

## **Announcements**

1. Distance Learning—Kids back in school
2. Paint job—carpet, and more
3. Annual Meeting
  1. Potluck
  2. Member to vote

## **Mission Minded: Connect**

### **Ephesians 2:19**

We are in our second week of being Mission Minded. As I stated last week, I firmly believe that we are to be mission minded in our approach to our personal faith, mission minded in regards to the growth of other people's faith that are in the church, and mission minded in reaching people that do not believe that Jesus is the only way for salvation.

I gave you this definition, if you will, for being mission minded as followers of Christ: to be intentional in our lives to represent Christ. Being 'mission minded' is not what happens when we reach maturity in Christ, but is what happens to reach maturity in Christ. We are intentional in our faith.

One of the great goals of the church, I am speaking of the believers in Christ, is to be ambassadors. 2 Corinthians 5:18-20 says, "And all of this is a gift from God, who brought us back to himself through Christ. And God has given us this task of reconciling people to him. For God was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself, no longer counting people's sins against them. And he gave us this wonderful message of reconciliation. So we are Christ's ambassadors; God is making his appeal through us. We speak for Christ when we plead, "Come back to God!"

As believers, as the church of Christ, we are first to bring the story of salvation to mankind. We are to unmask false gospels that are being portrayed in the world by bringing the real gospel, the Truth. We want people to be connected to the Truth. And, the Truth is the only thing that can connect us to God.

What do I mean by the Truth? Jesus said He is the Truth. He defines His essence as the Truth. John 1:1 says He is the Word. 2 Timothy 3:16 says

“All scripture is God breathed.” In other words, Scripture, the Bible is God’s revelation to man. It is from God, it came from God, and it has been directed by God to reveal the Truth that God has for us. Scripture connects us to God and what He has for us and wants for us.

The second aspect of being ‘mission minded’ as followers of Christ is the aspect of maturing in the Lord. [This is the CONNECT, EQUIP, GO part of the funnel]. It’s a personal mission, but it is also community mission for the body of Christ. Ephesians 4:12-13 says, “Their responsibility is to equip God’s people to do his work and build up the church, the body of Christ. This will continue until we all come to such unity in our faith and knowledge of God’s Son that we will be mature in the Lord, measuring up to the full and complete standard of Christ.” Until we *all* come to such unity in *our* faith.

Maturing in Christ is something that happens together. It is something that is more than just a personal venture in faith. Our growth in our faith is personal, don’t get me wrong. It is a relationship with Christ where His Spirit interacts with me in my daily affairs that are unique to me. But, my faith isn’t just for me to keep to myself. It is a joint venture with other people. It is a process of growing alongside others that are less mature and more mature.

This second level of maturing in faith is about connecting people to the things of God. The first level, we talked about last week, is about people that have not received the salvation that Christ gave His life for. They are people who do not have anything to do with God. They may believe there is a God that exists, or they may believe there is no God and we just exist, but they are people outside the church and disconnected from the things of God. Science, moralism, other gods, or some other thing is what dictates their life, not the God of the Bible. For them, the first step of maturity is connected to our sharing the story of God as ambassadors of Christ and the Spirit of God working in them. This week we are talking about people that have at least some connection to the things of God, there is some interest, and the Spirit seems to be working in them.

They may still not know Christ at all, or they may know a little about Christ, but there is interest. There is an openness towards the belief of God. There is openness to conversation. There is an openness to your testimony. There is an openness to the things of Scripture. There is an

openness to the church and what the church does. There is a receptive mentality towards faith and not a hostility towards it. But, to draw a line between the 'REACH' part of the process and the 'CONNECT' part of the process is the people of the 'CONNECT' part have moved from just a talk of interest in the things of the church, but are stepping into the things of the church. In other words, they are coming or have come and been present to the things of the church.

