The Good Work - Part 2

# Making A Difference

## (1 Corinthians 12:12-27)

It’s great to have all of you with us today, we are in a message series called “The Good Work.” Last week we talked about when you’ve got a burden, something that’s bothering you, it might be something that you see or something that you hear about, it could be a need or someone that’s been neglected, but it’s something that upsets you on behalf of God. And so, we talked about when you’ve got to do something and today, I want to talk to you about “Making A Difference.”

If you have your Bible with you today, would you turn to first Corinthians chapter 12, and we’re going to launch off in chapter 12 at verse 12. I’m talking about “Making a Difference” and it really begins with making yourself available. The prophet Isaiah said it this way, "Here am I. Send me” (6:8). Nehemiah said, “Send me to Jerusalem so that I can rebuild it” (2:5). And today I want to encourage you to stand up and step out because you have no idea how God might use you. The Bible says we were created in Christ Jesus to do good works and so we know that we were born with purpose, we were created to make a difference.

The Bible tells us in first Corinthians chapter 12,

“The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts; and though all its parts are many, they form one body…” (1 Corinthians 12:12).

And so, if you’re a believer, a follower of Jesus, you have meaning in life, because you were born again with divine purpose. You see, each one of us are part of the puzzle, one piece of the picture, and we all belong to something bigger than ourselves. And some of you feel it, you know you were created for something more, you’re seeking to find your identity in Christ and you’re looking for that place where you fit. And that’s why the apostle Paul reminds us, “we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body,” because what we’re looking for is not out there, it’s in here, it’s in the body of Christ, it’s in the local church (1 Corinthians 12:13).

The Bible says very clearly, you were created for something more, something bigger, something greater than you could ever do on your own. And so, Paul says in verse 27,

“Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it” (1 Corinthians 12:27).

In other words, if you’ve been born again, if you’ve been baptized by the Spirit into the body, you belong to something bigger than yourself.

In this series we’ve been talking about “The Good Work” and some of you may question whether what you are doing is really making a difference? You know, do your prayers really matter, when you serve is it really making a difference, and I believe God says very clearly, “Yes it does.” The Bible says,

“God has arranged the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be. If they were all one part, where would the body be? As it is, there are many parts, but one body” (1 Corinthians 12:18-20).

In fact, God says you are on assignment, you are on mission, because you are an ambassador, a representative of the kingdom of God. And so, no matter what part you are, wherever you are serving, you are a bright light shining in a dark world because you have been filled with the resurrection power of God. The same Spirit that raised Jesus from the grave lives inside of you, and so it’s because of your work, your giving, your serving, that people in our community and around the world will praise God.

Now, I’ve been using the story of Nehemiah as the theme behind this series, and so if you’d like to follow along would you turn to the Old Testament book of Nehemiah? If you weren’t with us last week, let me give you the context to bring you up to speed. The year was 444 BC and the walls of Jerusalem had been torn down, the city was in ruins, and it had been that way for 140 years. The people were discouraged and felt hopeless to do anything about it because they didn’t have the manpower or the resources to rebuild the walls.

However, that was all about the change, because one day, a thousand miles away, a man named Nehemiah asked his brothers, “about the Jewish remnant that survived the exile, and also about Jerusalem” (Nehemiah 1:2). His brothers said to him,

"Those who survived the exile and are back in the province are in great trouble and disgrace. The wall of Jerusalem is broken down, and its gates have been burned with fire" (Nehemiah 1:3).

Hearing this news, Nehemiah was totally devastated and sat down and prayed. But he didn’t stop there, he stood up and said, “I’ve got to do something about this.”

The thing that really stands out to me about this story is that Nehemiah didn’t rebuild the walls because of his position or his resources. He wasn’t a building contractor, he wasn’t wealthy, nor was he a great leader or even a king, but he was simply the cupbearer of King Artaxerxes of Persia. And so, here’s what I recognized, and I hope you’ll understand, you don’t have to be wealthy or powerful or even a great leader to be used by God. You just have to be available and care about what that matters to the heart of God.

Today I want to encourage you to see yourself as someone who can make a difference in the world because we serve a God who specializes in using ordinary people. You can make a difference by yourself, but if you want to change your community and change the world, you’re really going to need other people to come alongside of you. Therefore, it’s important to have a stated purpose so that you can define the mission clearly. You see, a stated purpose helps to motivate us, it helps to keep our priorities straight, and it will guide us to become all that God intends for us to be.

I want you to notice what happened in Nehemiah chapter 2, the king saw that he was sad, that his countenance had changed, and so he asked Nehemiah what was wrong. Nehemiah told him that his hometown, the city of his fathers was lying in ruins. The king asked him, “What is it you want?” And in verse four, Nehemiah tells us, “then I prayed to the God of heaven.” And so, before he answered he prayed and then he replied to the king,

"If it pleases the king and if your servant has found favor in his sight, let him send me to the city in Judah where my fathers are buried so that I can rebuild it" (Nehemiah 2:5).

