

EXPLORING MEMBERSHIP—SESSION ONE

THE JOURNEY



FIRST SOUTHERN BAPTIST CHURCH

Exploring Membership

Exploring Our Identity (Session One)

What is the church?

The nature of the Church, as described in the Scriptures, determines its structure. Therefore, the structure of the church should *not* be determined by culture, business practices, or even denominational traditions. The word *Church* is particular to Christianity. You won't find it in any other religion. For example, there are no Buddhist churches, or Hindu churches. Why is this?

“According to the New Testament, the church is primarily a body of people who profess and give evidence that they have been saved by God's grace alone, for His glory alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone.” - Mark Dever, *Nine Marks of a Healthy Church*

The Church is not foremost about the building the body meets in but primarily about those who make up the body that meets. It is a local, living, and loving, community of people who have bonded together in and through Jesus for the sake of the body of Christ and the spread of the Gospel in the world.

The Church exists primarily for the instruction, discipleship, and edification of those who are followers of Jesus Christ. Additionally, it exists to equip the saints for evangelism of those not yet come to faith in Jesus as their savior.

The Church is the *bride* of Christ

(Ephesians 5:25-27; Revelations 19:7-9, 21:2)

The Church is the *body* of Christ

(1 Corinthians 12:27, Ephesians 1:22-23, Colossians 1:18a, Romans 12:4-6)

The Church is a *fellowship*

- What is fellowship? (Acts 2:42)
- What are some top priorities in fellowship?
(Ephesians 4:1-3, Rom 14:9, Psalm 133:1)
- Any attitude that causes disunity is sin.
(Proverbs 17:14, Romans 12:16-18, 15:5-6, 1 Corinthians 1:10, Philippians 2:1-3, Colossians 3:12-15)

The Church is a *family* (1 Peter 3:8, Galatians 6:10, 1 Timothy 5:1-2)

What major trait characterizes a family? *Love for one another* (John 13:34-35)

As a family, First Southern seeks to embody the New Testament passages that use the phrase "one another." These phrases reveal how we Christians are to treat one another. The exhortation to love one another occurs more than a dozen times in the New Testament. The additional exhortations define what love in action looks and feels like within the family of God. They include:

- 1 Corinthians 12:26, be members of one another
- 1 John 1:7, have fellowship with one another
- Romans 12:10, be devoted to one another
- Galatians 5:13; 1 Peter 4:10, serve one another
- Romans 12:16, be of the same mind with one another
- Romans 12:18; 14:19; Hebrews 12:14; be at peace with one another
- Romans 15:7, welcome and accept one another
- Ephesians 4:32; Colossians 3:13, forgive one another
- Romans 12:10, honor one another
- 1 Peter 4:10, employ gifts for one another
- 1 Thessalonians 5:11; Hebrews 3:13, encourage one another
- 1 Thessalonians 5:11, build up one another
- Galatians 6:2, bear each other's burdens
- Colossians 3:13; Ephesians 4:2, bear with one another
- Ephesians 5:21, submit to one another
- Colossians 3:16, admonish one another
- Romans 15:14, instruct one another
- Hebrews 10:24-25, stir up one another to love and good work

Why be a member of a church?

“Church membership is a crucial topic for understanding what Christ is calling you to as His disciple. Joining a church will not save you any more than your good works, your education, your culture, your friendships, your financial contributions, or your baptism will save you. Non-Christians should not seek to join a church, but to learn more about what it means to be a Christian...”

Ten Reasons Why Membership Matters

It's biblical.

Jesus established the local church and all the apostles *did* their ministry through it. The Christian life in the New Testament is church life. Christians today should expect and desire the same.

The church is its members. To be part of “a church” in the New Testament is to be one of its members (Matthew 16:17-18; Acts 2; I Corinthians 12-14). And you want to be part of the church because that's who Jesus came to rescue and reconcile to himself.

It's how to officially represent Jesus.

Membership is the church's affirmation that you are a citizen of Christ's kingdom and therefore a representative of Jesus before the nations.

It's how to declare one's highest allegiance.

Your membership in the church is a public testimony that your highest allegiance belongs to Jesus. Trials and persecution may come, but your only words are, “I am with Jesus.”

It's how to embody and experience biblical images.

It's within the accountability structures of the local church that Christians live out or embody what it means to be the “body of Christ,” the “temple of the Spirit,” the “family of God,” and so on for all the biblical metaphors (see 1 Cor. 12). And you want to experience the interconnectivity of his body, the spiritual fullness of his temple, and the safety and intimacy and shared identity of his family.

It's how to serve other Christians.

Membership helps you to know which Christians on planet earth you are specifically responsible to love, serve, warn, and encourage. It enables you to fulfill your biblical responsibilities to Christ's body (for example, see Eph. 4:11-16; 25-32).

It's how to follow Christian leaders.

Membership helps you to know which Christian leaders you are called to obey and follow. Again, it allows you to fulfill your biblical responsibility to them (Heb. 13:7; 17).

It helps Christian leaders lead.

Membership lets Christian leaders know which Christians they will “give an account” for (Acts 20:28; 1 Peter 5:2; Hebrews 13:17).

It enables church discipline.

It gives you the biblically prescribed place to participate in the work of church discipline responsibly, wisely, and lovingly (Matt 18; 1 Cor. 5).

It gives structure to the Christian life.

It places an individual Christian's claim to "obey" and "follow" Jesus into a real-life setting where authority is actually exercised over us (John 14:15; 1 John 2:19; 4:20-21).

