

# Week 1 - Becoming a Community of Purpose

## Week 1 - Summary

Being a Community of Purpose means being focused on God's purpose for us as a church. We want to make sure that every class, every activity, every effort is aligned with the purposes of God. We want to find ways to foster spiritual growth in every member. We want to pursue whatever it takes to spread God's message of reconciliation. We want to live our lives together in such a way that our relationships reflect the love, mutual humility, and acceptance that are demonstrated in the relationship between God and Christ. Being an intentional congregation simply means staying focused on our purpose. It will take every member being focused on that purpose...we all need to engage in the effort.

## Week 1 - Being a Community of Purpose

There are two different ways to think about being a community of purpose. One way focuses on what the purpose of the church is. A second way focuses on how we carry out those purposes. Both aspects are intended with the phrase, "a Community of Purpose." We want to be a congregation that has a firm grasp of God's purposes for his church and we want to be a congregation that pursues fulfilling that purpose with focus. In this section we will examine the scriptural background which describes God's purposes for establishing a church on earth.

### ❖ ***God's Chosen Witness***

In the Old Testament God chose Abraham and his descendants to be a people through whom all nations on the earth would be blessed. (Gen 12, 15, 17) As God redeems and then blesses the Israelites he calls them to be his witness to the nations around them. They are called to live in a peculiar way, to promote justice, strive for righteousness, be obedient and to be led by God more than by the king and to fulfill their role as God's partner by having faith in God. God wanted them to be his witness to the world and to fulfill that mission they needed to *be* a certain kind of people. Their role was critical to God's plans for the world. In Isaiah 43:1-5 we see that when the nations put God on trial the only witness God calls to the stand is Israel. They were expected to be the living witness of God, their relationship with God and a witness to God's activity in their own lives. When they failed at their role (Amos 5, 6, 10), God promised to form a new kingdom under a new covenant (Jer 31:31f), that new kingdom is the church and we are the new witnesses for God (Eph 3:7-13, Acts 1:6-8)

### ❖ ***A Body demonstrating the unity of God***

The idea of unity runs throughout the text of the New Testament where the primary concern is that the church be the one place where both Jews and Gentiles live out their relationship with God together as one group. (Eph 2; Gal 3:28; Rom 1-8). But there is another dimension to the idea of unity which is also important in the text of the New Testament concerning the unity of the relationships we have with one another. Our unity serves as a witness to the world that we are empowered by God's spirit, a spirit that does not recognize the usual status markers of race, gender, economics, position, or talent. These distinctions still exist in the church, but they do not form the basis of our relationships with one another (John 17; Gal 3:28; Rom 12:3-8, 16) The unity of the body comes about through healthy theology about righteousness and healthy attitudes toward one another. The unity spans social differences as well as differences in personality and giftedness, reaching even to the area of differences in views of what constitutes righteous behavior. It is achieved through the power of the Spirit (Gal 5; Rom 8) and an attitude of humility and acceptance (Rom 14).

### ❖ ***Nurture Each other to Maturity***

One of the purposes of the body of Christ, the church is to nurture each other toward maturity in Christ. Maturity in Christ serves as a defense against false teaching as well as fulfills God's desire that we attain completeness of perfection. (Eph 4:11-16; Phil 1:3-9) We are told to "encourage one another" with words of truth and love. (Eph 4, 5) We are to use our gifts in ways that edify each other (1 Cor 14) and to give and receive sound instruction which helps each other achieve perfection in Christ (Col 1:28-29).

### ❖ ***Deal with sin...stay on track***

The church is also the place that God expects sin to be dealt with properly. We are told to seek those who stray off into sin (Matt 18) and to restore each other when we get caught in sin (Gal 6:1f). Forgiveness, love, humility, and compassion are the governing attitudes in this process.

### ❖ ***Spread the message of forgiveness***

The church then is a collection of people who have experienced the forgiveness of God and who offer forgiveness to each other while we proclaim a message of forgiveness. The key passage that depicts the message of forgiveness is 2 Cor 5:16-21.

## Discussion Areas

### ***What is a community of purpose?***

A community of purpose is simply a group of people who know their purpose and who focus every effort on accomplishing it. We believe that our focus as a church will come from everyone knowing the church's purpose and their personal role in that and then being deliberate about every aspect of the church's efforts. We are not interested in fads, watering down the gospel message, or bowing to popular ideas of Christianity that exist in society. We want to focus on our purpose in God's world. At the same time we also believe that being a Community of Purpose means that we are not governed by traditions or the acceptance or rejection of other congregations.

### ***How is a Community of Purpose different from what we are?***

In most ways we already are a community of purpose, but we want to refine our efforts in some critical areas. Specifically we want to place more emphasis on fostering and encouraging continuous spiritual growth in every member and finding ways to carry the message of Christ to our community. To accomplish this we are willing to examine every practice, program, teaching and activity to assess how they fulfill the purpose of the church and our congregation. We also want to create a culture within the congregation where spiritual growth, scriptural discussions, and accountability are the norm. This approach to church will likely lead to changes in how the leadership interacts with you, changes in worship, and changes in how we focus our time together. We don't want you to be worried about those changes, but we suspect that some of you will be concerned. In the first six week cycle we want to touch on some of the ways we hope we can accomplish our purpose, remain faithful to Scripture and avoid violating individual consciences. But we cannot do this without your help in several ways, described in the next section.

### ***Why do we want to be this?***

Quite simply we are placing emphasis on being a community of purpose because we believe that it is the best way for us to fulfill our purpose of being a body of believers and that it will lead to growth: spiritual growth in each of us and growth in bringing others to faith in Christ. We believe that God works through people not programs and each of us needs to become effective channels through whom God can work by submitting our lives into his hands.

### ***How does it impact me?***

As we mentioned above, this idea of being a community of purpose is what the leadership feels is best for the congregation, but it will take all of us working together to accomplish the goal. There are many things that each of us can do to contribute to the goal. First each of us needs to bring our gifts to the table and offer them for each other to encourage each other and edify one another. The leadership needs each of you to become active listeners engaged in the struggle to understand and fulfill God's will. To that end we need you to listen carefully, study diligently, and raise questions. We want everyone to engage in the process of exploration and the careful study of the scriptures. We will all grow in our understanding of God and each other when we openly engage each topic. The governing attitude must be one of love, acceptance, and mutual respect. Ask questions, test assumptions, but do so without judgement. If you miss a class or sermon, find the study outline and / recording and study the material on your own. We will try to provide as much written and recorded material as possible to insure that we are communicating as well as possible. To assist in this we have added a location on the web site which will allow you to post your discussion comments to class teachings, sermons, etc. We need everyone engaged.