This morning we are continuing on with our series entitled *The Tree of Life*. If you are visiting with us this morning, our series is unpacking the eight essential qualities of a Jesus follower, and we are thinking of these qualities within the context of a tree…since Jesus regularly used that imagery to describe what happens in the life of a person who has received the gospel. In other words, through the practice of the spiritual disciplines, we should be growing deep roots…this is our hidden life in Christ. The health of the tree is completely dependent on the root structure, right? But what we know is that ultimately, the health of the tree is revealed by its fruit. So, as disciples of Jesus, as our roots grow deeper, we should be growing upward and outward, bearing the fruit of the Spirit that leads to the spread of the Gospel and the growth of God’s Kingdom in us and through us.

Thus far in our series we have looked at the first four qualities of a disciple: a disciple is one who 1) demonstrates a Gospel saturated life; who is 2) connected God; who 3) bears the fruit of the Spirit; and one who is 4) growing in their understanding of the Bible and Christian theology. This morning we will consider the 5th quality of a disciple: one who is committed to missional living.

As we have mentioned previously, we are working out of a small book authored by Pastor Dana Allen called *Simple Discipleship*, and at the end of this series we will be taking an assessment tool to see how we are progressing in the eight qualities of a disciple. So, when it comes to this fifth quality, missional living, Allen begins with this descriptor: ‘The extent to which an individual understands God’s mission in the world and is able to apply and replicate Jesus’ posture in their own situation.’

I LOVE this definition of a missional life, and I hope you will pay very close attention to every word of it. Too often we think of “missions” as funding people who go to Africa or other parts of the world to share the gospel. The “missions” budget in most churches reveals often reveals our convenient delegation of “missional living” to those who are professional “missionaries.” But listen church: nothing could be further from the truth.

Every disciple of Jesus has been called to live missionaly in the neighborhood where you live, in the office where you work, in the school where you attend, in the health club or the gym where you work out, on the bleachers where you watch your kids play ball…at all times, in all places, the disciple of Jesus is to live missionaly. So what does that mean?

Allen breaks down this concept of living missionaly into two facets: 1) understanding the ministry of Jesus; and 2) incarnational posture.

**1. Understanding the Ministry of Jesus**

I want you to take a minute and ask yourself: Do I understand the ministry of Jesus in the world? In other words, if I were to give you a piece of paper and you had to answer that question, what answer would you give? How do you understand the ministry of Jesus? What was the goal of
his ministry? What was His methodology? What strategies did Jesus employ to accomplish His ministry?

In Luke 19:10 Jesus defines His ministry: “The Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.” When all is said and done, the ministry of Jesus is a rescue mission. Souls are bound in sin, they are separated from God, and without the intervention of Jesus, they will be lost forever. Such is why the ministry of Jesus is to find lost souls, and to save lost souls.

In Luke 15, Jesus described His ministry in the parable of the lost sheep. He pointed to Himself as the Good Shepherd who leaves the 99 to search after the one sheep who has gone astray. I could point to several other examples, but you probably get the point by now: lost people matter to God…lost people were the mission and ministry of Jesus…so seeking out lost people for the sake of their salvation through the Gospel of Jesus Christ should always be the primary mission and ministry of Christ’s church, amen?

Now, how did Jesus go about His ministry? What were his strategies and tactics? How did He define success?

Let me simply highlight a few observations that Jesus followers should come to know about the ministry of our Lord.

1) The primary strategy of Jesus’ ministry was to become incarnate…to take on flesh and move into the space of those he came to save. Jesus never set up shop in a nice building and hoped that lost people would come to Him. Jesus presented the love of God by humbling himself, making himself nothing, and taking on the form of a servant. He came to us…He learned our language…He made Himself available to those who were lost at great personal sacrifice and expense. Jesus pursued His mission with full awareness that it would be costly, and He willingly paid the cost of his perfect life to see lost souls come into the Kingdom of God.

2) We can also observe that Jesus adjusted His approach based upon who He was talking to. If you read how Jesus spoke to the unbelieving Pharisees and religious leaders John 8, you will note how differently Jesus addressed the Samaritan woman at the well in John 4. Jesus dealt with a demon-possessed man differently than those who sat on a hill to hear him teach. Jesus dealt with the lepers differently than those who were healthy. Jesus was always on mission, but He understood that different people required different approaches in order for them to hear the Truth and enter into the Kingdom of God.

3) With very few exceptions, Jesus approached people in a spirit of humility. He spent time asking questions and engaging in conversations as a means of sharing the truth about God’s love. Jesus rarely employed a confrontational style of ministry, though there were times he was quite confrontational with religious people who leveraged their religious piety to manipulate and hold power over others.

4) Jesus often addressed the needs of hurting people as a means of earning their trust and sharing the truth of God’s Kingdom. The ministry of provision, healing, and deliverance were vital aspects of Christ’s ministry in a hurting world.

5) Jesus raised up followers and sent them out to be leaders. He called these follower/leaders “disciples,” and he commissioned His disciples in Matthew 28 to make
more disciples. So…we can observe that the strategy of Christ’s ministry required multiplication of follower/leaders who would advance His mission and ministry to every corner of the globe.

