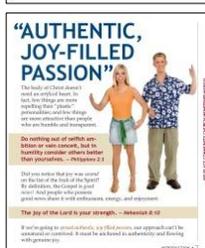
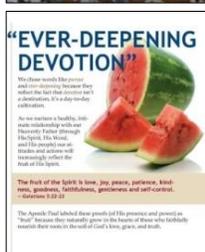
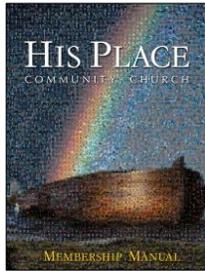


Our Own Backyard

His Commission, Our Ambition

December 5, 2021

Today we're talking about God's mission and our ambition! But before we get to that, answer me **this: Are we like-minded?** And by "we" I mean "all of us".



I've been thinking that we really need to take a Sunday to just talk about membership and missions and *our* mission – yours and mine – here at His Place, and *today* is *that* Sunday! I don't talk that much about church membership, because **I'd much rather discuss who we are.** Our mission. And are we like-minded? But we do have an online handbook (at HisPlaceMembership.com) that clarifies who we are, and our shared mission, in order to help you to see if we're like-minded. And we put a ton of work into this baby! So allow me to paraphrase: Ever try forcing a puzzle piece into a place it wasn't intended? Even if you succeed, it only results in distorting the design. This handbook is *not* intended to talk you into joining. **It's about interlocking with like-minded believers** to grow and work together toward a common goal. Therefore, the fundamental question isn't, "How do I join?" but, "Are we a fit?"

And to answer *that*, we need a close look at the mission-ambition our family members share. Because our God-given mission includes *more* than inner transformation, it's also part **training mission** and part **rescue mission**. We call this our Co-Mission. Let's read it together: **Our co-mission is to pursue ever-deepening devotion and spread authentic, joy-filled passion for God by modeling Jesus in a relevant fashion in Skagit Valley and beyond.** We chose words like *pursue* and *ever-deepening* because they reflect the fact that **devotion isn't a destination, it's a day-to-day cultivation.** That's who we are here. And as we nurture a healthy, intimate relationship with our Father through His *Word* and His *people*, our attitudes and actions will increasingly reflect the *fruit* of His *Spirit*. Paul gives us our mission when he writes that:

The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. – Galatians 5:22-23 NIV

Paul labeled these *proofs* – of God's presence and power – as *fruit* because they grow *naturally* in the hearts of those who dig their roots deep into God's love and grace, and find nourishment in the "soil" of God's Word (as it's called in the parable of the sower). And a short phrase that defines *who we are*, by *what we strive for*, is: **Authentic, joy-filled passion.**

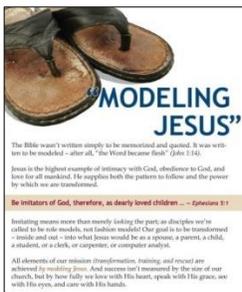
The body of Christ rejects an artificial heart. In fact, few things are more *repelling* than plastic personalities; and few things are more *attractive* than people who are humble and transparent and honest about who they really are while being transformed together. And *that's* who we are here.

Therefore [writes Paul] if you have any encouragement [from being united with Christ, if any comfort from His love, if any common sharing in the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind. Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others. – Philippians 2:1-4 NIV

Did you notice that “joy” is *second* on the list of spiritual fruit, only after “love”? “Gospel” means “Good News”! And **those with good news share it joyfully with enthusiasm without effort.**

[And that’s why] The joy of the Lord is your *strength*. – Nehemiah 8:10 NKJ

[And therefore] Strength and gladness are in His place. – 1 Chronicles 16:27 NKJ

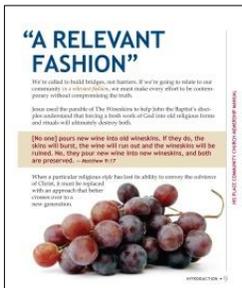


And if we’re going to spread *authentic* joy-filled passion, our approach can’t be *unnatural* or *contrived*. **It must be anchored in authenticity and flowing with genuine joy.** The Bible wasn’t written simply to be memorized and quoted. It was written to be modeled – not on the surface, like a fashion model, but put into action and lived out in the real world as a role model. And Jesus is the “Supermodel”, so to speak, of *intimacy with God*, and *obedience to God*, and *love for all God’s children* (lost and found).



