

Introduction

Pray.

Acts 17:22-27. (Pg 32 in Lent Guide).

Continuing in our series today on the practice of **mission – demonstrating and proclaiming the gospel to people who don't yet know Jesus.**

I want to start this morning with a bit of an exercise.

[So if you've got your lent guide out you're good to go, if not grab a notebook, or your notes app on your phone, I'm going to have you write some things down.]

- **Neighbors**
- **Coworkers**
- **Non-Christian friends or family**
- **Places you go to frequently (gym, grocery store, coffee shop, park, social club)**
- **Hobbies/Interests you enjoy**
- **What are you good at?**

Alright, set that list to the side for a moment, we'll come back to it at the end.

Acts 17:22-27

Acts 17. A bit of background:

- The book of Acts, if you're unfamiliar, is basically a detailed account of the growth of the early Church.
- A lot of it actually follows a new disciple of Jesus named Paul, who eventually became the guy who wrote the majority of the New Testament.
- And here Paul is going to have a specific gospel encounter with some folks in the city of Athens.
- We'll pick it up in v22...

Acts 17:22-27

22 So Paul, standing in the midst of the Areopagus, said: "Men of Athens, I perceive that in every way you are very religious.

So Greece at this time is polytheistic – which means they worship a whole bunch of different gods. And they're open to adding new gods to their list of ones they worship.

And Paul has been in the city for a few days now preaching about Jesus. And so some leaders in the city have invited him to come to the **Areopagus**, which is sort of their central meeting place, to present a case for why they should add Jesus as a deity to worship.

23 For as I passed along and observed the objects of your worship, I found also an altar with this inscription: 'To the unknown god.' What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you.

So as Paul starts his case, he begins by pointing out they even have an altar to "the unknown god".

- It's like a – “Just in case we missed one and he shows up we can say – ‘here you go, we were worshiping you we just didn't know it was you.’”
- And Paul is going to use that as a launching point to start talking about Jesus.

Now, just to be clear – what Paul is not saying is that they were actually worshiping the one true God they just didn't know it.

- He's simply starting with a place of common ground - these people assumed that there was such a thing as a spiritual realm. They were a religious people.
- And Paul wants to start on that commonality and then build a bridge over to the one true God, the only true God and what it means to follow Him.
- ***It's a masterclass in contextualization.*** Starting where someone is and building a bridge to the good news of Jesus.

That's what Paul is doing, I'm proclaiming to you about this one true God who you do not know. And look at what he says about God...

24 The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in temples made by man, 25 nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything. 26 And he made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place, 27 that they should seek God, and perhaps feel their way toward him and find him. Yet he is actually not far from each one of us.

So here is Paul proclaiming good news of God to this group of people – and in it he says something so crucial to us understanding our role in the mission of God. Our role in demonstrating and proclaiming the gospel.

If you can get a deep understanding of what Paul is arguing here (and I say this with no exaggeration), **If at a core level you can grasp and believe what these verses say – it will completely change (1) how you live on mission but even bigger than that (2) how you live your everyday life.**

Here's what the Scripture says, let me put it in one grabbable statement:

You are who you are and where you are so the people around you might come to know God.

Let's break this down together.

Who You Are

First let's talk about who you are.

24 The God who made the world and everything in it (that includes you and me), **being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in temples made by man, 25 nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything.**

What does it mean that God gives to all mankind life and breath?
It means very simply and yet wondrously – **God created you.**

Think about that for a minute – you exist as you because God gave you life.

- You are not just the result of some purely biological process called conception.

- You are created by God.
- You have been formed and wired and knit together into you by God.

Which means, stay with me on this – you are unique.

- In one sense you're just like everyone else in the fact that you are created in the image of God as a human with dignity, value, and worth.
- In another sense – you are nothing like anyone else. You are not me. I am not you.
- You are you, and you are you because God made you you.

And I don't just mean how you look or like your fingerprint. I mean God Himself has designed the combination you have of...

- Skills
- Aptitude
- Personality + temperament
- Past + History + family of origin
- Cultural Identity

None of that – is chance or happenstance. It's God. God formed you as you.

This is how the Psalmist writes it in **Psalm 139:13-16**:

13 For you formed my inward parts; you knitted me together in my mother's womb. 14 I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works; my soul knows it very well. 15 My frame was not hidden from you. when I was being made in secret, intricately woven in the depths of the earth. 16 Your eyes saw my unformed substance; in your book were written, every one of them, the days that were formed for me, when as yet there was none of them.

Look at what the Psalmist says – you formed me and you formed my days. Before I lived any of the days I lived, before that date was even on the calendar – they were written for me.

As one pastor says it – You were made for the days and the days were made for you.

So you are you, because God has made you you. But there's another layer to it as well, because when you become a follower of Jesus God adds on top of that creation wiring, what the Scriptures call "spiritual gifts".

Now this is different from the way you are wired. This is different from your aptitude or natural abilities (which are also given by God). If you are a Christian, you are also given specific spiritual gifts, specific supernatural empowerment by the Holy Spirit.

