

Before we get into the meat of the material today, I'd like to recap a couple of things related to our ongoing midweek discussions that relate to the teaching today. First of all, I'm encouraged by the practical applications that have been discussed in our group, and I know there's been some similar conversation in other groups. The practical applications that those in the group have discussed imply that people are understanding, to something of a greater degree, the implications between what we're learning and what then needs to change to reflect the truth in what we're learning. The next step in this process – and really an ongoing step in our lives as believers who hope to mature in the faith – is then bridging the gap between simply knowing a thing and doing a thing. We see in the apostles' actions and letters, that they were concerned that the churches were both grounded in doctrinal understanding and that the believers' lives were also manifesting the practical life change that resulted from that the renewing and transforming of their lives. Growing in both of these areas will be a continuing task for us at Crossings for as long as the Lord gives us to be a light for Him here.

I want to encourage all of you today to note any questions that come to mind as we go through the teaching today, and bring them up at the end if they are still lingering when I'm finished talking. I was encouraged and compelled by what Trevor said a few weeks ago, in terms of the need for us to engage very intentionally as those hearing the teaching, because it is a context for us to gain instruction, exhortation, and correction, in terms of the way we are living our lives to fulfill our callings. We need to understand that some of the things that we hear on Sundays will be new to our understanding and critical to our growth, and I hope that that fact gives us reason to listen very carefully.

Let me summarize what we've looked at in the previous couple weeks, as those principles and ideas are foundational to today's material. In the first book of the 1st Principles series – *Becoming a Disciple* – we studied what the core message of the gospel was, what the essential elements of belief are as they pertain to Christ's redemptive work. We then saw how baptism, the enfolding of a new believer into a local community of believers, is an essential step for each believer in terms of their ability to attain the lifestyle of a disciple and to participate in the Great Commission.

In book 2, *Belonging to the Family of Families*, we saw how God revealed to Paul that the church not only is part of God's plan for bringing the hope of the gospel to the earth – not only an ancillary component of our individual strivings to share the gospel – but rather, that the church itself *is* His plan. We saw how the church functioned both to mature the believers by facilitating the Spirit's work in renewing and transforming our minds, and to proclaim to the world and beyond, the 'manifold wisdom of God'. We then looked at how the gospel of Christ shapes our identities in our human families and in our church family. We looked at the roles we are to respectively play in our nuclear families. We also looked at how we as members of individual families, are to relate to other members of our church body, the 'family of families'. We saw the importance that the

apostles placed on the ‘household order’ of the church, in terms of each church’s ability to please the Lord and to communicate the gospel.

With these ideas in mind, let’s now narrow in on what is to be our life *purpose*, *Participating in the Mission of the Church*. Here’s our working summary:

Building on key first principles of the faith (belief in the gospel, enfolding of believers into a local body, ‘household’ order), the apostles instruct the churches about their participation in the Great Commission. The message of the gospel of Christ is to be communicated by every member of the body. Some will receive the calling, through the commissioning of the church, to preach the gospel and establish churches in a context beyond their local community. Others (most) are called to carry the message of the gospel – to live lives consistent with sound doctrine and to share (verbally) the gospel message as such times avail themselves – in the context of the web of their relationships. Those in the local context are to simultaneously support the work of those called to minister extra-locally.

The apostles were molding the churches into bodies that would carry the message of the gospel both into their local communities and outside the boundaries of their local communities. It is important for us to have an understanding of the underlying principles of that task and the practical considerations governing our missional work locally and extra-locally, so that:

1. we can better understand and live out our respective callings here locally
2. anyone in the body who might be sent out by the church will have an idea of what they are being called to
3. we can better understand and support our partnership with church planting that is happening both nationally and internationally.

The mission of any church should be to fulfill the mandate of the Great Commission. The apostles fulfilled the Great Commission in their lives by establishing churches and instructing them how to proclaim the gospel. These churches were to practically carry out this task by evangelizing their local areas and by sending out some of their own to establish churches in new regions. The churches in the new regions then repeated the process, continuing to evangelize their local area and sending some of their own to evangelize new areas. This pattern, of a multiplication of churches, is the pattern we are to follow in our effort to carry on the work of the Great Commission.

So how is our body, Crossings, to participate in the mission? Let’s start by looking at some aspects of Paul and Barnabas’ first missionary journey.

Let’s first note that Paul received directly from the Lord thirteen years prior to his sending from Antioch, an explanation of what his lifework would entail. In Acts 26:16 – 18, Paul described his encounter with Christ on the way to Damascus. Christ said to

Paul, [\[read the verse\]](#). We see in Acts 13, when Paul and Barnabas were addressing the synagogue in Pisidian Antioch, that they were clear about their mission: [read 13:47]. If Paul knew about this calling on his life, why didn't he simply leave Damascus immediately after his conversion for a mission to preach to the gentiles?