By the way, when I speak of the church, I am speaking of people coming together, in one location, but for the purposes of God. You are here, in this location today, and we are doing the things of God. Glide Baptist is the location that the things of the church are happening. And, many of you have called this church home. This is the church that you have committed to. Maybe its a work project somewhere else, maybe its a Bible study group at someone's home, but the base it comes from is Glide Baptist. Things of the church are happening, but in a different location, under the umbrella of Glide Baptist, but for the purposes of God.

After people have been reached out to outside of the church, and have began to connect with the things of the church, the hope is they will move towards the EQUIP'ping stage. But they must go through the CONNECT'ing stage.

This CONNECT'ing stage of the faith process is still wrapped around what God is going to do for me. This stage is filled with more of a receiving mentality, where the EQUIP'ping stage is more of a servanthood mentality. Those in the CONNECT'ing stage are dictated more by questions like: What do I get out of it? What does the church do for me? Why do I need to be connected to the body of Christ? Their giving and their serving will have strings attached. I give and I serve so I have ownership and clout. The mindset is more consumeristic and 'my' church instead of surrender to what God wants to do. The mindset of a person in this stage is usually still heavily influenced by the things of this world and the patterns of this world instead of being an influencing force upon the world for the things of Christ.

I would like to stop here for a minute and mention, this isn't about hierarchy or meant to be demeaning. Ephesians 2:19 says, "So now you Gentiles are no longer strangers and foreigners. You are citizens along with all of God's holy people. You are members of God's family." Members of

God's family. God is the hierarchy. We have a place in the family, but it is under the head of the family, and that is God the Son, Jesus. This is about natural growth process. Our faith journey is very much similar to a baby being born and the process of that child growing up. Peter mentions this in his letter to the early church. 1 Peter 2:2-3 says, "Like newborn babies, you must crave pure spiritual milk so that you will grow into a full experience of salvation." Paul says it like this in 1 Corinthians 3:1 and 2, "Dear brothers and sisters, when I was with you I couldn't talk to you as I would to spiritual people. I had to talk as though you belonged to this world or as though you were infants in Christ. I had to feed you with milk, not with solid food, because you weren't ready for anything stronger."

This CONNECT stage is that early stage in the maturing process of faith. It's a stage that doesn't understand the deeper things of faith, and we shouldn't expect them to understand the deeper things of faith until they are ready for it.

One of the great tragedies of the church is we have expected too much from newborn babes and those young in the Lord. And, we have given too much responsibility to those young in their faith without proper training, support, and boundaries. One of the ways this plays out is people that feel judged and then turn away from the church because of hurt feelings, unmet expectations placed upon them, shame and guilt from failure, unreconcilable differences, or could be ungodly pride because of too much power too soon. Another way this plays out is people that do good works for the sake of looking good before others instead of it being an act of humble worship before a gracious God. The church then becomes filled with prideful people who think they have arrived in their faith and miss the darkness still hidden in their heart.

What I am not saying is 'there should be no accountability in the church'. I am definitely not saying that. I am also not saying that we coddle people who are young in the Lord so much that we stunt the process of maturing. What I am saying is that we need to be gracious with the Truth. We need to be cognizant of others. We need to do more than know of the people we are ministering to and walking life with. Instead, we should seek to know them personally so we can have an understanding of where they are in their faith so that we can be an encouragement instead of a hindrance. This takes humility and submission. Ephesians 5:20 says, "And further, submit to one another out of reverence for Christ." Paul's point is to put

yourself in a position for another person to grow. Seek what is best for the other person. But catch the last part, “out of reverence for Christ”. So, it isn’t about what you believe is best for that person and how they should live or even how they should respond to you, but it is centered and based upon Christ.

For a church of seasoned church goers that have a way of doing church, if you will, this is a hard stage to do church with. Because it takes effort and energy physically, emotionally, and spiritually to walk the journey of faith with. This is where holding to traditions too strongly can actually turn the seeker away from church and possibly God, but build bitterness in your heart.