6) Jesus defined success when even one person repented. As He said in Luke 15:10, “There is joy in the presence of the angels over one sinner who repents.” Success in ministry can be measured in many ways, but Jesus lifted up repentance as the indicator of lost people finding their way home… a picture that is powerfully presented in the Parable of the Prodigal Son…also in Luke 15.

So…disciples, followers of Jesus, should demonstrate an understanding of these essential components of Jesus’ ministry that we just observed. Understanding the ministry of Jesus can be achieved through careful study of the New Testament and many secondary resources that help us to understand what Jesus did and how He went about it.

However, Allen acknowledges in his book what we all know is true: understanding the ministry of Jesus is only the first step…we must also commit ourselves to practicing the same incarnational posture that Jesus modeled for us in His earthly life.

II. Incarnational Posture: Allen defines the second aspect of missional living, incarnational posture, this way: the extent to which the disciple embodies the attitude and posture of Jesus in their life. It’s one thing to understand in our intellect the ministry and tactics of Jesus; it is quite another thing to commit ourselves to applying those same characteristics of Jesus in our ministry to the world. Here is where we once again must examine the roots of our tree. Are we tapped into the living water of Christ’s Holy Spirit such that we are becoming like Jesus in our attitudes and our posture towards a hurting world? What assumptions are we taking for granted that might keep us from forming an incarnational posture towards those who are lost in our context?

As I was thinking about Allen’s second point here, I could not help but return to Philippians 1 and 2, as Paul exhorts the young church in Philippi to both embrace the ministry of Jesus and to “have the same mind” as Jesus had in regards to their posture and attitude.

So, here’s what we’re going to do. I would like to invite you to stand, and together we will read what Paul wrote to the church, because these verses in every way encapsulate the ministry of Jesus and the perquisite posture for accomplishing that ministry through living a missional lifestyle.

Let us read the Word of God together, beginning with Philippians 1:27:

27 Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel, 28 and not frightened in anything by your opponents. This is a clear sign to them of their destruction, but of your salvation, and that from God. 29 For it has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in him but also suffer for his sake, 30 engaged in the same conflict that you saw I had and now hear that I still have. 2:1 So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit,
any affection and sympathy, complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.

Do all things without grumbling or disputing, that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world, holding fast to the word of life, so that in the day of Christ I may be proud that I did not run in vain or labor in vain.

As Paul writes to the church in Philippi, he is bound in chains, a prisoner due to his ministry. Right from the beginning of the letter, Paul encourages the church that even his imprisonment has served to advance the gospel (1:12), and that his current suffering has even served to embolden the witness of his team. Thus Paul is rejoicing...he is undeterred...and he is determined to live missionally regardless of the cost. Paul writes in 1:20, “...it is my eager expectation and hope that I will not be at all ashamed, but that with full courage now as always Christ will be honored in my body, whether by life or by death. For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.” Paul understood missional living. He understood the ministry of Jesus Christ, and he understood what that would be required of his life. Paul understood the cost, and he was fully committed to following Jesus, regardless of the cost.

In the passage we just read, Paul calls the church to make a commitment to missional living, and he honestly states what that will require. As we read in vs. 27-30 Paul writes, “Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel...for it has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in him but also suffer for his sake, engaged in the same conflict that you saw I had and now hear that I still have.”

Paul articulates one of the key aspects of this “incarnational posture” that Allen is referring to in his book. The incarnational posture of Jesus, as embodied and lived out by the Apostle Paul, will involve a degree of “suffering”...it will require the disciple to “engage in the conflict.”
One of the underlying, unspoken assumptions of our western culture is that we should be able to
arrange our lives in such a way as to avoid suffering and conflict. How many of you know that is true? If we could take a moment to be brutally honest, I think we would be shocked to observe just how much money, time, and energy we devote every day to avoiding conflict and suffering. Our culture celebrates comfort and the absence of conflict as goals worthy of our best effort. But are those cultural aspirations compatible with the disciple’s commitment to missional living? No…in fact, a biblical worldview shatters any expectation of a “comfortable and conflict avoidant” lifestyle. In Luke 9:23-24 Jesus states clearly, “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it.”

To live missionally means that we engage in the conflict, knowing full well that a certain degree of suffering, sacrifice, and inconvenience comes with following Jesus. Here in Philippians, Paul doesn’t mince his words, and he challenges the church to embrace the cost of discipleship for the sake of living missionaly.

Paul then gets even more specific about this Jesus-like posture. Beginning with 2:1 Paul writes, “So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. Do nothing out of selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.”