The answer clearly lies in the fact that Paul was also given the grace to reveal to the churches 'the administration of the mystery', as we saw in Ephesians chapter 3; that is, how the churches were both to be structured and to operate, and what their glorious role was in proclaiming the Good News. Paul understood that the church, not himself acting on his own, was to proclaim the gospel in the world. And we clearly see that Paul and Barnabas' missional endeavor was the work of the church. It was *the church*, operating under the direction of the Holy Spirit, that sent them. [READ Act 13:1-4]. In this way, Paul was able to fulfill his responsibility to carry the gospel to the gentiles in a way that was consistent with God's revealed purpose for the church.

So, we see that missional work, outside of the context of the church's local community, is really just an extension of the local church. The local aspect and the extra-local aspect of evangelism are inextricably and intimately bound together by their connection to church. This is important for us to understand, because this aspect of the missional pattern is not prevalent in the missional work of churches in our western culture.

Let's now look to see how Paul and Barnabas went about proclaiming the gospel once they were sent.

First, we see that they used a strategy of proclaiming the gospel in cultural and population centers of the regions in which they traveled. In reading Acts 13 and 14, we see that they preached the Word in cities. Second, we see that they preached the gospel in places where there was an ear to hear the message and a context for it to be understood. Paul and Barnabas, at least in their travels up to and through the city of Iconium, preached the gospel in synagogues. In this way, they were able to speak the message of the gospel from the platform of the Old Testament prophets, all of which we will remember, by way of Peter's message to Cornelius in Acts 10, pointed to Christ. It is clear from the account in Acts 13 and 14, that there were gentiles present in these synagogues who were hearing the gospel alongside the Jews. Even in the context of Paul and Barnabas preaching in Lystra, with at least much of their audience being pagan, they preached the word using Scripture (quoting Exodus, see Acts 14:15) and speaking about God's attributes in a way clearly consistent with Scripture's description of Him (in Acts 14:16-18). We see then, that Paul and Barnabas utilized Scripture in their proclamation of the gospel, as they preached in strategic areas (cities) to an audience that had an ear for the message.

What they did next in their mission work should look familiar to us, as we've very recently looked at the principles which informed their subsequent actions.

The believers in every city were gathered into churches and taught. Notice that at Derbe, the final point of Paul's first missionary journey from Antioch, Paul and Barnabas looped back toward Antioch only after they had, "preached the gospel and made many disciples" (14: 21). Note that Paul and Barnabas were not simply making converts, they were making disciples.

Paul and Barnabas doubled back to the cities where they had preached the gospel, "strengthening the souls of the disciples..." (14:22). The fact that they did this, in spite of the fact that they had been mistreated and threatened in these cities, (and in Paul's case, even stoned and left for dead) speaks to the fact that they understood their missional work was not completed by simply preaching the gospel and making converts. In addition to strengthening the churches, Luke notes that Paul and Barnabas appointed elders 'for every church'. We see from Paul's letters to key leaders of his missional team (e.g. Timothy and Titus) later in his life, that teaching the first principles of the faith to new believers and appointing elders in every church was a crucial piece of the missionary work. Paul told Titus that he was to "set in order what remains, and appoint elders in every city" (Titus 2:5).

We see then, that Paul and Barnabas did not return to their 'sending' church – they did not consider their 'missionary run' complete – until churches were established in every city where their message had won converts. Clearly then, the goal of Paul and Barnabas' missional work was not simply to win converts, but to establish churches. But, what principally was the reason for this?

One way to answer this would be to simply recognize, as we have noted before, that Paul understood that God, in His divine wisdom and according to His eternal purpose, has chosen to use the church itself to proclaim the gospel. In reading letters to key leaders and to various churches, we can gain further insight into how Paul and the apostles practically understood how the churches were to carry out their proclamation of the gospel. We will see that Paul and the apostles intended for the gospel they preached to continue penetrating the communities and cultures in which they journeyed and labored, far after they had completed their individual tasks. Principally, the patterns that Paul established in his missionary work launched from Antioch – spreading the gospel, enfolding new believers into the church, and establishing them in the faith – were intended to continue at a local level through the new churches. The local churches were to be organisms which continued the work of evangelism in their communities.

Sessions 2 – 5 of *Participating in the Mission of the Church*, speak primarily to our local evangelistic effort. Let's first look closer at the instructions Paul gave to Titus in his letter, instructing Titus how to go about setting the church in order.

