

HOW TO GET AND KEEP A MISSIONAL MINDSET GENESIS 12:1-3; JOHN 3:16-17

We've been reviewing our mission and vision as a congregation. Two weeks ago, I spoke to you about God Himself being a missionary. I want to thank our Long Range Planning Ministry Team for helping us to see last week how God is already starting to do in and through us what we hope and pray He will continue to do in the months and years ahead. Today I want to share with you what I believe is essential in getting and keeping a missional mindset as a group of God's people doing mission together in the Northland community of Columbus, Ohio in the early years of the 21st century. As we get started today, I want us to recite together our church's mission statement as a way to familiarize ourselves with it yet again: "We seek to glorify God by building a family of believers passionate about Him where people are loved the way they are, urged to become more like Christ and equipped to share Christ in word and deed."

A word about words.... What does the word "mission" itself mean? Well, a mission is something that has a long term purpose or goal that's achieved through planned actions. A person can have a mission. A business can have a mission. A church can have a mission. The Bible reveals to us that God Himself has a mission. Very briefly, God's mission is to restore and redeem this broken, sinful world and its peoples to Himself. That's God's long term purpose or goal that He is achieving through His own plans and actions.

Now in talking about God's mission today, I've decided to use the word "missional" instead of "missionary". The word "missionary" is a perfectly good word. But words evoke images, and the word "missionary" often brings up the image of white, Westerners going overseas to share the Gospel with darker skinned natives of other countries. There's nothing wrong with that except that it can be unintentionally limiting. The word "missionary" has come to symbolize to many Christians a specific group of people who are called by God to cross an ocean and to engage in cross cultural mission activities. For instance, Kim Brown is one of our church's missionaries. She's been helping to fulfill God's mission in Thailand for over 25 years. So you happily pray for Kim Brown, the missionary, and you gladly give money to support Kim Brown, the missionary, but you may be reluctant to think of yourself as being a missionary like Kim Brown.

I believe every Christian is, by definition, a missionary, but the very fact I have to explain what I mean indicates that the word "missionary" can be limiting. The word "missional" appeared about 10-15 years ago. It denotes something that is related to or characterized by God's mission or has the qualities or dynamics of this thing we call God's mission. It can apply to anything having to do with God's mission or anyone engaged in God's mission. So both Kim Brown and you can be missional. In reality, there's probably not a dime's worth of difference between the words "missionary" and "missional", but if by using the word

“missional” we see more quickly that mission applies to every follower of Jesus and not just professional missionaries like Kim Brown, then well and good!

The way you look at life – your mindset - should be missional. In other words, it should be influenced by God’s mission. Your view of the world – your mindset - should be dominated by God’s mission. By the same token, the way we do church at Karl Road Baptist - our congregational mindset, so to speak – must be increasingly missional. It must be all about God’s mission or we lose any reason to exist. I’d like to share four key concepts that help me get and keep a missional mindset as your pastor. My hope is that they will also help you get and keep a missional mindset as an important participant in our church’s mission.

CONCEPT #1: GOD IS A MISSIONAL GOD.

This was my whole message back on February 5. But I remind you of it again today, because this concept is absolutely essential to getting and keeping a missional mindset. It all goes back to who God is and what He wants to do: His mission. I presented the idea that mission is not just something that God does but also something that God is. In other words, mission is intrinsic to God’s very nature and character. Mission is an attribute of God just as much as holiness, love, omniscience or omnipotence. I focused on the idea of sending or being sent as it applies to mission. Therefore, we considered how the Bible reveals that God sends Himself first and foremost. God doesn’t expect human beings to find their way to Him. No, He took the initiative and sent Himself.

You can see this in the Bible as early as Genesis 12:1-3. This is God’s call to a man by the name of Abraham. It’s in that last phrase “... and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you” that we see the first glimpse of God’s mission. God wants to bless, restore and redeem all humanity and He has a plan to do it. Abraham was the father of the nation of Israel which was called by God to be a spiritual light to all the other nations of the world. Then God sent Himself primarily through His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. Here’s just one passage that underlines that central truth: John 3:16-17. There’s God mission in a nutshell. Then God sent Himself in a different but powerful way by sending the Holy Spirit shortly after Jesus’ resurrection.