Can you hear how Paul is calling the church to bear the incarnational posture of Jesus in the way that they live in community with each other and in the mission field of a hurting world? I find Paul’s words to be compelling, but I cannot help but ask, “What would be required of us…of me…to grow into Christ in such a way that we would ‘do nothing out of selfish ambition or conceit…’?” I can tell you church, I have a long way to go in that department…you can ask my wife and kids…this is still something I struggle with every day. I am disgusted with how many things I do in a day that are clearly based on my selfish ambitions, and even my own conceit. I know…and so do you…that as soon as my decisions, investments, and time are devoted to my selfish ambitions…I am no longer living missionally. I have set aside the nature of Jesus and allowed my sinful nature to hold rule and sway in my life. Now listen: All of us struggle with our selfish ambitions and conceit…but to live missionally is to “have the mind of Christ…” It is to count others as more significant than myself…it is to live out of genuine humility…it is to look to the interests of others. So how do we make the transition from living selfish, self-promoting lives to living missionally? Paul captures the transition in what comes next beginning with vs. 5, “Have this mind among yourselves, that is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.” Notice what Paul says… “Have this mind among yourselves, that is yours in Christ Jesus…”

Paul does not say we should try really hard to be like Jesus. He doesn’t shame the church or ridicule our failures. Paul simply encourages the church to have…to take hold of…to employ that which has already been given to them when they became Jesus-followers…the mind of
Christ. Don’t miss this! The mind of Christ…the very incarnational posture of Jesus…is GIVEN TO THE DISCIPLE…this is part of our transformation from the old man to the new man, and it is something that the Holy Spirit does in us. We don’t have to manufacture the mind of Christ and His incarnational posture…it is something that comes about quite naturally when the Holy Spirit is working in our lives. When we relapse into old patterns of self-promoting behavior, it is because we are not yielding to the work of the Holy Spirit in us, but Paul knows with confidence that those who are truly in Christ will gradually have the mind of Christ on a more consistent basis, and as a result, their lives will begin to look like the life of Christ. Like Jesus, the posture of the disciple will be one who humbles himself, who empties himself, who takes the form of a servant, and who pursues obedience to the Father even at great personal expense…even at the cost of his/her very life.

This past week I began reading a fascinating book entitled, The Spiritual Roots of Kansas City: Discovering the Pasto to Shape Our Future by Bill High and Annika Bergen. I’m only a few chapters in, but already I have been deeply moved to discover how many well-known names in our city trace back to those who lived missionally for the Kingdom of God. For example: Johnson County is named after Rev. Thomas Johnson who started a missionary school to serve misplaced native Americans…it was a school that eventually came to be known as Shawnee Mission because many of the native Americans came from the Shawnee tribe. The name Wornall traces back to one of Kansas City’s great church planters, John B. Wornall. The name Holmes traces back to the founders of the First Baptist Church in Kansas City, Robert and Mary Anne Holmes.

All throughout history, even the history of our great city, men and women have responded to the call to live missionally for the Kingdom of God. Most of us are very poor historians, but if we were to read the right books and do our homework, we would discover that MOST of the world’s greatest good came about from average human beings who surrendered their life to live missionally for the glory of God and the advancement of His Kingdom. Some of you might recognize the name Scarritt…there is a Scarritt Point and a Scarritt Renaissance neighborhood here in town…both commemorate one of the leaders of our city in the mid 1800’s. Dr. Nathan Scarrit was a pastor, but he was also a businessman and an investor. Over the course of his life, Scarrit actually earned millions of dollars buying and selling farm land even as he pastored five Methodist churches at the same time! Scarritt was highly respected and honored in the city; however, Scarritt had one allegiance and one only which was captured in something he wrote late in his life, “The title of Sonship to Himself, which I believe God by His Spirit has written on my heart, I esteem as infinitely more precious than any title with which mortal man could honor me.”

Scarritt shone brightly for the Kingdom of God; and this was Paul’s dream as he wrote to the little church plant in the city of Philippi. Paul knew that those who committed themselves to live for the ministry of Jesus, who yielded to the Holy Spirit and assimilated the Mind of Christ, would be “those who shine as lights in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation.” Church…that is our mission: to be the light of Christ in a hurting culture so that the lost are found; the broken made whole; the fatherless find hope; and our city is blessed.
Our mission will require each and every one of us to live missionally…to suffer whatever is required to seek and to save the lost…to engage in the conflict in Jesus’ name. I can’t tell you exactly what that looks like in your context, in your family system, in your workplace, or in your daily lives. I can tell you that living missionally will require all of us to follow Jesus outside of our comfort zones and the regular crowd of Christians we typically hang out with. Living missionally will require us to incarnate into the space where people are lost and hurting. Living missionally will require us to engage in the conflict wherever there is injustice, because injustice tramples the souls of those whom Jesus died to save. Living missionally will require us to live generously, to make sacrifices, and to set aside our pride so that lost and broken people will come to know Jesus and be saved. At the minimum, living missionally will require that we live in the BLESS rhythms: Begin with Prayer; Listen and Engage; Eat Together; Serve; and Share our story. For some of us, living missionally means we need to answer the call to pursue vocational ministry; still others of us are being called to the foreign mission field. Only you know what God is calling you to specifically, but I can tell you that all of us are being called to live missionally, amen?

Church, missional living begins with one decision that leads to the next decision. What are you going to decide today that will lead you to live missionally as you leave this place? What spiritual discipline will you pursue so that you might decrease and the mind of Christ increase in your daily life? What are you willing to suffer and endure so that lost souls can be found, broken souls healed, and fatherless souls reunited with our One True Father? I encourage you to make a decision today, and another one tomorrow, that we might be a church that lives on mission. Amen? Let’s pray.