As we discussed in our midweeks last week, Paul described a 'household order' in the 2nd chapter of the epistle. The way in which believers related to each other within their

churches and within their individual families within those churches, were noted to have significant bearing on the progress of the gospel in their local communities. Let's review those points, as they are very relevant to our focus on the church's local evangelism.

Paul explains very plainly to Titus that the nature of our 'family of families' dynamic:

1. has direct impact on the way those outside the church view the word of God
2. gives unbelievers a taste of the gospel of Christ
3. to the extent that we relate appropriately to one another, it restricts outsiders' ability to say anything wrong about us.

This importance of the way we relate to each other, in terms of how that relates to our gospel proclamation, is reiterated throughout the New Testament. Consider just a few examples:

1. Christ stated, as recorded in John 13:35, "By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."
2. In Paul's letter to the Galatians, he states that we fulfill the entire law by loving each other.
3. In Paul's letter to the church in Ephesus, he instructs them that husbands and wives actually portray to a watching world, in the way they relate to each other, a picture of how Christ relates to the church, and how the church relates to Christ (Eph 5:22-24).

Therefore, we must pay close attention to how we are relating to our wives and children, and to those in our body, because those interactions communicate volumes about the gospel. If we are not diligent and committed to properly ordering ourselves in our families and the family of families, we run the very real risk of establishing a significant hindrance in our effort to spread the gospel locally.

In addition to describing the order that is to be established in the churches, Paul describes the disorder that was present in us, apart from Christ. [READ Titus 3:3-4]. Notice that Paul states in Titus 2:11-12, the reason that we are to live in the orderly way described and not according to the disorderly way which was natural to us apart from Christ. [Read Titus 2:11-12]. We are to order our family of families according to the pattern Paul described to Titus because it creates a *contrast* which will be evident to all who are apart from Christ. This contrast, effectively lived out, will provide us with a very potent opportunity to explain our faith to those outside the church. Essentially, the order in our families and the family of families will provide us a platform to share and explain the gospel with those who interact with us, and we should see this as a significant tool in our evangelistic effort.

Another important factor in the letter to Titus, which is noted by Paul to be important in our local efforts to share the gospel is good deeds. The term 'good deeds' is used by Paul four times in Titus 2 – 3:8. Notice how Paul connects the redeeming work of Christ to good deeds. [READ Titus 2:11-14] Note that an attribute of those purified for Christ is a

zeal for good deeds. This is reiterated in Titus 3:8 [READ]. Good deeds are to accompany our lives, and we should be careful, as Paul says, to engage in good deeds. Again, this will stand in contrast to the selfishness which pervades the human condition apart from Christ, and will provide another gospel-adorning, life *contrast*.

One last thing that I want to mention with regard to Paul's instruction to Titus, is the way in which Paul described the stance of the church to the society at large. [READ Titus 3:1-2] In addition to understanding the importance of our relationships with one another in our families and in our church, we need to be aware of the importance of the way we relate to those *outside* the church. Consider how Paul describes what should be the tone of our interactions with our government and those outside of the body. This is consistent with Paul's instruction to Timothy [READ 1 Tim 2:1-3]. In light of Paul's instructions to the churches via his leaders Timothy and Titus, we need to consider how the church in our society engages or is perceived to engage with certain segments of the non-believing population. Consider also how the church in our society engages or is perceived to engage with our government. Again, in the context of our efforts to evangelize locally, we need to be very careful how we engage our society, and that leads us to another important piece of the local evangelism picture: *Making the most of our opportunities*.

Paul's letter to the church at Colossae gives us some important insight as to how to do this. [READ Col 4:2-6]

First, we note that we are to 'devote ourselves to prayer', being alert and thankful. In this, we at the local level are also given a very real opportunity to partner with those operating in an extra-local, missionary manner, by praying that God open a door to the missionaries for the gospel, and that they might present the message clearly. Our diligence in prayer is important to the gospel's progress, both locally and extra-locally.

Second, we are to have an appropriate, disciplined mindset with regard to the way in which we interact with those in our web of relationships outside of the church. Let's again look at verse 5. [READ Col 4:5] We need to ask ourselves if we are making the most of our opportunities with outsiders. Do we simply view those relationships as part of the flow of our daily life – with coworkers, neighbors, family members outside of the church, etc. – or are viewing those relationships as opportunities to communicate the gospel? Clearly, intentionality in wisely and graciously bringing the gospel message into our web of relationships with those outside of the church is commanded by Paul. For some of us, the starting point in this respect will entail the development of an ability simply to relate better with those outside the church, to foster relationships with non-believers. For others, it will entail an increasing intentionality in being wise with, and making the most of our opportunities in, the relationships we already have with those outside the church.