That led to yet another way God sends Himself. Through the Holy Spirit, God gave birth to this entity we call the Church: this group of people past, present and future who have put their trust in Jesus for salvation. God sends Himself again by sending His Church into every corner of the world, into every country, into every people group, into every city, into every neighborhood and into every family. Because God planted Karl Road Baptist Church in the Northland area of Columbus, Ohio we can say emphatically that God has sent our church into Northland. Our church is to be one of His instruments to bring men, women, boys and girls who live in this community of Northland into a restored and redeemed relationship with Himself.

Now, if that's not our main reason for existence, we're in big trouble! We had better be missional as a church or we don't have any good reason to be here. The fact is that God wants to send Himself into the Northland community through us as individuals and a gathered people. If our church ever de-emphasizes this defining characteristic, we will cease to be the church God called us to be. Mission isn't just a program of our church. Mission must define our entire church as God's sent people. So you could say that our challenge today is to move from a mindset where we are a church with a missions program to being a missional church in everything we do. We need missional Sunday School classes, missional small groups, missional children's and youth ministry, missional music ministry, missional budgeting, missional governing and missional leadership. The last point I made two weeks ago was that God sends you and me. That's leads to a second key concept in getting and keeping a missional mindset.

CONCEPT #2: GOD'S MOST POWERFUL MISSIONAL TOOL IS THE HOLY SPIRIT IN YOU.

God calls and sends people personally and individually. Consider these words of Jesus just before He ascended back to Heaven. "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you. And you will be my witnesses, telling people about me everywhere—in Jerusalem, throughout Judea, in Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." (Acts 1:8 NLT) Two weeks ago I shared with you that 75-90% of people who visit a church for the first time or receive Jesus as Savior, do so because of the invitation of a friend or family member. The Holy Spirit in you is God's most powerful tool to bring other people into a saving relationship with Jesus Christ. In my Doctor of Ministry studies, I was recently reminded of this truth by two amazing historical examples.

How many Christians do you think there were at the end of the first century? Jesus died and rose again around the year 30 and the first followers of Jesus shared the good news about Him after that. How many people had become Christians by 100 A.D? Scholars estimate that it was around 25,000. Now, how many Christians do you think there were about 200 years later in 313 A.D. when the Roman Emperor Constantine gave Christians the right to practice their faith without persecution? Scholars estimate that it was around 20 million. How did those early Christians do it? How did they grow from being a small movement to the most significant religious force in the Roman Empire in two centuries?

Consider the incredible obstacles they faced. One, Christianity was an illegal religion throughout this period. At best, Christians were tolerated. At worst, they were persecuted and killed for their faith. Two, they didn't have any church buildings as we know them. Most worship places were converted homes. Three, they didn't have the Bible as we know it. They had the Old Testament, yes, but the New Testament was being put together during those years. Four, they didn't have an organized institution or a professional form of leadership. There was no

central Christian organization or ordained pastors with seminary degrees. Five, they lacked what we think is essential for church growth. They didn't have seeker-sensitive services, youth groups, children's programs, worship bands, choirs, seminaries, commentaries or Christian media. Finally, they actually made it hard to join the church. By the late 200s you had to undergo a significant initiation period before you could be baptized and join the church. And yet they grew from 25,000 to 20 million in some 200 years. How did they do it?

Fast forward with me now to the middle of the 20th century – the 1900s. How many Christians do you think there were in China when Mao Tse-tung took power in 1949 and began a purge of all religions in Chinese society? Scholars estimate that there were then about 2 million Chinese believers. Mao banished all foreign missionaries, nationalized all church property, killed or imprisoned all senior Christian leaders and banned all public meetings of Christians. He perpetrated one of the cruelest persecutions of Christians in history. How many Christians do you think there were in China in 2004 – less than 60 years later? Conservative estimates put the number of Chinese Christians at 80 million. Amazing! And yet they faced most of the same obstacles that Christians faced in the Roman Empire centuries before. Christianity was illegal. No church buildings. No easy access to the Bible. No central, organized church and either dead or imprisoned church leaders. They lacked everything that we think is essential for church growth: seeker-sensitive services, youth groups, children's programs, worship bands, choirs, seminaries, commentaries and Christian media. And, just like the early Church, it was difficult to become a trusted member in the Chinese Church. And yet the Chinese Church grew from 2 million to 80 million in less than 60 years. How did they do it?

