?”

Every church has a mission – a reason why they do what they do – whether they know it or not; whether it’s intentional or not; whether its stated or unstated. So the proper question isn’t, “Is everything we do *really* about mission?” but, “What is our mission?” and “Is it the right one?”

What I mean is this – everything we do is inevitably aimed at something (some sort of mission; some sort of purpose. We do things for a reason. They may not be the right reason; we might not be fully aware of our reasons; but there’s still a reason for why what we do.

So, again, the question isn't, "Is everything we do *really* about mission?" but "Is our mission the right one?" (i.e., Is it what the Bible says our mission is suppose to be?)

- "Mission" ≠ evangelism. Our mission includes evangelism, but it is also bigger than evangelism.

Some people may be put off when I say, "Everything is about mission," because when they hear "mission" they think "evangelism." But they're aware that as a church we're called to do much more than just evangelize. We *are* called to evangelize. But we're also called to build up believers after they come to faith in Christ.

As we'll see, the church's mission includes both these things.

And so, when I talk about "mission" in this course, I don't just mean the church's task of evangelism. I'm referring to the church's mission in its broadest sense.

At the same time, we shouldn't hear this as an excuse to view evangelism as something optional or marginal to the church's mission (e.g., "We're an edification- or discipleship-focused church, not an evangelistic-focused church"). No, our mission is *more* than just evangelism; but it's certainly not *less*. A church that fails to engage in evangelism is a church that fails to fulfill its mission. It is a church that is disobedient to Christ's call.

**Significance:** So what? Why does this matter?

- It focuses and provides a "rudder" for our ministry decisions.

We're specifically thinking of our church leadership here – elders, pastors.

Knowing why we exist as a church and what we've been called to do ought to shape what we choose to do as a church and how we choose to do it. This mindset ("philosophy") serves as a "rudder" for our ministry decisions.

- It enables us to be intentional and deliberate. [In other words, even as members,] we know what our mission is, and why we do what we do.

There are many things we do as a church – a lot of things that make up our church life. Or again, we often times we conceive of these church practices in terms of certain "core values" we wish to embody (e.g., community, prayer, worship, gospel-centered, Biblically-grounded teaching, outreach, etc.) These are all things that we do, and things that we value.

But have we ever thought to ourselves, "Why do we value these things?" Or, "Why do we do the things that we do?" How often do we consider how these "values" or practices fit into and serve the larger purpose of our church (i.e., our mission)?

If we lose sight of how our “values” and practices fit into and serve our overall purpose as a church (i.e., our mission), their purpose becomes lost to us. Divorced from their proper aim, they can become aimless (we do them “just because”), short-sighted (we treat them as ends in themselves), or even distorted (serving the wrong ends).

- It helps us not to lose perspective.

One of the byproducts of this mindset is that it enables healthy assessment. It helps us evaluate our current church practices, identifying and letting go of “ministry relics” – things we do that once worked well but no longer serve their purpose.

All too often, we hold onto our practices far too tightly. We don’t like change. We become comfortable with things. They become traditions. “It’s the way we’ve always done things.” But we must remember, our church does not exist for the sake of these practices/traditions. Rather, these practices exist to serve our mission. If they no longer serve our mission, we adapt them.

Viewing things in terms of our mission helps us avoid “sacred cows.” We avoid disrupting our unity over things that don’t really matter.

- It corrects false conceptions we may have about the church.

There are a lot of misconceptions about the church. Sometimes we think of the church as a social club; it’s a place to build friendships. Or we think about church like a mall. We are consumers and the church provides us a certain service to improve the quality of our lives.

I think it’d be more accurate to think of the church like a M.A.S.H. unit (a “Mobile Army Surgical Hospital”). We are on mission. We are on the frontlines of a battle field. When we come together as a church, we come together to equipped and sent back on mission.

Understanding the mission-orientation of our church corrects misconceptions we have about the church.