A very real aspect of this intentionality with those outside the church relates to the way we speak. [READ Col 4:6] Notice that this idea of being very mindful of our speech directly informs our efforts to build relationships with unbelievers. Are we having a difficult time knowing how to act around them, are we wondering how to engage them in conversation? Paul states that the reason we are to be careful to speak with grace, as though we were seasoning it with salt (making it tasteful), is that it will allow us to know how to respond to them. How do I learn how to appropriately interact with a nonbeliever? – Paul says that a key part of gaining that ability is simply to be careful to speak gracefully. Note the consistency here with the instructions we looked at just a few minutes ago, which Paul was giving to Titus regarding a Christian’s interaction with society outside of the church.

Are there any examples in Scripture of a person operating at a local level, who was embodying these characteristics of household order, good deeds, prayerfulness, and harmonious relationships with outsiders? As we read in Acts 10, Cornelius was a man whose life reflected many of the key qualities that we have been identifying today as crucial to a successful evangelism of our local community. Cornelius’ story was an important one with regard to the process of the church’s evolving understanding of God’s plan of salvation – of the continuation of Christ’s teaching to the church after His ascension. Note what Acts 10:1-2 says about Cornelius [READ]. For someone in a position of authority over a conquered people, Cornelius possessed some remarkable traits which most certainly would have required intentionality. He was a devout gentile and feared God, he prayed continually, he was generous to people over whom he had authority, and his whole household was God-fearing. Note that in verse 22, we learn that Cornelius was, “well spoken of by the entire nation of the Jews”. This is a remarkable fact given what must have been the general loathing which the Jews had of the invading, conquering Romans. Talk about a man who made the most of his opportunities. And what did his ordered, gracious, intentional, life do? It set the stage for the gospel to penetrate his whole household and the lives of his friends. His was a remarkable story. Cornelius’ lifestyle was one congruent with that instructed by the apostles, and the result was the salvation of Christ for those in his community. This should be a great encouragement to us, and stands as a case study for cultivating in ourselves, lifestyles which are conducive for significant progress of the gospel at the local level.

Notice though, that the context of Cornelius’ life was not, in and of itself, sufficient for the gospel’s advance in his community. The gospel message needed to be explained; it needed to be spoken. That gospel message which Cornelius and those present with him heard, had been spoken by the apostle Peter. Peter’s letter to the formerly Judaic churches, whose people were scattered outside of the region as a result of the dispersion, holds important information for us with regard to how we are to *explain*, how we are to *speak* the gospel. Let’s look at 1 Pet 3:8-17 [READ]. Notice first the absolutely stunning congruence between Peter’s instructions about how to frame the *spoken* gospel message, and Paul’s instructions regarding the cultivation of a life consistent with the

communication of that message, which we have been looking at today. First, Peter instructs the believers to live according to the ‘household order’ (vs. 8 & 9). Secondly, notice that within the Scripture passage which Peter quotes (Psalm 34: 12-16), are contained the following principles:

1. graceful speech
2. doing good
3. being peaceful
4. prayerfulness

With *that* backdrop, and instructing the believers to make Christ the absolute priority in their hearts, Peter tells them to “always [be] ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and respect”. Notice that Peter frames the spoken gospel message as a response to a *question*. Whether this question is posed by someone who is challenging us, or by someone who has a genuine interest in the faith, we are to *always* have an explanation of the gospel of Christ on the tip of our tongue, fitting for the moment.

Clearly, if Peter presupposes the spoken message of the gospel in the local context to be a response to an inquiry about our faith, then we must pour significant effort – and I want us all to think about this in terms of significantly *more* effort than we are currently allotting – into cultivating a lifestyle that drives the question from outsiders, “why do you believe what you believe?”. In this effort, consider how Hebrews 12:1-3 could inform our mindset: ¹*Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us.* ²*Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.* ³*Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.*

Family, let us commit ourselves to *progress* in the following areas, in order that the gospel will go forth from our body in an increasingly powerful way:

1. living according to the ‘household order’ described by the apostles
2. good deeds
3. fostering a perception among outsiders of us being a sensible, peaceful body
4. prayer
5. our relationships with those outside the church
6. graceful speech
7. our eagerness and ability to speak the message of the gospel

In closing, I also want to draw your attention to a very interesting fact, something for us to consider. It may be the case that new believers who, Lord-willing, will be enfolded into our church as a result of our *local* proclamation of the gospel, may end up being sent by us *outside* of the context of our local body – to preach the gospel, enfold new believers, and establish new churches. Whether or not this happens, we are to engage in the effort to progress the gospel here in our local community, and to be mindful of our continuing partnerships extra-locally in the network.

- End with prayer for our local mission, our people in the Iowa plants, and Paul N with the Cambodian churches.