Both historical periods point to the same fact: ordinary, everyday, untrained followers of Christ filled with the Holy Spirit shared the Gospel with family and friends. There really is no other possible explanation. No gimmicks, just personal relationships infiltrated and used by the Holy Spirit. No reliance upon techniques or technology, just the Holy Spirit flowing through sinful, forgiven human beings to other sinful human beings needing forgiveness. No trusting in all the stuff we think is so essential to bring people to Christ, just one to one transference of spiritual life. Now, I believe we have been given the same Holy Spirit that the first Christians received. I believe that when we trusted Jesus as Savior, the same Holy Spirit that fills Chinese Christians fills us. So, what's the problem? Why don't we see the same explosive growth in conversions in the United States as they did? I'm sure there are many explanations. But here's part of the answer: we've forgotten that the Holy Spirit in us is God's most powerful missional tool. Maybe we've never learned that truth. Or we've never practiced it in every day life, or tried it or asked God to help us do it. Or we got rejected when we tried so we stopped. God's methods stay the same and His most powerful tool to accomplish His mission to bring men, women, boys and girls to Himself is the Holy Spirit in you.

What does that mean for us here at Karl Road Baptist Church? One example. This past week our Long Range Planning Team met and we had a long discussion about how God is bringing children from the Northland community into our building in a variety of ways. Most of these kids have tremendous physical, emotional and spiritual needs that far outstrip our resources. Most of them have little to no knowledge of the Bible or who Jesus is or what He's done for them. We agreed that somehow we've got to find ways to build relationships to and with these precious children and, hopefully, their families as well. You're probably going to hear more about all of that in the weeks and months to come as we seek God's guidance on how to do that. But I can tell you in advance that part of its going to be providing avenues for you to connect with community kids who come to us and developing relationships with them. It all comes back to this central truth, doesn't it? God's most powerful missional tool is the Holy Spirit in you and me. God is sending you into your work place. God is sending you into your school. God is sending you into your neighborhood. God is sending you into your family. And God is sending our church into Northland. Do you want to be sent? Are you letting God use you? Now here's a third concept that can help us get and keep a missional mindset.

CONCEPT #3: GET AND STAY OUTWARDLY FOCUSED.

Jesus made this statement to His disciples after His resurrection. "... 'Go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Teach these new disciples to obey all the commands I have given you. And be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age.'" (Mt 28:19-20 NLT) We face two big problems in helping God fulfill His mission to the Northland community. First, the default setting of most local churches is to focus inwardly on programs and events that cater to the needs of its participants rather than those outside the congregation. Sometimes it feels like the real mission of the church is just to maintain the organization or the building. That was never Jesus' intention. Our primary aim can never be just to perpetuate Karl Road Baptist Church as an institution, but instead to follow Jesus into his mission into Northland and the rest of the world.

Here's the second problem. Lost people in the Northland community, by and large, could care less if we're here. American culture is becoming increasingly pagan and views the Church of Jesus Christ as less and less relevant every day. Friends, we are now facing in the United States what many missionaries faced when they left these shores to share the Gospel with people and cultures who had never heard of Jesus or the Bible. There are growing numbers of people who have no interest in even visiting a local church much less becoming involved in its life and ministry. We continue to believe in the myth that non-Christians are vitally interested in what kind of music we're doing in the worship service, or what kind of preaching style is utilized or what kind of children's and youth programs we're offering. The truth is, by and large, they could care less.