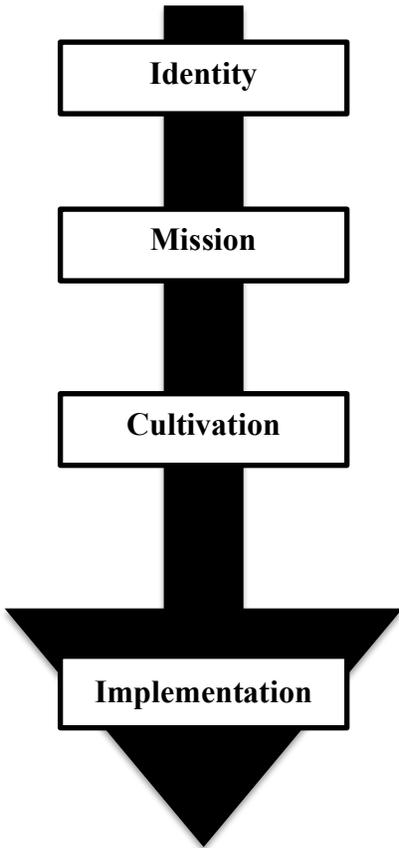
- It keeps our focus on mission.

Have you ever walked to a room with the intention of doing something; and then as soon as you get there you forgot why you went there in the first place? We get side tracked. We forget what we set out to do.

We can do something similar in the church: We’ve been given a mission from our Savior. But in the midst of the hustle and bustle, we forgot what we’ve been called to do. We settle into a routine and we forget why we do what we do – what’s the point of what we’re doing?

Understanding the mission-orientation and –aim of our “church life” keeps the mission in our crosshairs.

## “MINISTRY MAP”



We begin with what God has done and who we are as a result of it. Out of this identity (who we are) flows our mission (why we exist).

Because of who we are (our identity), this is what we are called to do. This is our mission, our purpose—why we exist as an organized community.

These are the principles we believe scripture identifies as those things that build up and equip our community for its mission. As such, these serve as our ministry values. They are vital for our church’s health and the fulfillment of its mission.

This is how we put those ministry values into practice in our specific church context. When you experience “life as CrossWay,” this is what you see. But these are not accidental activities, structures, and programs. These are intentional practices, built on our values, which seek to build up our church towards health and mission. In this way, everything we do is oriented towards our mission.

## IDENTITY

Our mission is born out of our identity—who we are. And this is who we are:

We are a local church. We are a local expression of that larger people that God has rescued through the saving work of his Son, Jesus Christ.

But we do not exist for ourselves. Out of this identify (who we are, more specifically, who God has made us to be through the Gospel) flows our mission (why we exist; what we are called to do). We have been saved in order that we may in turn become ambassadors of the very same message by which we ourselves have been saved. In other words, as a church, we are not merely the product and recipient of the Gospel, but we are now also its God-appointed agent—the vehicle through which he announces his message of reconciliation to the world around us.

2 Corinthians 5:18-20 -

- How does Paul describe us in these verses (our identity)?
- How does our identity (who God has made us) shape what we are called to do (mission)?

## MISSION

Because of what God has done and who God has made us to be as a result of it (our identify), this is what we are called to do—our mission, our assignment from our Lord and Savior. This is why we exist as a community.

**Mission:** *To glorify God by advancing the gospel, which transforms people into fully devoted followers of Jesus.*

- ***“To glorify God”***

The church was created and exists for the glory of God—to display his wisdom, make known his worth, unveil his beauty, and spread a passion for his greatness.

Eph 3:10-11

- ***“Into fully devoted followers of Jesus”***

The church glorifies God primarily by fulfilling its commission to make disciples—seeing people transformed into fully devoted followers of Jesus Christ.

Matthew 28:18-20

- ***“By advancing a Gospel that transforms people”***

Finally, the church fulfills this commission to make disciples through the Gospel—the only message that is powerful to save and transform people into fully devoted followers of Jesus.

Romans 1:16

**Scripture:** Look up the following sets of passages. According to these verses, what is our mission as a church?

- Matthew 28:18-20
- Luke 24:46-49 and Acts 1:8
- John 17:18 and 20:21

**Practices:** Now this should actually be the mission of all Christians and any truly Christian organization. However, the church fulfills this mission through the following things that distinctively set apart the church as a “church.”