It builds a witness and invites the nations.

Membership puts the alternative rule of Christ on display for the watching universe (see Matt. 5:13; John 13:34-35; Eph. 3:10; 1 Peter 2:9-12). The very boundaries which are drawn around the membership of a church yields a society of people which invites the nations to something better.

...Church membership is our opportunity to grasp hold of each other in responsibility and love. By identifying ourselves with a particular church, we let the pastors and other members of that local church know that we intend to be committed in attendance, giving, prayer, and service. We allow fellow believers to have greater expectations of us in these areas, and we make it known that we are the responsibility of this local church. We assure the church of our commitment to Christ in serving with them, and we call for their commitment to serve and encourage us as well...

Why membership at First Southern?

First Southern has a rich heritage. It has been a part of this community for some fifty years but two years ago this church went through a difficult season that will forever mark its history as the church leadership sought to merge two churches and reconstitute under a new membership and constitution. Ultimately, the church at large made the decision to not go in this direction and it resulted in the exit of the leadership and many families. This created a two year season of healing and soul searching for this fellowship. Though difficulty in a local church like this is never desired, the end results have been a very unified and committed body of brothers and sisters in Christ laboring well for God's fame and glory.

It has also caused this body to clarify its core mission and values. Without question this church knows why God has placed it on this hill. We exist to glorify God by **making His name famous among the nations** and discipling His children so they are **formed in His image**.

Saved by Grace, through Christ alone,
we share God's love in worship and witness.

Seeking to Live the Gospel of Jesus in word and deed.

Shining the Light of Jesus throughout our community and our world.

This church is ever committed to loving one another well in the name of Christ, serving in such a way that we are a light in the midst of a dark and perverse society, giving generously of our time and resources so that the mission would advance and those in need would experience the generosity of God through His people.

Three primary lessons that this body has learned over the last few years are that membership matters, that is, commitment to Christ and to one another is a must. As well, this congregation has learned that becoming outwardly focused is vital to mission effectiveness. And finally, that having well equipped leaders is of primary importance.

This church is poised for mission impact and growth. What we need is willing servants whose desire is to be pleasing to the Lord as they pray, serve, and live in light of the grace and mercy they have received from Christ.

We have a distinctive identity as a church who partners with the Southern Baptist Convention to accomplish its mission. The SBC is a group of 44,000 churches who cooperate together in advancing the mission of the church. This is accomplished through the sending and supporting of missionaries in North America and throughout the world. As well, this partnership includes a commitment to discipling God's people through the production of educational materials and through the support of colleges and seminaries who are tasked with the responsibility of training and equipping Christians for greater service in the Kingdom.

First Southern's heritage, experience, and affiliations make it the church it is today. We are grateful for God's grace as He continues to demonstrate His faithfulness to His church in Floyds Knobs, Indiana. First Southern is a great place to experience the joy of living in community with other believers and being engaged in a cause that is bigger than yourself. You are invited to join a band of brothers and sisters in your service to King Jesus.

Jesus said, "I will build my church" (Matt. 16:18).

If Jesus is committed to the church, should we be any less committed to it?

Who can join First Southern?

First Southern's membership is made up of those who have ***confessed Jesus Christ as their Savior***, recognizing their own sinfulness and their desperate need for redemption, believing that the shed blood of Christ and death on the cross and His resurrection provide a means of forgiveness and salvation for all who will believe.

These individuals have been ***baptized by immersion*** as a public confession of their belief in and commitment to Jesus as their Savior.

These individuals are ***committed to the mission of the church*** as demonstrated by their regular participation in gathering with fellow believers, giving generously of their

time and resources in service to the church body and the community, and following well the leadership of the church.

Who is First Southern?

First Southern is marked by ***gospel clarity***. We do not want anyone to misunderstand the claims of Christ. He is the Son of God come in flesh, who lived a sinless life as the God-Man, shed His blood in death on the cross, and was raised from the dead overcoming the power of sin and death, thereby making a way for all who will believe to be saved.

It is out of God's great mercy and grace in salvation that we are a redeemed people. As people whose very lives have been purchased with the ransom of the Son of God's life, we are a new people with a new identity. We have a ***redeemed identity***.

**As the people of God, we are worshippers, family,
servants, disciples, and witnesses.**

Worshippers.

OUR HEAVENLY FATHER IS SEEKING TRUE WORSHIPPERS

John 4:23... But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the **true worshipers** will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for **the Father is seeking such people to worship him**.

The Bible says that God created all things and sustains it by the power of his word. The psalmist tells us of "the heavens are telling of the glory of the Lord, and their expanses declaring the work of his hands." (Ps 19:1). Through Moses, God instructs his covenant people Israel, that they are to have no other gods before him, to make no idol-like substitutes to worship instead of him, they are to regularly set aside time as his people to gather and worship him. Scripture is filled with invitations like these to worship and glorify God.

All of creation sings his praise of course, but how much more must those of us, who are redeemed and have been commissioned to be his ambassadors bearing his image, become true worshipers of the one true God.

This indeed is what the heavenly father is seeking—worship from the redeemed. Our very lives and words are to speak of this redemption. God has chosen to use forgiven sinners to make his name famous among the nations. Through people like you and me, he is making the good news of Jesus Christ known to every tribe, tongue, and nation. Revelation 5:9-10 – reminds us that the 24 elders and the 4 living creatures sang out in worship of the lamb, Jesus Christ:

And they sang a new song, saying,
"Worthy are you to take the scroll
and to open its seals,

for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation, and you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God, and they shall reign on the earth.”