So, who's going to have to take the initiative so that disciples can be made? We are. Who's going to have to be willing to experiment and find ways to reach out to non-believers and not expect them just to show up first at the doors of the church? We are. Some of our ministry will need to be away from the building entirely because that's the only way to get into the lives of people who will never set their foot inside of a church for whatever reason. God loves the world which means we must get out and go to where the people are and be his redeemed people in those contexts. But this mindset profoundly affects every ministry that we do inside the building, too. Church becomes less and less about me and what I like, what I need and what my family deserves. It becomes more and more about being a place where we can meet a practical need in the lives of those who don't know Jesus yet and thereby earn the right to speak to them about Jesus. What's the old saying? "The church is the only organization that exists for people who aren't members of it yet." I have to speak very briefly about one final concept because it's just too important not to mention.

CONCEPT #4: RESIST YOUR ENEMY.

If you think for one minute that Satan is just going to allow Karl Road Baptist Church to fulfill God's mission for us without a fight, you are sadly mistaken. He is going to oppose us every step of the way. But we are called to resist Him and not give in to His attacks. What does the Bible say? "So humble yourselves before God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you." (James 4:7 NLT) I believe the devil will attack our church in at least three ways. First, he will attack our spiritual vitality. He will do anything and everything to dampen and snuff out any fire or passion for God individually or as a congregation. He will get us to buy into religious forms of consumerism. "Church is all about me and what I want and what I need." He will get us to settle for a dead, lifeless orthodoxy. You can be ever so right in your doctrine and ever so correct morally, but just passionless when it comes to God and the things of God. We need to be about urging one another to get and stay passionate about God.

The devil will attack our relational vitality. He does this primarily by getting us to fight with one another, by chipping away at our unity and by getting us to focus on what divides us rather than what unites us. Of course, Christians have conflicts like everyone else. We bruise and hurt one another because we're still sinners saved by grace. But don't settle for relational brokenness between you and others here. Fix whatever needs to get fixed. Forgive whatever needs to be forgiven. Put God's mission in this place first not your precious feelings or your damaged pride. Let's urge one another to get and stay relationally vital.

Finally, the devil will attack our prayer vitality. He will discourage us from prayer at any and every opportunity. He will help you make any and every excuse not to pray. Next Sunday at 6:00 pm is our monthly prayer gathering. We usually have about 15-20 people who come out for that. I'd love to see 100-150. If you can't make that time for whatever reason, I'm not here to guilt you into coming at that

day or time. If you have other ideas as to how we can promote prayer, increase prayer and give higher priority to prayer, I'm all ears. But, at the end of the day, we just flat out need to pray more. Remember, Satan fears nothing but prayer. So let's urge one another to pray more and let's just pray more ourselves!

Rings is his name. I don't know how old he is, but he's pretty old. I don't know where he was born or what his real name happens to be. I'm not sure anyone does. He simply goes by Rings. His home is the cab of his pickup truck which he parks near downtown Ocean Beach, California. Rings is a chain smoker, an ex-convict, ex-addict and ex-alcoholic. Rings likes to tell people that if Jesus saved him, then Jesus is able to save anyone and everyone. Instead of using his monthly check to buy alcohol or a hotel room for himself, he spends all of it on food at the local supermarket. He transfers the food he buys to coolers in the back of his truck, then he drives to the beach and makes meals for his fellow homeless. While preparing these simple meals, Rings tells the gathering crowd about the freedom that Jesus brought into his life. He tells them that God is the One who told him to feed others with his money and that it's because God loves each of them. Rings gives everything he has to others because he knows he has nothing that wasn't given to him by God.

It's not often you can point to a homeless man as a good example of what it means to be like Jesus. But when the history of the Kingdom of God gets written – the history of God's mission and how it was fulfilled – I believe there will be many unlikely heroes like Rings. People who understand that life is about God's mission not my mission. People who understand that God's most powerful missional tool isn't church buildings, sermons, Christian music or slick programs, but simply the Holy Spirit in me. People who get and stay outwardly focused however and whatever that looks like in my context. People who understand what it means to resist the devil and to pray a whole lot. As I close today would you join me once again in reciting our church's mission statement? "We seek to glorify God by building a family of believers passionate about Him where people are loved the way they are, urged to become more like Christ and equipped to share Christ in word and deed." Dear Lord, make that statement a reality at Karl Road Baptist Church!