- Organization and government – Maintaining and practicing healthy and Biblical church membership and governance.<sup>1</sup>
- The ministry of the word – Ministering God’s word, especially the Gospel, to one another.<sup>2</sup>
- The ordinances – Faithfully administering Baptism and the Lord’s Supper.<sup>3</sup>
- Corporate worship – Regularly assembling together to read scripture, hear it expounded, practice the ordinances, pray, confess our faith, and collectively respond to God through song.<sup>4</sup>
- Prayer – Communing and communicating with God.<sup>5</sup>
- Community – Engaging in intentional relationships of accountability, mentorship, and companionship.<sup>6</sup>
- Edification – Using our various gifts for the sake of each other’s encouragement and maturation.<sup>7</sup>
- Church discipline – Protecting one another by not tolerating unrepentant sin.<sup>8</sup>
- Multiplication – Actively engaging in evangelism and mission (multiplying disciples), church planting (multiplying churches), and the identifying and raising up leaders (multiplying leaders).<sup>9</sup>
- Giving – Giving financially and materially for the sake of others and the spread of the Gospel.<sup>10</sup>
- Social concern – Serving and engaging the needs of our church and communities.<sup>11</sup>
- Partnership – Appropriately partnering with other churches and Christian organizations in order to increase our ability to fulfill our mission.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Mt 18:15-17; Acts 2:47; 5:14; 6:3-6; 14:23; 1 Cor 5:3-5, 13; 6:1-5; 2 Cor 2:6; 8:19; Eph 4:11-12; 1 Thes 5:12; 1 Tim 3:1-13; 5:9, 17; 2 Tim 4:2; Tit 1:5-9; Heb 13:7, 17; Js 5:14; 1 Pet 5:2-3.

<sup>2</sup> Rom 15:14; Eph 4:15; Acts 2:42; 20:20; 1 Tim 4:13; 2 Tim 3:15-4:2.

<sup>3</sup> Acts 2:38, 41-42; 8:12, 36-38; 9:18; 10:47-48; 16:15, 33; 18:8; 19:5; 20:7; 22:16; Rom 6:3-4; 1 Cor 1:13-17; 10:14-22; 11:17-34; Gal 3:27; Eph 4:5; Col 2:12; 1 Pet 3:21.

<sup>4</sup> Acts 2:42; 20:7, 20; Rom 4:25; 1 Cor 5:4, 11; 11:17-18, 20, 33; 14:23; 15:1-4; 16:2; Eph 5:19-20; Phil 2:5-11; Col 1:15-20; 3:15-16; 4:16; 1 Cor 14:14-17, 26-33; 1 Tim 2:1-2; 3:16; 4:13; 6:12; 2 Tim 2:11-13; 3:15-4:2; 1 Thes 5:27; Heb 10:25; Js 5:16.

<sup>5</sup> Acts 2:42; 20:20; 1 Cor 14:14-15; 1 Tim 2:1-2.

<sup>6</sup> Rom 12:10, 13, 15; 1 Cor 12:26; Gal 6:1-2; Eph 4:2; Heb 3:12-13; 10:25; 12:15-16; Js 5:19; 1 Pet 1:22; 1 Jn 3:18.

<sup>7</sup> Mt 28:19; Rom 12:6-8; 15:14; 1 Cor 12:7; 14:12, 26; Gal 6:1-2; Eph 4:11-16; Col 2:19; 1 Thes 5:11, 14; Heb 10:24; 12:15; 1 Pet 4:10-11; Jude 20.

<sup>8</sup> Mt 18:15-20; 1 Cor 5:1-13; 2 Cor 2:5-11; Gal 6:1-2; 1 Tim 5:19-21; 2 Thes 3:14-15; Js 5:19-20.

<sup>9</sup> Mt 28:19-20; Lk 24:47-48; Jn 17:18; 20:21; Acts 1:8; 14:23; Rom 10:14-17; 2 Cor 5:18-20; Col 4:2-6; 1 Thes 1:8; 2 Tim 2:2; Tit 1:5; 1 Pet 3:15.

<sup>10</sup> Acts 2:44-45; 4:32-37; Rom 12:13; 15:25, 31; 1 Cor 16:1-4; 2 Cor 8-9; Gal 6:9-10; Phil 4:18; 1 Tim 6:17-19; Heb 13:16.

<sup>11</sup> Gen 1:26-27; Lev 19:15; Deut 15:11; Prov 19:7; 31:8-9; Isa 58:6-12; Jer 22:3, 13-17; Ezek 16:49-50; 22:29; Amos 5:11-15, 24; Mic 6:8; Zech 7:9-10; Mt 7:12; 22:39; 25:31-46; Mk 12:31; Lk 4:18-19; Gal 2:10; Js 1:27; 1 Jn 3:17-18.

<sup>12</sup> Acts 15:1-35; 1 Cor 16:1-4, 10-11; 2 Cor 8-9; Phil 1:15-18; Col 4:16; 3 Jn 5-10.