Look with me at **1 Cor 12...**

4 Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; 5 and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; 6 and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who empowers them all in everyone. 7 To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.

When you become a Christian, when you put your faith in Jesus and start following Him, you get the Holy Spirit. He comes to live within you to lead you and guide you and empower you.

And when He shows up in your life, He does not show up empty handed.

He comes, according to 1 Corinthians 12 – with a gift, with some specific way God wants to empower you. Gifts like:

- Teaching
- Encouragement
- Leadership
- Helping
- Generosity

You have a gift! If you're a Christian, you have a gift!

So God has uniquely wired you and then through the power of the Holy Spirit gifted you with spiritual, supernatural empowerment. That is who you are in Christ.

God has given you life, and breath, and everything. You are who you are – wired and gifted – because God made it be so.

Where You Are

Next, let's talk about where you are.

26 And he made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place...

So not only has God wired you, created you, he's also placed you.

- He's allotted the **periods** – **when** every single person would live.
- The **boundaries** – **where** every single person would live.

*You are **when** you are because of God...*

- It is no accident you were born the year you were born to live in this moment and time with these challenges in this culture in this generation.

*You are **where** you are because of God...*

- And I don't just mean Charlotte NC.
- Where you live
- Where you work
- Where you go to school
- Where your kids go to daycare
- Where you grocery shop

You. Uniquely wired and gifted you. Placed in the particular place you are.

- And not only that, he also particularly placed all of the people who would be there as well.
- **He determines everyone's when and where.**

Might Come to Know God

You are *who you are* and *where you are*... why? So the people around you might come to know God.

25 Since God himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything. 26 And he made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place, 27 that they should seek God, and perhaps feel their way toward him and find him. Yet he is actually not far from each one of us.

Why has God wired you, gifted you, and placed you how He has? **For the people around you to find Him.**

- So you thought you decided to **move to Charlotte**, but God is actually the one who placed you here because He has people there He wants to save.
- You thought you were choosing **a house or an apartment** based on school zones or affordability or the neighborhood, but God placed you there because He has people there He wants to save.
- You thought you were choosing a **career** based on pay or interests or it was the only place that would hire you, but God placed you there because He has people there He wants to save.
- You thought you were picking a **gym** based on convenience or the classes they offered, but God placed you there because He has people there He wants to save.
- You thought you were stuck with the **daycare** your kid is in or the school they're in because the other 15 choices were full, but God placed you there because He has people there He wants to save.

*And this, according to Acts 17 + Psalm 139...has been His plan since before you were even born.
You, in a place, for the sake of the gospel.*

That men might seek him and know him though he is not far from us.

How do we know He isn't far from us? How do we know He isn't far from our neighbors? How do we know He isn't far from our coworkers, family, or friends or the people around us?

Because you are there!

You're God's plan! He has called you to reach your neighbor. You know how I know that? Because it's YOUR neighbor.

I need you to see this – everything in your life that you think you logically decided, you weighed out the pros and cons, or you think you got forced into because it was the only option available – God was working behind the scenes in all of that – so that you might be in the particular places you are, as the particular you you are, for the sake of people coming to know Him.

Ordinary, Everyday Missionaries

This is crucial for us to grasp if we're going to join the mission of God.

Demonstrating and proclaiming the gospel means recognizing I am who I am and where I am for God to use me to reach people through me.

Which means we don't add mission to our lives as much as we learn to live missionally in our everyday lives.

This is what it means to be an ordinary, everyday missionary.

Aaron Coe – “The mission of God requires that believers leverage their lives for His glory. The Great Commission is not for a select few; it is for the entirety of the church. The movement of God’s mission sweeps across everyday, ordinary lives to draw in businesspeople, soccer moms, grandmothers, neighbors, students, lawyers, teachers, baristas, contractors, white collar, blue collar, or no collar at all. Regular people like you and me...filled with His spirit, laying down our lives, denying ourselves for the mission of God and the good of others. This is the invitation...this is God’s plan to change the world.”

An everyday ordinary missionary is one who knows – God is at work around me. He’s already seeking and saving the lost around me, and he has placed me where he’s placed me because he wants to use me to reach the people around me.

It’s learning to look at **our places and our passions** not just as the everyday, monotony of life, but as the God-designed opportunities for sharing the gospel.

- I’m not just at work to do my job, get a paycheck, and go home. I’m here on mission with God.
- I’m not just at the coffee shop to get my latte and read a book. I’m here on mission with God.
- I’m not just trying to parent my kids for another day and make it to bedtime. I’m here on mission with God.

Seeing these everyday, ordinary parts of our lives as infused with meaning because we have the chance to join God in what He’s doing in the world.

But this is going to require 2 things...

1. Intentionality

You go where you already go, but you go with new eyes and new desires – ready to be used by God for His mission.

That means as Christians we are always in these spaces proactively moving towards others.

- Paul is in the city of Athens, in the Areopagus ready to share about Christ. Ready to see what’s going on in the city around him, God has brought him to this place, wired him and gifted him, to not be used by Him to preach the gospel to these folks in this city.

