

Christ Community Covenant Church
"Live a life worthy"
Pastor Randy McNeal - March 6, 2011
Commissioning Service/Sermon

Intro: How did I get here?

My journey in Christ began at a young age. When I was five years old I heard a message about Christ, through the wonderful technology of flannel boards, and knew I needed him in my life. From that point on I grew up in the same church my parents still attend. I was involved in AWANA, youth group, worship team, work days, VBS, and practically anything I could get into. So were my parents. Like most youth, going to church wasn't a guarantee of my devotion to following Christ. I was caught up in the games of being popular. When I had to miss school or things for youth group I often lied. I begged for the coolest clothes, played the sports (although not well) that my friends played and acted in every way like everyone else. I even refused to turn in my homework so I wouldn't look smart. Seriously, that was the extent that I pursued popularity.

Ask my parents. My assignments were done well and had a permanent residence in my back pack. I of course, blamed my teacher but forgot to hide the evidence and was eventually found out. My parents tried to motivate me by paying me 10 cents for each assignment I turned in. After turning in all my assignments I had like 2 dollars! The real motivator came when they took away the only sport I liked; hockey. After that my grades drastically improved. I graduated with honors from both high school and college. Ultimately it was my parents who helped motivate me in school. They worked with me at home, held me accountable, and lovingly corrected me.

My quest for popularity ended in 8th grade. I made a profound decision to leave my friends behind because of their influence over me and start new. One of my youth leaders had said to me:
"Decide who you are going to be in high school or your friends will decide for you."

I knew that staying with my group meant I would be the same. I wanted to follow Christ and a new setting was perfect. It was in this new environment that I first heard a prophetic word over my life.

In technology class freshman year, we were tasked with writing a Career Research paper. Our school had a legal emphasis and given my propensity to argue with my parents, we thought that being a lawyer would be a good option. However, I had begun thinking about one day becoming a pastor. I asked my friend, who wasn't a believer, what I should write about. I still remember his comment:

"You should do it on being a pastor since that's what you will become anyway."

And now, some 10 years later, that prophecy in my life is fulfilled with my commissioning as a pastor here at 4Cs. This will always be a moment in my life where I can look back and see God's hand guiding me to where God wanted me to be.

And that's what leads me here today, talking about how we are to live a life worthy of God's calling in each of our lives.

Calling and Vocation

Often times in commissioning or ordination services Ephesians 4:11(NRSV) is used. It reads:

"I beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called."

While this verse is great as a stand alone in confirming someone of their call, I prefer to look at it in the context that Paul writes. If we ask ourselves, "What call is Paul talking about" we may start flipping backwards to see if he has already stated the call. I believe the Apostle starts with an

explanation of our call in chapter one of Ephesians and that is where we will take our cue from today.

Ephesians 1:3-14:

³ Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. ⁴ For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love ⁵ he predestined us for adoption to sonship through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will— ⁶ to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves. ⁷ In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace ⁸ that he lavished on us. With all wisdom and understanding, ⁹ he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, ¹⁰ to be put into effect when the times reach their fulfillment—to bring unity to all things in heaven and on earth under Christ.

¹¹ In him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will, ¹² in order that we, who were the first to put our hope in Christ, might be for the praise of his glory. ¹³ And you also were included in Christ when you heard the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation. When you believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, ¹⁴ who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession—to the praise of his glory.

Perhaps if I were to ask you to take a closer look and find a recurring phrase you would pick out "to the praise of his Glory". This passage calls us to live "to the praise of his glory". If you were to look deeper at who we are according to this passage you would come up with words like:

- Blessed
- Chosen
- Predestined
 - To the praise of his glory
- Redemption
- Knowledge
- Chosen again
 - To be for the praise of his glory
- Marked
- With a seal
 - To the praise of his glory.

One author sums up this passage like this:

"God has **blessed** us, **chosen** us and **predestined** us to adoption in Christ to THE PRAISE OF HIS GLORIOUS GRACE. In Christ we have **redemption, knowledge** of the mystery of his will and we are **chosen** so we might be for THE PRAISE OF HIS GLORY. You were marked with the **seal** of the Holy Spirit to THE PRAISE OF HIS GLORY." ¹(Brendlinger 27)

So we are to live for God's glory. Our speaker this weekend at Powderburn was Tim Ciccone. He described it as "Awe and Wonder". When you think about the times that we see God's glory in the Bible, it's often times where some attribute is reflected. Think of Moses and the burning bush where God was reflected through the fire. Or even how whenever Moses met with God his face was radiant, reflecting the image of God.