He is the image of the invisible *God*, the *firstborn* over all creation. – Colossians 1:15 NKJ

Therefore be *imitators* of *God* as dear children. – Ephesians 5:1 NKJ



For in Christ Jesus you are *all children* of *God* through faith. As many of you as were baptized into Christ have *clothed* yourselves with Christ. – Galatians 3:26-27 NRS

But not as a *fashion model*! Because **being imitators doesn’t mean being imitations.** Think of a young boy imitating his dad. **It means becoming the real thing**, which means so much *more* than merely *looking* the part.

Our mission is to be transformed, inside and out, into what Jesus would be if *He* were *me*, as a spouse, parent, child, student, clerk, carpenter, or computer analyst. And the success or failure of our *mental-transforming*, *spiritual-training* and *role-modeling*, is measured, and can *only* be measured, by how *sincerely* and *completely* we **see with His eyes, love with His heart, speak with His grace, and help with His hands.** *That’s* who we are. Or at least are *striving* together to *become*.

And though were not *fashion models*, we strive to be *role models* in a relevant fashion. We’re called to build bridges, not barriers. So, we make every effort to stay contemporary without compromising truth. Like in Jesus’ example of trying to pour new wine into old wineskins. (Mt 9:17) When a particular *old* religious *style* has lost its ability to convey the *substance* of Christ, it must be replaced with an approach that better crosses over to a *new* generation. Jesus didn’t hide in the temple; **He entered a corrupted culture and embraced a fallen people.** He was a missionary in His own backyard. As were the first *ambassadors* that *He* commissioned, because:



[As Jesus read] “Repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in His name to *all* nations, *beginning* from *Jerusalem*.” [That was *their* backyard] – Luke 24:47 ESV



[For as He'd said] “You will be My witnesses in Jerusalem *and* in *all* Judea *and* Samaria, *and* to the end of the earth.” [And *that's* our backyard] – Acts 1:8 ESV

For ambassadors of Christ, *isolating from the world is just as misguided as imitating it*; because we're called to *embrace* the people placed around *us*. We tend to think of the mission field as anywhere outside our own zip code, but that's *actually* the *exception* to the rule. Our mission field *begins* in Skagit Valley. And as *any* foreign missionary will tell you: *the best missionary is always one of the natives*. That's *us*. Backyard missionaries.



“Open your eyes and look at the fields! [Jesus urged and encouraged His shortsighted disciples] They are *ripe* for harvest.” – John 4:35 NIV



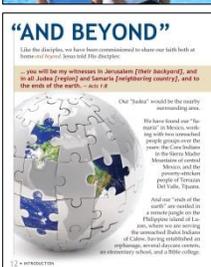
Now we need to *urge* and *encourage* each other to recognize our huge potential on this little corner of God's kingdom. Which happens to *literally* be in my *old backyard*. This was Pop's old wrecking yard; and I grew up in the Youth House. And the pool we use for baptisms was built back in the 1970s.



I first met Pastor Nick in my backyard back in the 70s. He and Pops were buddies back in their B.C. days (before Christ). And now *Nick is a literal missionary in my literal backyard!* From *my* perspective that's *crazy!* But that's what God desires to *do*, in some way, in *everyone's* backyard; and especially *you*, because that's *who we are*, and because *your mission field is anywhere genuine relationships grow* (thus providing a natural opportunity to share your life and love and faith). So open your eyes! To quote Jesus. *You are in the center of a mission field preordained for you*. You just gotta make your mission your ambition.



Make it your *ambition* to lead a quiet life, to mind your own business ... so that your daily life may win the respect of outsiders – 1 Thessalonians 4:11-12 NIV



But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. [And] *Always* be *prepared* to give an answer to everyone who asks *you* to give the *reason* for the *hope* that you have. – 1 Peter 3:15 NIV

[Just] Make the *most* of every opportunity. – Colossians 4:5 NIV

Scripture places such incredible significance on our normal ordinary. Do you?

Some are called to go. But, *if you weren't called to go, then you were called to stay.*

And remain faithful. *And relate to those entrusted to you.* Right here in your own backyard.

Unless you happen to be an exception to the rule. Like Pastor Nick (*our* missionary to the Philippines); which means *our backyard is much bigger than one might think.*