



Church ON Purpose

Sermon Growth Guide

January 14, 2024
People Need Jesus



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1 Corinthians 1:17-29

Key Verse: 1 Corinthians 1:17

“For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel—not with wisdom and eloquence, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power.”

Big Idea: We have been given the mission of reaching the people around us with the good news of Jesus and the salvation He gives.

Foundations

Paul is writing to those who are believers but who seem to have “gotten the wrong end of the stick” about the gospel. Instead of the unity they should have in Christ, they have divided into factions. But these factions are not organized along the usual lines of wealth, status, and power. They are divided along intellectual lines.

The congregation is infested with gnostic thinking. Gnostics thought that the world was divided into two dimensions – the material and the spiritual or mental. The material world was considered evil and the source of evil. It was not the real world. The proper goal of humanity, then, was to escape this evil, physical world.

The way that was accomplished was by seeking life on a higher, spiritual plane. Thus, the more intelligent you were, the more likely you were to achieve an exalted, free spiritual state. To the Gnostic, that was the real world.

Since the physical was not real, denying bodily desires was a virtue for some Gnostics. But to others, like the Corinthians, it didn't matter what one did with the body. It was no wonder that the church in Corinth was fractious. They had tried to mix the gospel with the philosophic trends of the day. They were turned inward and inattentive to the needs of their neighbors.

Understanding God's Word

Read together 1 Corinthians 1:17-25.

Paul begins his letter to this dysfunctional congregation by explaining what God has called him to do. He is to preach the gospel. But the good news Paul preaches is not a “baptized” form of human wisdom. In fact, it contradicts human wisdom.

Paul is committed to the fact that the power of the gospel is in the Cross of Christ. He was convinced that focusing on preaching style detracted from the power of the message of the Cross. In what ways do you think that Christ and His cross are the power and the wisdom of God (v.24)?

Applying God's Word

New Testament professor Marion Soards has written: “...God works in defiance of the standards of this world...and [His] work is powerful so that it incapacitates and even turns upside down the values of this world...” What worldly wisdom do you struggle with? How can your struggle help you reach your neighbor?

Witnessing God's Word

How does your understanding of Paul's emphasis on the Cross help you to understand the need of your neighbor?

Happy New Year, a little late. As we get rolling in 2024 I want to ask this question: Does your life in Christian community feel intentional or accidental? We don't want to do church on accident this year. You know, sometimes in church life, things are getting so difficult out there, we are just happy to get to the end of a year and say, "We are still here! We didn't lose ground." I'm not satisfied with treading water or holding ground. Let's not just endure; let's advance. Elders and staff have been asking for more alignment around our strategy as a church and how we might gather momentum to advance the cause of Jesus together. Maybe you feel that too. God is doing something. Jesus is calling us to something. It's time to join together to take ground. This series is all about that. We are not going to do church on accident in 2024. We are going to do **Church on Purpose**.

This may feel a little funny, but during this series I am asking you to imagine something. Imagine we are planting First Pres for the first time right now. Imagine this is our inaugural meeting. We know Christ has asked us to build a church in the heart of Colorado Springs—to create an enduring spiritual community where generations grow in Christ and the gospel goes out with penetrating relevance to the community. Imagine you are sitting here wondering, "How are we going to do that?" It takes imagination because we have been here awhile! But that's what we need. Renewed energy. Commitment of mission. **Church on Purpose**, reigniting our passion and drive to be **Light and Life for the City**; to reach this city for Christ. Why? Because **People Need Jesus**.

In your hands is this cheat code. Here's the secret sauce. How we think about our mission together to reach this city. Everybody has a mission statement. You go to get your oil changed and see a mission statement on the wall: "To restore every automobile driver

to open travel and limitless possibility with dignity and confidence." You ask, "Does that include topping up fluids? Because every time I drive away from here, I hit my windshield washer and nothing happens." A mission statement gets us all pulling in the same direction. Have you seen "The Boys in the Boat"? It's the movie about the 8-man rowing crew that took gold in the 1936 Berlin Olympics. You don't do that with everybody throwing their paddle in the water whenever they feel like it! It takes disciplined coordination to make momentum happen. **Light and Life for the City** gives us direction. If you want a little more meat on the bone, read along the edges of your card: "We exist to see lives transformed in the power of Christ, shaping believers into Christian disciples who proclaim the LIGHT of the gospel and demonstrate the LIFE of Jesus to our CITY, bringing many to saving faith in Christ and the whole world to glorify God." That's what church is about.

We have a mission to reach Colorado Springs for Christ. We are sent by Christ to make disciples of all people under His power. See **The Discipleship Pathway**? It starts with community members. Who are the people of Colorado Springs? Who are the people we have been sent to reach for Christ? Do you understand their wants, their needs, how they are trying to navigate life and what is missing? These are your neighbors, your friends, your coworkers, your family members. You will have to listen to understand. If you think Colorado Springs is a tough place to be on mission for Christ, try Corinth in 55 AD. Paul sent this letter to encourage the new church plant in one of the most difficult mission fields of the ancient world. Corinth was famously wild. The name of the city was used as a verb, "to corinth" was to lose the handle and drop all boundaries of, particularly, sexual pursuits. A port city, the economy was built on the immediate gratification of those passing through. "Wanna be a Christian?"

The gospel did take root there, as it does, but new believers carried in old ways. They were competitive. They measured success by who had the most baptisms. Paul said forget all that and unite around the power of the gospel: “For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel—not with wisdom and eloquence, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power.”