¹ Brendlinger, Irv The Call to Authenticity Emeth press, Lexington, KY copyright 2009

Given this definition of God's glory, let's say that Glory is the reflection of God. If that is true then according to Ephesians 1 *our* calling is to reflect God.

The difference between calling and vocation is that calling is shared by all of us while vocation often comes from the unique way we work out our calling.

We are all called to reflect God. When we do this people have an opportunity to see God's glory and respond to God. Often times within our calling different expressions arise.

For youth, it often happens musically, with sports, academics, service projects, etc.

For adults it is often captured in their vocation, volunteer hours, parenting, etc.

One of the ways I saw different expressions of calling being worked out in vocation was in the remodeling of this church. You didn't have to be around long to see God's glory being reflected all over by individuals using their professional giftedness and willingness to make this beautiful building.

- Clayton administrated the building operation
- Allen was around working with carpentry and electrical stuff
- Smoker was here constantly, often past midnight which caused the alarm company to wake up the Thoutt family
- Pastor Victor had a crew here doing everything that needed to be done
- Many of you showed up en mass on Saturdays to help paint
- There were people on their hands and knees for days laying baseboards.

And youth, I have to tell you. It was important to us that this floor is flat so we could play dodge ball, ultimate four square, and ultimately have space to run around without the possibility of turning an ankle on the slanted floor. What you probably don't know is I came in later one night and for hours people had taped off both sides of every crack in the floor, sealed every crack, and then pulled up the tape. That meant hours on their hands and knees on this hard concrete floor. God's glory was reflected to me that night where despite physical pain they pushed through because they wanted the youth and children to have a place to do what we do.

Our calling is to reflect God. That calling works its way out in different ways for different people depending on their giftedness. A question for you is:

"How do you best reflect God?"

Abundant Life: When calling meets vocation

We talk a lot about the abundant life here. For me my abundant life is best represented by how I live out my calling by reflecting God with my gifts. This abundant life seems to represent itself best since I get to combine my calling with my vocation.

All throughout college I interned at a church in youth ministry. After college I continued at the church. When Aubrie and I started dating and we decided I should move to Colorado, I took some time to determine my call in vocation. I thought about working at a teen center, becoming a middle school counselor, even a teacher or maybe a PERA. As I dreamed of these options, my calling got in the way. How I best reflected God would never fully be established if my vocation was placed outside the church.

I love the Bible. I love reading it, I love talking about it, I love studying it. In fact, the more I study the Bible the more convinced I am that it is useful, relevant, and a necessary aid for us in today's world. The examples of faith in the Bible are ones we can relate to. The people in there are just as messed up, probably more so, than we are. The Bible points us always to Christ and the Gospel. Which is my other problem.

I love the Gospel. I am convinced that I never heard the Gospel until a couple years ago. Ok, so that's not true, I just didn't listen well. I always thought the Gospel was about my salvation. Believe in Jesus, pray a prayer, be saved: "The Gospel." Recently I've learned it's so much more. I learned that God creates the world and creates us to rule the world under God's authority. We reject that authority and end up facing judgment. Christ comes in, taking our punishment and reestablishes his rule over us which means that "salvation" is more than just believing; it's yielding.

When we yield to Christ we do so out of gratitude. I rebelled against yielding for so long because "believing" was enough and it meant freedom. I didn't realize that in my refusal to yield to Christ's rule in my life I was missing out on the best part of the Gospel: Kingdom Living. By yielding to God as my Lord and Master I submitted myself to God's plan for my life. I actually feel more free than I ever did!

I feel free because I no longer have to earn anything. If Christ is the hero, the ruler, then it's not about me. Nothing I did saves me. Even God unveils my eyes so I can believe. The reason that is freeing is because if there is nothing I can do to earn my salvation, it also means there is nothing I can do to mess it up. Salvation is Christ's job. I just yield out of gratitude, not obligation, to my King. I live for the Kingdom.

When I finally realized this concept it was like a second conversion. Everything changed. What my values were, how I viewed my relationships, my trust for God. It was the confidence I received from knowing that I had been forever freed from sin and delivered into slavery for the Kingdom. So, like any good slave, I received my mark of ownership in the form of my tattoo.

"Intentional" is the word above the cross. For me, it symbolizes love in action. For me to intentionally love someone means I have to show it. The greatest example of love ever shown was when God, in human form, died so I might enter into the kingdom. I want everyone to know who I belong to.

Belonging is what every one of us desires. It's seen so strongly in youth. I want our youth to know that they belong to the best group of all. They belong to a Kingdom where the king himself will willingly lay down his life so that we may live. A king that loves them intentionally and will never let them go.