Know this, God has a mercy plan and the redeemed worshippers are not only recipients but we are active participants in spreading the word. God is indeed seeking true worshippers from all around the globe.

“Missions exists because worship doesn’t. Worship is ultimate, not missions, because God is ultimate, not man. When this age is over, and the countless millions of the redeemed fall on their faces before the throne of God, missions will be no more. It is a temporary necessity. But worship abides forever.” (John Piper, Let the Nations Be Glad, 11)

Think about that statement with me for a minute. There's coming a day when missions will cease but worship will never end. **Part of our permanent redeemed identity is that of a true worshiper.**

TRUE WORSHIPPERS, BY GOD’S GRACE, HAVE ABANDONED THEIR IDOL WORSHIP FOR TRUE WORSHIP OF THEIR CREATOR

John 4:16-18... Jesus said to her, “Go, call your husband, and come here.” The woman answered him, “I have no husband.” Jesus said to her, “You are right in saying, ‘I have no husband’; for you have had five husbands, and the one you now have is not your husband. What you have said is true.”

Though the Samaritan woman displays religious and theological interest, her soul was wrecked with sin. This is exactly what Jesus points out in her life. He speaks clearly of her need for living water, that is the source of eternal life in Jesus Christ. But he goes further and seems to press right into the darkest spot of this lady’s life. He points out that she has had five husbands and she is now living with a man to whom she is not married. In part, what Jesus is doing here is pointing out an all-consuming idol in Samaritan woman's life. She has been consumed, it seems, and has idolized her “need” for a man in her life. She has tried to find satisfaction and fulfillment in a human relationship rather than in a relationship with God. It has wrecked her life.

We must understand anytime that we try to find satisfaction and fulfillment in anything other than Jesus Christ we are destined to be disappointed and even destroyed by life’s circumstances. The reality is that these substitutes consume us and whether we would confess it or not we have made them an idol in our life.

Jesus tells this woman and us that the Father is looking for true worshipers who will abandon the worship of false gods and become true worshipers of the one living God, consumed by worshiping Him in Spirit and truth.

Christ is teaching us that when we come to faith in Christ our identity is forever changed from one who opposed God and worshipped idols to one who worships him alone. As a redeemed child of God, we are now true worshippers.

GOD IS SEEKING “SPIRIT AND TRUTH” WORSHIPPERS

John 4:23-24... But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.”

Spirit...Jesus’ point here is that since God is spirit, proper worship of him is also a matter of spirit rather than physical location (Jerusalem versus Mount Gerizim). Jesus is the greater replacement in terms of worship over and against the Jerusalem temple.

Thus, true worship is not a matter of geographical location (worship in a church building), physical posture (kneeling or standing), or following a particular rituals (cf. Matt. 6:5–13); it is a matter of the heart and of the Spirit.

Truth...Jesus says of himself in Jn 14:6, “I am the way, the truth, and the life, no one comes to the Father but by me”. Jesus is the truth.

“SPIRIT AND TRUTH” WORSHIP IS GOSPEL-CENTERED

John 4:20-21... Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, but you say that in Jerusalem is the place where people ought to worship.” Jesus said to her, “Woman, believe me, the **hour is coming** when neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father.

At this point in the conversation, Jesus has pressed into this Samaritan woman's life and exposed her brokenness and sinfulness. As a result, she perceives Jesus to be a prophet and asks him a theological question that centered on a centuries old debate between the Samaritans and the Jews about the right time and place of worship.

It's a bit humorous that over the last 25 years the American church has been engaged in what we might call a worship war of our own making as well and we think that it is something new. And these wars have related to the style of worship—that is, the type of music and lyrics of the songs sung, the volume of the music, the instruments utilized, the medium of lyric delivery, and so forth. Often you may have wanted to stand in the midst of those doing the battling and say “Is this really worth our effort and energy?”.

But on the other hand, the protestant church has been engaged in worship discussions since Luther made changes to the Catholic liturgy in the 1500s. He wanted the congregation to participate in worship which meant making sure that the common language of the people was used in the worship service not Latin. This meant that the bible had to be translated and even new songs written. Luther was driven to make these changes for two primary reasons:

1. **He believed in the priesthood of all believers (1 Pet 2:5,9 Eph 4:11-16)**—that is we are all priests before God and that Jesus is our “high priest” who has obtained forgiveness for us. We do not need an earthly priest. We are servant-priests with gifts to minister to one another in the body of Christ.
2. **Worship was an opportunity for the redeemed to celebrate Christ's sacrifice and victory**—an opportunity to respond to that amazing grace; not an opportunity for the priest to obtain forgiveness of our sin.

This change in worship continued through leaders such as Bucer, Calvin, Knox, Zwingli, and others.

These are important conversations for each generation to have, for sure. But what must never change is the rich conviction of the reformers and of the apostles, which is, worship must be gospel-centered. Every time we gather for worship, we must tell the story of redemption—God is the holy Creator who made man in his own image desiring relationship and worship; man rebelled ultimately through self worship judging God's words as untrustworthy resulting in a broken relationship between Creator and creature and a marring of that perfect image; God reveals his preplanned intention of sending his son Jesus who would sacrifice his life as a ransom for many by dying on the cross and being resurrected; Man, by God's grace and gift of faith, recognizing his need for Christ acknowledges his own sinfulness and seeks forgiveness through Jesus the Savior; Believers are now at peace with God and with one another through this grace and richly desire to offer their lives up in worship to their Savior and Creator; this community of the redeemed is actively sent out to tell the nations of this grace and faith that is available only in Jesus Christ and are about this mission until the promised earthly return of Christ occurs, judgments are pronounced and the heavens and earth are renewed with God dwelling amidst his people and the whole cosmos being his temple.