In one simple statement he clearly states his purpose, and this is so important because if you can’t define what you’re hoping to achieve it’s not very likely that you will even come close to accomplishing it.

This is practical in every area of life and we see this very clearly in the Scriptures. When Jesus taught his disciples how to pray, he said this then is how you should pray:

"Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven” (Matthew 6:9-10).

Jesus Christ, the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost, and therefore, the Church must grow, the Kingdom must advance, because the people of God are praying specifically, “Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.” In other words, you can say it in whatever words you want to say it, but your will be done perfectly, powerfully, and presently.

And so, Jesus tells us to pray for the kingdom to come, the kingdom is coming, and each of us have hundreds of unreached people within our area of influence. That’s why Jesus sends us out into the world clearly stating our purpose in Matthew chapter 28,

“Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you" (Matthew 28:19-20).

He says, “go and make disciples” because the kingdom is coming. This is our purpose, the Church, the body of Christ is God’s plan to advance his kingdom so that his will is done in the world. In fact, not only was this church planted with that purpose, but this nation was founded with that purpose. In 1607, as the first settlers moved west from Europe, the declared purpose of the Virginia company was, "The principal and main ends … were first to preach and baptize into the Christian religion…"

In 1620, even before the Plymouth settlers came ashore, they made a covenant with God called the “Mayflower Compact." It began: "In the name of God… having undertaken for the glory of God and the advancement of the Christian faith…"

And again in 1643 the New England Confederation proclaimed: "We all came to these parts of America with the same end and aim, namely, to advance the Kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ."

And the stated purpose of this nation’s founders has been fulfilled far beyond their wildest imaginations. American Revolutionary leader, Patrick Henry said, "It cannot be emphasized too strongly or too often that this great nation was founded, not by religionists, but by Christians; not on religions, but on the Gospel of Jesus Christ."

And so, as we can pray, “your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven” with confidence knowing his will, because the Bible tells us in first Timothy,

“Our Savior wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth” (1 Timothy 2:4).

And so, just as the apostles, the first believers, and the founders of this nation had a clearly defined mission to promote the gospel of Jesus Christ, we also must do everything we can to share the good news of Jesus with those who don’t know him. We have our marching orders, we have a stated purpose to further the kingdom of God and that is why Peter tells us,

“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).

And so, we’ve got to be prepared, we’ve got to make plans carefully, we’ve got to know what we’re going to do, we’ve got to determine how we’re going to bring this about. And I want you to notice how Nehemiah has a very specific plan to fulfill his stated purpose. In verse six the king asked him,

"How long will your journey take and when will you get back?" (Nehemiah 2:6).

And Nehemiah was prepared to give an answer, he said here’s how long it's going to take, and he set a time because he’d already thought this through. And then he also said to him in verse seven, he makes two very specific requests,

"If it pleases the king, may I have letters to the governors of Trans-Euphrates, so that they will provide me safe-conduct until I arrive in Judah?” (Nehemiah 2:7).

In other words, send letters before me to let the governors know that I am on official business so that they will protect me as I go. And then the second thing he asked, he says,

“May I have a letter to Asaph, keeper of the king's forest, so he will give me timber to make beams for the gates of the citadel by the temple and for the city wall and for the residence I will occupy?" (Nehemiah 2:8).

And so, he had to do some digging to find out who this was, he couldn’t just Google, “What is the keeper of the king’s forest name? He had to do his homework, and so he was very strategic, and very specific in his planning. I think sometimes we undervalue the planning process and yet it’s the process of preparation, all the work that goes on behind-the-scenes that is so very important. That’s why Peter said,

“Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks…” (1 Peter 3:15).

And Nehemiah was prepared, he didn’t come before the King not knowing where to start or what to do next. He considered the process, he stated his purpose, he prepared his steps, he had a specific plan, and then he simply took the next step. None of us can change our lives, our homes, or our communities all at once, but we can change it one faithful step at a time.

Nehemiah stated his purpose clearly, he made a specific plan, and then he simply took the next step. This is so important because we all need guidance, we need to know the way, and we need a moral compass. We need to know the truth and that’s why Jesus words in John chapter 8 are so meaningful, he says,

“If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth and the truth will set you free” (John 8:31).

And so, his Word is key to having confidence to take that next step. In fact, it’s having his Word that gives us direction and purpose in our lives, because we know that as his Word remains in us we will bear much fruit for the kingdom. It’s as you make serving God and advancing his kingdom your goal that you will find fulfillment in life.

You see, having been forgiven and set free from sin, part of the exciting adventure of following Jesus, is not just a change in position spiritually, but it’s also a change in purpose. The same grace that redeems us also changes us and empowers us so that we may become the kind of people that glorify him.

“People that are his very own, eager to do what is good” (Titus 2:14).

And that’s what Nehemiah does, he travels a thousand miles back to Jerusalem, and after he arrives, he goes out at night while everybody else is sleeping to see firsthand what the condition of the walls and the gates are. And so, he is working, accumulating information, and developing a strategy, all before he gathers the people together to discuss the vision that God had given him.