My vocation and calling meet as the passions and gifts God has given me are worked out at my job. It's worked out as I communicate the Biblical Truths, the Gospel, and God's intentional love in the lives of the youth.

"How do you reflect God in your job?"

High Point Student Ministries

Who we are affects how we do our jobs. My job is the Youth Pastor for HPSM and who you have heard God has made me manifests itself best in the values and goals of HPSM.

At HPSM our goal is:

"To help students develop a lasting relationship with Christ and the Church..."

by

"Partnering with parents and caring adults to model a faith walk that is sustainable throughout the life of the student."

I would like to unpack this further with you. "To help students develop a lasting relationship with Christ and the Church" means that we are helping these kids respond to the Gospel. It means that their lives will be more than just believing; but also about Kingdom living. That's why we do service projects, mission trips, camp, CHIC, meet with youth all over Arvada, teach them to reach their schools, and ultimately call them to rely on their relationship with the church (the people, not the building or institution) to motivate and encourage them. The reason it is so important that we all be in this room together is because we are all part of the Kingdom. Kingdom living means we have to be connected. If youth don't make connections with adults when they are young it will be harder for them to continue to live in the kingdom. The trend is that most abandon the kingdom, and stick with just believing.

Youth, we want you to know the joy of Kingdom living. We want you to stay involved in the church because we really believe and know that your life will be better for it because of the second part of our Goal: "Partnering with parents and caring adults to model a faith walk that is sustainable through the life of the student".

I will get to the partnership piece in a moment. First I want to define what a faith walk is.

The definition of a faith walk is: If you can see the end of the path, you aren't on one.

Faith is something we can often see in others but doesn't tell us the end goal for ourselves. When I was praying about this position here at 4Cs I had a rock. The rock reminded me that I wanted God's plan no matter what. I didn't know where that would take me but I trusted my king. Now this rock is a symbol of a mile marker of how God provided for me.

If you've ever hiked a lot, especially in climbing mountains, you know what a cairn is. It's a stack of rocks meant to show the way. You can't see the end of the trail until you are already there. At the top you can look back and see many of the cairns that marked your path. That's how it is with a faith walk. We have moments in life that we look back on to see where God has provided for us.

A couple weeks ago we laid rocks in this jar to symbolize God's provision in your lives. The Israelites did the same when they crossed the Jordan to be able to share with their children how God had provided them with freedom. The reason we need adults in our youth ministry is because we can't see ahead on our faith walk, only behind. People older than us have more to see in that respect and can show us the way. Youth, this is why your parents are so important.

In your handout you have a list of HPSM values. Most speak for themselves and you can always read the corresponding verses to know more. The one value I want to finish with may be new to some of you. Parent Partnership.

Parent Partnership (Deut. 6:4-6 NIV)

Moses sets up parent partnership when he says to "talk about if (being the great commandment to love God) always." He gives this job to the families. Notice he doesn't say "make sure you know everything about the Bible and be perfect so that you can teach your kids". No, he only encourages the conversation. The Bible is full of bad parents who had great influence on their kids...

Noah was a drunk

Abraham offered his wife to another man

Rebekah helped deceive her husband into giving Jacob the blessing

David had an affair

And yet each parent was effectively used by God. There is no escaping your responsibility. Even if you could argue your way out, logically parents have the most influence on their kids.

The average church only has 40 hours in a given year to influence a life (see graph).

The average parent has 3,000 hours per year to influence a life (see graph).

*“No one has more potential to **influence** a child’s relationship with God than parents”.*

That’s why it’s so important that at HPSM we partner with parents. You need to know our plan so we can work together. For too long youth groups have functioned completely separate from families and we can’t have that if our children are to grow up with a kingdom mindset.

Now, we still will for those youth who don’t have believing parents or need an escape, but to do that we need families that are willing to adopt these youth into their spiritual families and model that faith walk.

Ultimately, if parents have the most influence and are charged with teaching youth the faith, HPSM exists as much for the parents as the kids. We are your support ministry. We want to help you feel confident in your faith development because it can be a scary task. We want to do whatever we can to help you. We offer programs that supplement the conversations you have at home and we want to start offering programs for you as parents to learn how to best impact your children.

To receive monthly installments of Parent Partnership email
Randy.McNeal@christcommunitycovenantchurch.org

This parent partnership will help you know what our plan is and give you helpful insight in how to talk to your kids about faith. We will have periodic get-togethers for parents to come together and talk about the issues surrounding the development of young faith. We want to help you.

I am who I am first because of Christ. Christ used my parents in a great way. No one has had more influence on my faith than my parents. Youth, the sooner you realize that adults, specifically your parents, actually know what they’re talking about, the easier your life will be.

Communion