So many churches have gotten so hung up on worship style rather than on the content and the object of worship.

Our audience for worship is an audience of one—the triune God!

So Jesus responds to the worship wars of his day, and declares this time and place argument to be useless. He tells the woman at the well that the time is coming and is already present that worshiping on Mount Gerizim in Samaria or on Mount Moriah in Jerusalem is not the defining factor in true worship.

You see, the Samaritans' bible consisted of the first five books of the law (the Pentateuch) and therefore they were convinced that Mt. Gerzim was the right place to worship. The Jews' Bible consisted of what we would now call the Old Testament which clearly included God's direct endorsement of Solomon's Temple in Jerusalem as the right place to worship. So the debate was legitimate to a point, but Jesus was now declaring it illegitimate and useless.

When Jesus says, "the hour is coming" he is referring to his death on the cross and his resurrection. What he is saying is that true worship will be forever changed because of the cross. It will not be confined to a specific place for the Spirit of God will indwell the believer who is now the temple of God and worship will be 24/7. Not only that, but at the heart of everything we do is to be a worshipful and grateful response to our resurrected Savior.

While Jesus was on the cross, He spoke seven phrases. The sixth phrase was—"It is finished" (John 19:30). These are the most important words, because they refer not to Jesus' life, as if he were saying, "It is over," but to his atonement for sin. It is because Jesus made a complete and final atonement for sin that we can be sure of our salvation. This is what Jesus meant when he told the Samaritan woman "the hour is coming".

All of this said, our worship must be constantly attuned to the fact that Christ died and rose again to pay for our sin. So, "spirit and truth" worship is indeed gospel-centered.

"SPIRIT AND TRUTH" WORSHIP IS KNOWLEDGE FILLED

John 4:22... You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews.

The Samaritans' knowledge of God was very limited because their Bible was limited. They did not access the full written revelation of God. So Jesus tells her that her people worship but they do not know.

Experientially, it is obvious that the more we know about God as revealed in the word of God and as experienced by walking with him; the greater our capacity to worship him. Particularly, when we gather for corporate worship we should be amazed at how the Spirit of God takes the words of God that we sing and recite and brings to memory other passages that apply to our immediate life situations. As he does that, we are often convicted of our sin and reminded of His grace and power and love for us.

The more that we marinate and saturate our lives and minds in the word of God, the greater our capacity for worship will be. True worship requires deep knowledge of God. Not only does our worship increase with increased knowledge but also with increased experience resulting from a life lived intimately with God—that means the older we get, the greater our experience of worship ought to be. May we be known as a people who pursue knowledge not for knowledge sake only but that it might increase our affections for God and our gratitude for his grace.

Christ is teaching us that when we come to faith in Christ our identity is forever changed from one who opposed God to one who worships Him. As a redeemed child of God, we are now “spirit and truth” worshippers.

Why is it important for us to gather as worshipers?

We gather to glorify God, to rehearse the Gospel, to obey, to encourage one another, to scatter in order to tell the nations of God’s grace.

Family.

Mark 3:20-21, 31-35... Then he went home, and the crowd gathered again, so that they could not even eat. And when his family heard it, they went out to seize him, for they were saying, "He is out of his mind...." And his mother and his brothers came, and standing outside they sent to him and called him. And a crowd was sitting around him, and they said to him, "Your mother and your brothers are outside, seeking you." And he answered them, "Who are my mother and my brothers?" And looking about at those who sat around him, he said, "Here are my mother and my brothers! For whoever does the will of God, he is my brother and sister and mother."

This passage comes at the end of the section of Mark's gospel where Jesus has healed a man with a withered hand on the Sabbath in the synagogue. The Pharisees went out of the synagogue that day with a determination to destroy (kill) Jesus. They were so intent that they even collaborated with the Herodians who would have been their enemies.

As Mark's account unfolds, Jesus turns his ministry attention to the large crowds that were beginning to follow him and then we find in the middle of chapter 3 where He calls the 12 disciples whom he wanted and appoints them as apostles. Mark says that Jesus did this because he wanted them to be with him and he wanted to send them out with the authority to heal, preach, and cast out demons.

This is where the story gets particularly interesting. Jesus' family shows up. They had a great concern for his well-being and perhaps even more so for the family name. Jesus' mother and brothers come to "seize" him and take him home. In other words they were determined overpower him and make him go back home with them. Verse 21 tells us that they thought he was out of his mind. Literally they were saying he was insane.

We do not know all that was behind their thoughts and motivations, but they certainly did not perceive that he was this long awaited Messiah. The Jews had seen others come on the scene and claim to be this Messiah. You know that his family was greatly worried about what the religious leaders would do with Jesus. So they came to rescue him and bring him back to his senses. Think of it like a family intervening in a situation where one of the children had gotten dramatically wrapped up in some type of cult and were "brainwashed". This is surely what they were thinking of Jesus and even worse.