(1 Corinthians 1:17) Today churches worry about worship numbers. That’s not what this is all about. I call you to worship, regularly, like a drumbeat, not because we need numbers in worship but because you need what worship does to your soul to keep going on this mission for Christ. We are not filling a worship space with bodies; we are driving a movement to reach this city. I’d rather have a hundred believers each trying to reach ten lost souls than a thousand trying to reach zero. John Wesley said, “Give me one hundred preachers who fear nothing but sin and desire nothing but God, and I care not whether they be clergymen or laymen, they alone will shake the gates of Hell and set up the kingdom of Heaven upon Earth.” Let’s shake the gates of hell around here.

The cross of Christ has the power. “For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.” (1 Corinthians 1:18) What does that mean? Some read it as simple differentiation. Are you in or are you out? Tell someone the gospel, “God loves you; sin separates you; Christ died for you and rose again; believe and be saved.” If they buy it, they’re in. If they reject it, they’re out. But don’t you remember when you were out; when you were perishing? Thank God someone took a minute to help you understand. The message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, in the dark. It’s ridiculous to them. You say, “They only way I make it through the day is that a Jewish man who died on a cross two thousand years ago visits me at night and whispers that everything will be okay.” People back away and reach for their keys. “My sin

was solved by a man who died on a cross.” “I’m sorry you are so strangely burdened by guilt and shame. I’ve never really had that problem. I’m okay. I don’t think I need Jesus.” The message of the cross is foolishness, ridiculous, right up to the moment when the lights come on and it means everything...and you are being saved by the power of God.

Paul takes great pains to understand the Corinthian people. The Jews seek signs. The Greeks search after wisdom. Intellectuals trust intellect, the strong trust in strength, the noble trust in their nobility and the influential trust their influence, but the wisdom of God outstrips them all. And don’t you remember you were just the same? “Brothers and sisters, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth.” (1 Corinthians 1:26) But God chose you. And God chooses to use you to demonstrate the power of His work, His gospel, His wisdom, His ability to save souls and transform lives for His glory for all eternity. Listen, some of you are new believers. You have not been walking with Jesus for very long at all. You can have a great impact for Christ right now. Why? You can still remember what it was like to be without Him. You can still relate to those who are on the dark road to perishing.

That’s the first step, relating, understanding. The first step on The Discipleship Pathway is community members. Do you know what they are facing? What they are up against, how they are trying to make it through this life? How can you share the good news of Jesus with them if you don’t take any time to understand? Our culture is dominated by narratives, worldviews, ways of explaining our lives and telling our stories. One is Materialistic Naturalism. The physical is all there is. Talk of afterlife or spirituality is all just hopeful fantasy. Everything is explained by the sciences, biology and neurochemistry. Your desires, your

impulses, your habits they are all simply the product of chemical reactions. Ultimately you are just a sentient bag of flesh, a lucky meatball passing through time and space, and when the batteries of your body run out, that's it. Another is Expressive Individualism. Locate your identity in your own inner voice; define your "self" from the inside and project it on the world around you. Where wisdom once was figuring out how you fit into the world and community around you, now the task is to listen to your inner voice and root your identity in your self-view, and where that contradicts your world, your religion, your society, even your own body, the way to resolve that disagreement is to elevate the inner self above all else. Bravery, courage, in this view, is to be totally and uncompromisingly self-centered. There is a cultural narrative around justice and power. The world should be fair, but there is nothing to define fair, so fair gets defined by those who have power. Gain power to make sure your version of fair is the version that wins. Or there is just plain old Hedonism. The purpose of life is to amass as many pleasures and comforts to myself as possible, as long as I'm not hurting anyone. This is just a start. Watch for these. Maybe you can name a few others.

But do you understand the community members? Do you understand your neighbors? Paul wanted the church to understand, "You are in Corinth. You are among Corinthians. Understand what they want, how they see the world, how they tell their stories and navigate their lives." It's the same for us here in Colorado Springs. Who is the average guy or gal in Colorado Springs? We live among a materialist people who want to be genuine and authentic selves honoring others, who want justice and fairness, who want to enjoy life and make the most of life by gathering as many pleasures as possible without impinging on the rights of others. That is a lot like Corinth. Paul wanted the church to understand the community. So were some of you, such were all of us, and now we know God's way, God's wisdom above all worldly wisdom. "For

the foolishness of God is wiser than human wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than human strength." (1 Corinthians 1:25) Those other ideas prove insufficient. They are just not enough. We need more, the wisdom of God.

God wants us to understand our community members not so much to win the battle of worldviews. We want to win that fight. We say, "Church helps me a lot in life." The world says, so what. We say, "You know, Christianity used to offer a very strong foundation for Western Civilization." So, what? They don't need a life coach, or an argument or a competition of philosophies. What do they need? They need Jesus. We understand these narratives because these narratives are keeping our friends from seeing Jesus. It isn't a worldview battle people need, or even a better narrative—not at first, not at most. Jesus said, "You search the scriptures, because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness to me." (John 5:39) People need Jesus. So we preach Christ. "But we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God." (1 Corinthians 1:23-24) People need Jesus.

Next week we will talk about what happens when those ideas are just not enough, but for now, do you know your neighbor? Do you understand those around you who don't know Jesus? It starts with the city where we have been planted. We are on a mission to reach Colorado Springs for Christ. I want to take a minute now, in the quiet of this moment before Jesus, let God put a name on your heart. What neighbor? What friend? What coworker or student or family member you know needs to know Jesus. Write that name. Let's pray, "Jesus, we pray for these names. Reveal yourself. Help us to show you to them." Or maybe you are sitting here not knowing Jesus yourself. Open your heart to Him.