Oftentimes, when you get those who are seeking or immature believers in the Lord you will get people who don’t have a good filter. They may live like the world and sometimes act like the world inside the walls of a church. Remember, we live in a different time. Reverence and respect for the institution of the church is no longer a thing. Pour out grace, but live in truth. Show love, give mercy, but stand on the tenants of Scripture. Allow room for failure, but have the stethoscope ready so they can be nursed back to health. Put feet to 1 Corinthians 13, “Love is patient and kind. Love is not jealous or boastful or proud or rude. It does not demand its own way. It is not irritable, and it keeps no record of being wronged. It does not rejoice about injustice but rejoices whenever the truth wins out. Love never gives up, never loses faith, is always hopeful, and endures through every circumstance.” Be the example of what that looks like.

Unreachable and untimely expectations can also be killers for a CONNECT’or. We cannot expect someone to live beyond their maturity, only to grow in it. The writer of Hebrews gives some great input at the end of chapter 5. “For someone who lives on milk is still an infant and doesn’t know how to do what is right. Solid food is for those who are mature, who through training have the skill to recognize the difference between right and wrong.” Likewise, chapter 6 tells us not to coddle people in their faith, “So let us stop going over the basic teachings about Christ again and again. Let us go on instead and become mature in our understanding. Surely we don’t need to start again with the fundamental importance of repenting from evil deeds and placing our faith in God. You don’t need further instruction about baptisms, the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment. And so, God willing, we will move

forward to further understanding.” That is the hope; that we will all move forward to further understanding. We will move from not knowing Christ, to be babies in Christ, to adolescences in Christ, to young adults in Christ, to seasoned adults in Christ.

Also, understand that our culture no longer is built upon giving another person respect because of age or position. That is out the window. We live in a culture that now gives respect only for gain or when it is earned. Unless it is taught in the home from a very early age and modeled, most people today don't know how to give respect. Some of that reason is because respect and trust are tied heavily together. You can't trust anyone, especially an organization in today's culture. And the church is no different. There have been too many scandals by leadership and too many church goers that pretend to be Christ-like and expect others to be Christ-like, but away from church do as they please.

It's, by the way, not about living a perfect life, but being humble enough to lay your sin before God and listen to His Spirit as He convicts you of your sin. It's about throwing off that old self, AND putting on the new self by meditating upon God's Word. As you do this, people will see God at work in you and then what you 'preach' in word and deed now gives room for trust and respect to grow. So part of helping people CONNECT to the church, and even God, is by living in such a way and talking in a such a way you earn trust so that what you bring can be respected. Titus 2:7-8 says it well, “ And you yourself must be an example to them by doing good works of every kind. Let everything you do reflect the integrity and seriousness of your teaching. Teach [or live out] the truth so that you're teaching can't be criticized. Then those who oppose us will be ashamed and have nothing bad to say about us.”

So what am I getting at? Helping people to CONNECT to the things of God and to the church takes work. It takes us stepping back and understanding where they are coming from, so we can help them move forward. It takes us getting out of the church and meeting them where they are at and helping them to walk into the church and be the church also.

Hebrews 10:24-25 gives us some more input, “Let us think of ways to motivate one another to acts of love and good works. And let us not

neglect our meeting together, as some people do, but encourage one another, especially now that the day of his return is drawing near.”

It's important to remember this is a process. It's important to remember we haven't all arrived in our faith. It's important to remember we can learn from one another. But, it's important to remember that what we teach isn't self taught moralism or being a good person, but we teach what God taught.

So how do we practically help people to connect to the things of God or the church. Get in their shoes. Remember what it was like when you first came to church and what helped you. Ask the questions of “What got your attention? How did you feel when you first walked into a new setting? What make you comfortable? What helped you to feel accepted? When the old people talked to you, what about their tone turned you off? When they spoke to you, what about their life caused you to not just listen, but hear what they were saying to the point where you were willing to implement it in your life? What was it that drew you to certain activities?

Realize we all are on the journey of faith. Realize the culture has changed. Realize trust and respect are not necessarily given, but it is earned in order to be heard.