As it turns out, part of what they were trying to avoid—the accusations and judgments of the religious leaders—reaches a strong watermark in this narrative. The scribes come down from Jerusalem (which in Mark's gospel, there is a pronounced movement toward this place, Jerusalem, where Jesus would be falsely accused and judged as a fraud, then killed on a cross by the government). These religious law experts accuse Jesus of being possessed by Beelzebub, that is none other than Satan himself.

The religious leaders are rejecting the divine origin of Jesus' ministry and his message. The house that Jesus is in is full, so full, in fact, that they cannot even eat dinner. The people are pressing in like crazed followers, but Jesus' mother and brothers are on the

outside of the house. They send in a word to Jesus that they have to talk with him, but in his response, he does what would have blown every person's mind in that room. He asks an unusual question— "Who is my mother and my brothers?" Instead of getting up and respectfully greeting his mother and brothers, he seems to say—who is really my mom and my brothers?

It is not them outside of the house, but it is those here, on the inside, who do the will of God. It is those who are my true brother, my sister and my mother. In this statement, ***Jesus forever redefines family for the Christian.***

So back up with me for a minute and see what Mark was doing here. He opens the storyline with Jesus' miraculous healing on the Sabbath as of way of rebuking the Pharisees about their view of the Sabbath and then we see their response of planning his destruction and death.

The story increases as Mark notes the growing crowds resulting from increased notoriety of Jesus' healing and teaching ministry. Then the selection of twelve apostles who would walk with Jesus over three years of intense training in preparation to lead the early church and take the gospel to the nations.

Then the accusation of the religious leaders that Jesus' power was derived from Satan and his works glorify the evil one and not God. This is then punctuated by his mother and brothers thinking him insane and in need of an intervention. This story is going from bad to worse.

So, we have religious leaders accusing him of the works of Satan and plotting his death, while his own family thinks him out of his mind. Both of these groups are painted as outsiders by Mark, while the insiders are the true followers of Christ. Folks like the apostles.

And all of this is a great set-up for the very last verse of Mark 3 and the answer to our question—What was Jesus' understanding of family?

34 And ***looking about at those who sat around him***, he said, "Here are my mother and my brothers! 35 For whoever does the will of God, he is my brother and sister and mother."

So, exactly what is this redefinition of family for the Christian?

Does this mean that our family of origin is of no consequence in our lives? Of course not! But it does mean that there is a family that is eternal and that we will forever have relationship with because of our union with Christ. It is a new family that results from our adoption as sons and daughters in the kingdom of God.

Paul, in writing to the Romans, puts it this way in 8:14-17:

For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, "Abba! Father!" The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs—

heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.

Jesus is drawing clear lines in this passage, that there those who are a part of the family and those who are not. There are those who are adopted and take on the name of the Savior and those who deny him. It is a stark contrast. And it unfortunately happens in our own families of origin. Sometimes, the very ones we love the most, the ones we grew up with are not children of God and it breaks our hearts.

Sometimes these very people reject Christ and they reject us; even disown us because we believe in Christ. They seek to mock us for our faith. In some parts of the world, a decision for Christ means a severing of ties with your earthly family *minimally* and sometimes it means risking your life (see Mt 10:32-39).

Sometimes a house is divided. There are those who believe in Christ and those who do not. Paul's clear that if you are married to an unbelieving spouse and they're willing to remain with you then your to do the same in hopes that one day they will confess Christ as Savior (1 Corinthians 7:13).

Ultimately, Jesus is calling for our full allegiance. He is warning us that there may well be a price to be paid as we live as a light in the midst of our earthly family's darkness. Regardless of whether your experience is with a believing earthly family or one that is antagonistic toward your beliefs; find ultimate comfort and confidence that you have been adopted into God's family and you are a co-heir with Jesus Christ. You have full rights as a son or daughter and have an inheritance which is in perishable—your salvation.

Part of your redeemed identity is that you are part of the eternal family of God. That means that we are forever related in Christ.

We've learned that Jesus redefined family as those who are sons and daughters of God through adoption in Christ. If we have believed on what Jesus has done in his death and resurrection, then we have been forever changed—we are the redeemed and forever connected to God our Father and to one another as brothers and sisters.

What does Jesus' definition mean for us as a church?

It means that all types of people are a part of our family.

Some are old and some are young; some have much and some have less; some have a lot of formal education and some have limited amounts; some may wear suits and some wear hand-me-downs; some are Democrat and some are Republican; some will be lighter skinned and others darker; some will have walked a life of ease and some will have endured much suffering.

We ought to be mindful of the apostle Paul who was known as a persecutor and violent aggressor against Christians. He was there that day that Stephen was stoned to death. Saul the murderer became Paul the preacher. As you can well imagine, the early church was hesitant to accept Paul into the family but not Barnabas. Barnabas understood the power of the Gospel to transform a person and what it meant for that person to be adopted into the family and to be accepted fully by the family.

What does it mean to be a part of the First Southern family?

- It means a personal commitment to one another.
- It means living out the one another commands amongst the family.
- It means guarding unity in the family.
- It means everyone has a special role to play.
- It means maintaining the family mission.

Servants.

One of the greatest passages in New Testament on living life as a servant is found in John 13. This is the story of Jesus washing the disciple's feet. In this encounter between Jesus and His disciples we see the mindset of our Savior—love and humility.

LOVE

John 13:1...Now before the Feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart out of this world to the Father, having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end.