Look at verse 17, he draws their attention to the walls and the gates saying,

"You see the trouble we are in: Jerusalem lies in ruins, and its gates have been burned with fire. Come, let us rebuild the wall of Jerusalem, and we will no longer be in disgrace." I also told them about the gracious hand of my God upon me and what the king had said to me” (Nehemiah 2:17-18).

He stated his purpose, defining the mission, and laying out a specific plan before the people. They saw the passion in his eyes and felt the burden within his heart and it became their inspiration.

They replied, "Let us start rebuilding." So, they began this good work” (Nehemiah 2:18).

All of a sudden, a group of people that for 140 years thought it was impossible, realized that with God all things are possible. They began The Good Work and I want you to know that God can do the same thing for you.

Your mission should you choose to accept it is this. At Christ’s Community Church we are connecting God and community; and so, we are always reaching, connecting, and equipping people to become fully devoted followers of Jesus Christ. That’s our mission, that’s our passion, not just to make a name for ourselves, not to build our church or a denomination, but to lead people to Christ. Jesus came to seek and save that which was lost, and so our mission is always going to be about people, and our goal is always to be lead them to become fully devoted followers of Jesus Christ. God’s purpose in us is stated in John chapter 10, that you…

“…may have life and have it to the full” (John 10:10).

Therefore, my goal and the leadership of this church is to equip you to live abundant and successful lives based on the principles of God’s word, nurturing you to full spiritual maturity, so that you can go out in ministry to serve and make disciples for Jesus. That’s what God calls us to do, always reaching, connecting, and equipping people, reproducing ourselves and making disciples. In other words, we’re always inviting the unchurched, helping them grow in faith, so that they will become fully devoted followers of Christ and will want to become active members in the church as well.

And so, we want to encourage the people like Nehemiah did. He said,

"Jerusalem lies in ruins and its gates have been burned with fire. Come, let us rebuild the wall of Jerusalem and we will no longer be in disgrace" (Nehemiah 2:17).

In other words, let us rebuild our lives, no longer living in ruins, living without hope, and living in disgrace. No longer living for the moment, living for things that don’t last, but surrendering your heart fully to Christ, becoming a disciple of Jesus. You see, God is calling many of you to a loving, serving, God glorifying life, so that one day you’ll look back and know that your life counted, that you made a difference. And when you stand before God, he will look at you and say,

“Well done, good and faithful servant!” (Matthew 25:21).

I believe that nothing is impossible with God, and as we get focused on one thing, leading others to become fully devoted followers of Christ, we can change not only this town, but we can change the world. In fact, next week we’re going to celebrate Compassion Sunday and I believe in Compassion International, because they change the lives of children and communities forever. I believe God is going to speak into many of your hearts and that our church will take care of the needs of children all around the world. If we could just get out of ourselves and allow our hearts to break for the things that break the heart of God, he is going to use this church in an amazing way.

Each one of us starts this journey by faith in Christ, and we must continue this journey with our faith in Christ. The apostle Paul says it this way in Colossians chapter 2, he says,

“So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in him, rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught…” (Colossians 2:6-7).

And so, we must continue in him, living in him, being built up in him, discovering your spiritual gifts, exploring your personal ministry, being equipped to minister by the Holy Spirit through the ministry of the church. This is God’s will for each committed follower of Jesus Christ; therefore, the Bible says we should,

“Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor is not in vain” (1 Corinthians 15:58).

And so, nothing we do for Jesus will ever be wasted, it has value in eternity, therefore we can be committed in service, and always abounding in ministry to others. This is the application of your faith as you use your spiritual gifts and the abilities that God has given you and the church’s mission becomes your mission. It’s the good work and because of your faithfulness, because of your generosity, because of the way you serve, because of the way you love, there are people all over the world being impacted by the gospel of Jesus.

This is what it means to be a Christian, a follower of Jesus Christ, you are reproducing yourself, or duplicating yourself as you are reaching, connecting, and equipping people to become fully devoted followers of Jesus Christ. And that’s why I would love to invite you to become a part of Christ’s Community Church, to do The Good Work, to do something bigger, and to serve something greater than yourself.

In two weeks, on May 2 we’re going to talk about Church Membership and if you’ve been watching from the outside, and maybe you feel like you really haven’t contributed much of anything I’d love to invite you to make a commitment to the body of Christ. So, we’re going to go over the membership agreement, what it is and what it means, and to give you the opportunity to experience the ministry of Jesus. This is so important because there are so many people around us without hope, children who are lonely, marriages that need healing, broken people who need to be welcomed into the family of God. And so, I’d love to see you experience the joy of giving, serving, inviting, and supporting the ministry of the church as we share the love of Jesus. As we close, would you take a moment right now just to be still in the presence of God and listen for the prompting of the Spirit? Would you join me in prayer?

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