We are not just sitting back hoping someone engages with us, talks with us, builds a friendship with us. We move towards people in the places God has put us.

We leverage what we’re already doing and where we’re already going with intentionality for the kingdom of God.

Caesar Kalinowski – “We need to move from a mindset of additional to intentional. What if God has actually given us this amazing way of seeing life that would make all of life one big, huge opportunity for discipleship and mission? Like everything we’re already doing, what if it’s already an opportunity, perfect for discipleship and mission?”

Panera. When we first moved to Charlotte, some of the women in our church began going to a certain Panera. They would sometimes go together, sometimes alone. It was convenient for them. Also Panera bagels are super cheap and their coffee has unlimited refills.

But they didn’t want this to just be a place they went, they wanted to go with intentionality, looking for gospel opportunities.

- They started befriending one of the women who worked there.
- Began asking questions and taking an interest in her life.
- Found out through conversation about some needs she had for her kids.
- Started inviting her to church, talking about Jesus.
- She ended up coming around Citizens for a little bit.
- No crazy ending...Eventually she moved away. But they were faithful to leverage where God had placed them for the sake of the gospel.

All they were doing was going to Panera. Somewhere they were going to go anyway. But I wanted to do so with intentionality.

I'm here, placed by God, for his mission.

That simple.

How do I intentionally leverage where I am, and what I have, and who I am for God's mission in the world?

2. Hospitality

So I'm not only stepping into these places with intentionality – how does God want to use me here to spread the gospel? I'm also learning in these environments to open up my heart and my life to be a non-anxious welcoming presence.

Here's what I mean – It is so easy to sprint through life with our heads down.

- We are all so incredibly busy and live such incredibly fast-paced lives.
- It's one thing to the next to the next to the next.
- I gotta go here, run this errand, do this thing, knock out this spreadsheet, finish up this meeting, get food at some point in there...
- *Our lives are frantic and chaotic and it's easy to get wrapped up in "what's the next thing I have to accomplish?"*

So hospitality means – letting yourself be interruptible.

I've been talking about this a good amount with some of the guys in my Community Group recently – just how interruptible Jesus is in the gospels. Like you read Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John and there's so much ministry Jesus has to do.

- Constantly surrounded by crowds and needs
- Miracles to perform and healing to offer and teaching to give
- **And yet he is consistently interruptible.**

When a woman touches the edge of his cloak. Or a centurion's daughter is sick and dying. Or when a lame man gets lowered down through a roof by his 4 friends. Or when little children want to come and learn from him.

And certainly you're important, and I'm important, but are we more important than Jesus? That he would be interruptible but we would be too busy...

- To stop and talk to our coworker?
- To put the phone down and play with our kid?
- To take off our headphones and talk to the barista?
- To pause our walk and chat with our neighbor?
- To rearrange our schedule to make space for a coffee with a friend?

Gospel intentionality and hospitality means leveraging who you are, how God has wired you, and where he has placed you for his glory. For the advancement of His kingdom. For the spreading of the gospel.

By opening up your life, your heart, your wallet, and your schedule to be used by God.

We have so many beautiful examples of this in our church family...

- I think about **Drew Dunn** and how God put him into a particular friend group when he got to Charlotte. And how much intentionality he has shown to have hard conversations, ask good questions of his friends and coworkers. Go out of his way to love and serve them...and so often he's the call they make when they're going through difficult seasons.

- I think about **Sophie Floyd**. I've lost count of how many of Sophie's coworkers I have met. She's so intentional – this person is not just someone I work with or next to. She works hard to build friendships, to invite them to places where they can hear about Jesus, to serve them and care for them.
- I think about **Brian Morrow** and how God put him at Coca-Cola and opened up doors (that he had to intentionally say “yes” to) to start a men's Bible study. That takes time out of his work week. He doesn't have to do that. He could go to work, punch in and punch out and go on about his life. But he's giving of himself, viewing that place God has put him with intentionality.
- Or I think about the **Myers** who leverage their home every month to create space for people to be together, to invite non-Christians to experience church family. That costs them something. Hosting something like that on a regular basis is a sacrifice, and yet they do it with intentionality and hospitality.

And there are so many more stories I could tell.

Conclusion + Practice

But let's close here.

Look back at your list.

- **Neighbors**
- **Coworkers**
- **Non-Christian friends or family**
- **Places you go to frequently (gym, grocery store, coffee shop, park, social club)**
- **Hobbies/Interests you enjoy**
- **What are you good at?**

How could God use you, if you took seriously the reality that you are who you are and where you are so the people around you might come to know God?

- What changes about how you live as a **neighbor**, if you realize you're there because of the mission of God? Maybe for you you just need to start getting to know your neighbors. Go for walks, stop and say “hey” to everyone you pass.
- What changes about how you go to **work**, if you realize you're there because of the mission of God?
- What changes about how you treat that **classmate, that friend, that server, that barista**. Whoever it is..... if you realize you're there because of the mission of God?
- How could you leverage what you **already enjoy doing** for God's mission?
- How could you leverage the **talents, abilities, and gifts** God has given you for his mission?

****Practice Guide.**