This reminds us of the nature of God's love for his people. The word lovingkindness is used in the Bible often and points to the loyalty and commitment that is embedded in God's relationship toward us. The writer of Hebrews reminds us that even when we, as his children, are faithless in those moments, he remains faithful toward us. Paul tells us that nothing can separate us from the love of Christ. This kind of love is described in the letter to the Corinthian church as a love that endures and never fails!

In Jn 3:21-30, we see an opposite image of enduring love. We actually observe a faithless impostor who not only fails to love to the very end but ultimately betrays Jesus and his fellow disciples. He is none other than Judas himself.

So John is giving us a stark contrast between the faithful love of Jesus and the disloyal hatefulness of Judas.

Know that Jesus' love for his disciples is the controlling idea in this passage and it is through the idea of him loving his own that we must see everything else in these verses. John concludes this section in verses 34-35, with a new commandment from Jesus to love as he has loved and that the world will know that they are his disciples by their love for one another. Not only do we see this loyal love in Jesus but we also see his humility.

HUMILITY

John 13:2-4...During supper, when the devil had already put it into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, to betray him, Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going back to God, rose from supper. He laid aside his outer garments, and taking a towel, tied it around his waist.

There is so much to say in regards to Christ's humility demonstrated in these few verses. We see Jesus taking on the role of a slave. It was typical in Jewish culture, that a Gentile slave would serve arriving guests by bowing on their knee, untying and removing the sandals, and washing the dust and grime off the feet; making a person clean. So we see Jesus performing the task of a Gentile slave.

But John intends for us to see more in the story. It says that Jesus knew He had come from the father and was going back to him. As Philippians 2 informs us, Jesus' humble attitude was put on display by not holding onto all the glory he deserved, but instead,

coming to earth in human form in slavish obedience to the father and dying on the cross in our place. And that passage goes on to remind us that ultimately Christ will be exalted above every name and every tongue will confess that he is Lord to the glory of God the Father.

Imagine for a moment, the God of the universe who created all things, including you, condescends in human form and then humbles himself to physically serve you by washing your dirty feet. This is an unbelievable story in both ancient and modern day. As a matter of fact, there's nowhere else in Jewish or Greco-Roman literature that we find a superior washing the feet of an inferior. Amazing!! But, just as amazing is that nowhere else do we find the god dying for the people. It is always the sacrifice of the person atoning not the god atoning. Christian belief is almost unbelievable but we who have experienced it, know it to be true. So not only do we see the enduring love but we also see the humble service of Jesus.

JESUS' MODEL OF SERVICE

Jesus puts on display for his disciples what it means to be a servant of the most high God. Jesus clearly understood that his love for the Father and for those whom the Father had given Him would require a season of suffering and pain, but that as a result of his service, there would be a blessedness he would experience.

This willingness to serve and suffer was in total contrast to the normal routine of people. In a way, Jesus is rebuking the religious leaders of the day who wanted to lord their leadership over the people in a very harsh manner. As well, it seems to be a correction for the disciples, particularly the sons of Zebedee who were seeking glory and honor in the kingdom to come. Jesus' model says to the disciple that if the disciples want to be blessed, then they must serve. If they want to be great then be a servant, if they want to be first, then be a slave to all (Mk 10).

So Jesus' model of servanthood is contrastive to both that of the religious leaders and his own disciples. But John draws a stronger contrast in this passage with Judas the betrayer. Judas was not seeking the best for others, he was only thinking about himself and his own personal enrichment. Judas did not love the other disciples and especially Christ to the end. He was in it ultimately for himself. He was not in it to serve others well in the name of Christ.

John 13:5...Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel that was wrapped around him.

Most of us cannot imagine a more disgusting job, yet Jesus willingly served his friends in this way, knowing that he was leaving for them a model to be imitated.

John 13:12-15....When he had washed their feet and put on his outer garments and resumed his place, he said to them, "Do you understand what I have done to you? You call me Teacher and Lord, and you are right, for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that you also should do just as I have done to you.

So far then, we have recognized Jesus' attitude of love and humility and his unashamed service; now let's take just a moment and think about our motivation to do the same.

OUR MOTIVATION TO SERVE

John 13:17...Truly, truly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them.

Jesus is unabated in telling his disciples that they will indeed be blessed as they humbly serve others in a slavish devotion to Christ. There is an immediate sense of blessing and there is a promise of future blessing resulting from this humble service. To be honest, this is often downplayed in the church but Christ did not. The reason we experience a sense of joy and peace and happiness as we serve on earth is because it is who we've been made to be as redeemed children of God. **Part and parcel to our redeemed identity is that we are servants for the most high King.**

But our motivation is rooted in something greater than our joy in service. It is rooted in redemption. In John 13:6-11, there is much symbolism that ultimately points toward Christ cleansing us from all sin and saving us. Jesus Christ has redeemed us because of his great love for us—he came to earth to serve us through his life, death, and resurrection. Jesus Christ has given us new identity which is rooted in this redemption. Because we are the redeemed of Christ, we are servants in his name.

Be reminded of four very practical realities:

- Serving others in the name of Christ is often not the most glamorous work.
- Serving others in the name of Christ will cost you much—much time, money, emotional energy, hard work, and for some your very life! (John 13, 21)
- Serving others in the name of Christ is natural for the Christian.
- Serving others in the name of Christ will make us happier.

Disciples.

Matthew 11:28-30...Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.

The verses are a beautiful invitation into life with Christ. It's an invitation to live differently. It's an invitation to learn from the master. Is ultimately an invitation into the life of a Christ-following disciple.

If you think about it, we all follow someone or something. We have become unwitting disciples of a trend or of a person. We need to wake up and consider our allegiances. We have received an incredible invitation to be a disciple of Jesus Christ—the Creator of the universe and all its inhabitants. There is not a better person from whom to learn.

Hear these three words of invitation—Come to me! Jesus did not say come to my teaching or come to my miracles or come to my resources, but it is personal—come to me!

- **Jesus is saying to those who are laboring attempting to earn salvation—QUIT**
- **For those who are fruitlessly searching for truth in the wrong places—QUIT!**
- **Jesus is saying to those who have been burdened by legalism and are attempting to gain God's favor through performance—QUIT!**

Instead of an invitation to labor and burden, Jesus offers Himself—come to ME!

In that agrarian culture, everyone knew that a yoke (11:29, 30) went across the necks of two beasts of burden, just in front of their shoulders, and connected them to the plow or wagon they were to pull.

In the New Testament, being yoked is generally understood as being in submission to an authority or in bondage. The Jewish religious leaders spoke favorably of the “yoke of the Law”. Yet the Apostle Paul spoke of it as a burden. It is not that Jesus demanded less of his followers, for the Sermon on the Mount shows that he looked for more from them, not less. But it was a different kind of yoke—one that was kind and not burdensome.

As Christians in covenant relationship with God, we are not relieved of all work or burden, but the good news is that we are given work that is appropriate for our abilities, within our limitations. In fact, the believer will find the work fulfilling and rewarding rather than toilsome and exhausting. Jesus' yoke is easy (suitable, good, reasonable), and his burden is light (easy to bear).

In this invitation from Jesus we hear the sweet words of follow me, serve me, and learn from me. This invitation ties nicely into our understanding of redeemed identity which includes being a servant.

Throughout Matthew's Gospel there is a great emphasis on learning. The word here used for “learn” is in the same word group for disciple. So in essence, Jesus is saying to be my follower is to be my disciple. To be my disciple then is to be a learner. Being a learner does entail knowledge gain for sure, but that is not all. If all we do in the church is fill our heads with knowledge, we will become nothing more than a “bobble head”. All “bobble heads” want to do is argue about theology; force you into the position they hold, usually with great arrogance—these are very unfruitful conversations.

In fact, Jesus is calling us to more than head knowledge; he is calling us into a lifestyle. This lifestyle requires not only knowing His word but it requires our hearts’ affections coming in line with that word and resulting in a different way of living. The Scripture speaks of Paul as having persecuted those who were part of “THE WAY”. This is a great descriptor for Christianity. Believers are called to live a life that is worthy of the gospel. It is a distinct lifestyle. Jesus is calling His children to be transformed from glory to glory day by day.

With his invitation, Jesus gives a promise. It is a promise of rest. A rest in the here and now and an eternal rest. When we are in covenant relationship with God through faith in Christ, then we experience rest.

Hebrews 4:2-3a...For good news came to us just as to them [the Exodus generation], but the message they heard did not benefit them, because they were not united by faith with those who listened. For we who have believed enter that rest...

The writer of Hebrews is saying the Exodus generation heard the good news of God’s rescue but did not enter into a true rest for lack of faith and obedience. This became typical for Israel in subsequent generations. Just read the book of Judges which contains the cycles of sin of this nation and you will find it on nearly every page.

Later, Jeremiah writes of Jerusalem and their lack of rest because of disobedience:

Jer. 6:16, 19... Thus says the Lord: “Stand by the roads, and look, and ask for the ancient paths, where the good way is; and walk in it, and find rest for your souls. But they said, ‘We will not walk in it.’... Hear, O earth; behold, I am bringing disaster upon this people, the fruit of their devices, because they have not paid attention to my words; and as for my law, they have rejected it.

Jesus is quoting from these very words found in Jeremiah 6 when he says “you will find rest from your souls” and thereby saying do not be like unfaithful Israel who refused to enter into true rest. Be a people who love God and walk in step with the Spirit. Be a generation of faithful disciples.

Hear this Christian, Jesus is inviting you to himself and into a life of rest. A place where you can stop striving and simply start walking in the “good way”. This is the essence of new covenant—Christ has made a way through his shed blood into a life of rest, joy, and glad service. The life of a redeemed disciple.

And He bids you—COME TO ME! So come and enter into that rest of which he spoke. Coming will give you true life and peace, while refusing to come will end in eternal exile.

Jesus says, “My yoke is easy, and my burden is light”.

Every person who walks this earth will yoke themselves to something or someone—but the ONLY thing that has power to give life, peace, and rest is Jesus. So come to Him!

If we were to live fully into our redeemed identity as a disciple what would that look like both as a church and as individuals?

- On an individual basis, it means is that we must stop striving so hard and start living in the grace he has already provided us. We need REST!
- As parents and grandparents, it means we must be intentional about raising up a generation of faithful disciples of Christ.

Parents are the primary disciplers in your child’s life, but remember that Jesus called his children to himself not to you. Point your children to Christ ultimately.

Duet 6 instructs particularly the father to teach the next generation; Ps 78 reminds parents of the necessity to pass the faith on to subsequent generations; 2 Tim 1:5, 3:15 points toward the faithfulness of Timothy’s mother and grandmother in passing on the faith to him; Titus 2 instructs older men and women to teach the younger men and women the faith.

Parents—teach well, model well, pray hard, and point your kids to Jesus. Don’t over complicate this thing!

- As a church, we must be purposed in coming along side of these parents and equipping them to be those disciplers.
- As a church, we must emphasize the importance of whole person discipleship (it’s not just about gaining more head knowledge).

Witnesses.

In Luke's retelling of the final moments of Jesus with his disciples on earth, we find Jesus accomplishing three things with them—he is clarifying their mission; he is emboldening them with the promise of power from the Holy Spirit; and he is motivating them with the reality of his earthly return. In all of it, he was reminding his closest friends and followers that because they are redeemed children of God they are witnesses of his grace and forgiveness to the ends of the earth.

Clarifying Mission

Acts 1:4-7... And while staying with them he ordered them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father, which, he said, “you heard from me; for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.” So when they had come together, they asked him, “Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?” 7 He said to them, “It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority.”

After hearing these words that they would be baptized with the Holy Spirit, the disciples thoughts were fixed on the promises of the Old Testament that God would pour out his Spirit on his people and would restore his people and the permanent and eternal reign of the Messiah on David's throne would become a reality. In other words, they thought the summing up of all human history was upon them and that they would assume the thrones of leadership that Jesus promised them in Luke 22:28-30. Jesus does not rebuke them, but he does correct them. He says, “It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority.”

In Mark 13:32-37, Jesus spoke to His disciples, saying...

“But concerning that day or that hour, no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. Be on guard, keep awake. For you do not know when the time will come. It is like a man going on a journey, when he leaves home and puts his servants in charge, each with his work, and commands the doorkeeper to stay awake. Therefore stay awake—for you do not know when the master of the house will come, in the evening, or at midnight, or when the rooster crows, or in the morning—lest he come suddenly and find you asleep. And what I say to you I say to all: Stay awake.”

So in all of this, the disciples were not wrong about the restoration of God's people; but they were wrong about the timing. In essence, Jesus is telling them the restoration will occur but until then, you have a mission. That mission is to be a witness to the world concerning God's grace and forgiveness in Christ Jesus.

This mission was not a newly founded one for the disciples; its roots reach all the way back to the garden of Eden with Adam and Eve. They were instructed to be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth. They were to fill the Earth with God's glory by instructing each generation about the Creator. Adam and Eve were given the promise that one of their

descendants would crush the head of the evil one and bring salvation to the world. This was the message they were to share in each generation.

You see, God has always chosen to use humans to tell his story. From the selection of Abraham and his family Israel; Moses and the Exodus of God's people from slavery in Egypt; David as King over mighty Israel and his son Solomon who built the glorious temple in Jerusalem; to the twelve disciples who were baptized by the Holy Spirit and used to ignite a gospel movement from Jerusalem to the ends of the earth. This is how God has ALWAYS worked and is still working today.

God has always had a mercy plan to redeem his people and has chosen to use his children as the means to make it known:

Matthew 5:14, 16...“You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. . . . In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.”

We are light to a darkened world, we are witnesses to the gospel, to God's redeeming work, to his invitation to life in his kingdom, to the gift of his radical forgiveness at the cross, and to his unconditional love and acceptance.

As the church, we are a sent people. We are sent from a place of unconditional acceptance and mercy, accompanied by the peace of God: “Jesus said to them again, ‘Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you’” (John 20: 21).

The truth that Jesus was speaking to his disciples was— “your ministry is not a ministry of reigning YET, BUT your ministry is a ministry of reconciliation. You are my ambassadors”.

What does all of this mean for us if we are redeemed children of God?

It's simple really. It means that in our earthly sojourn that we are not to be about building our own “kingdoms and queendoms”; but we are to be about advancing God's kingdom. It means that we have a mission with which we are to be consumed. The mission of telling the world how Jesus has changed our lives.

Emboldening with the Promise of Power

Acts 1:8... But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”

The outpouring of the Holy Spirit had been promised by Jesus and was now soon to occur. Up until this point, the Holy Spirit had rested upon certain people at certain times for particular tasks; what Jesus was saying was that this will be entirely different. The Holy Spirit will come and dwell within you and will empower you to accomplish all that I have asked. In a matter of days this promise of empowerment would happen and the needed fire for the gospel movement would ignite.

The disciples knew that Jesus had accomplished his ministry in the power of the Holy Spirit and that they too would have the same power within them. The disciples knew that they did not have what it took to do with Jesus was asking apart from the Holy Spirit.

Jesus said they would receive power and would become his witnesses. This word witness later became synonymous with martyr. So they would spend their life accomplishing the mission until they took their last breath. So it is with us!

Jesus said they would be his witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth. These words become the rough outline for the book of Acts as Luke records these men, joined by others, fulfilling the mission that Christ gave them. In chapters 1-7, the mission being fulfilled in Jerusalem, and then in chapters 8-12 the gospel goes to Judea and Samaria, and finally Luke records the missionary journeys of the apostle Paul as the Gospel spreads all the way to Rome in chapter 13–28. In fact, the final verse in Acts (28:31), with Paul preaching “without hindrance” in Rome, suggests that the story has not reached its final destination—the witness continues.

**“The story of Jesus led to Jerusalem;
the story of the church led from Jerusalem.”**

-John Polhill

Motivating His Followers

Acts 1:9-11... And when he had said these things, as they were looking on, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. 10 And while they were gazing into heaven as he went, behold, two men stood by them in white robes, 11 and said, “Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven.”

The disciples have the privilege of observing an incredible event—the ascension of Christ into heaven. In that moment, they were so awestruck that all they could do was gaze into the clouds. Two angels appeared and questioned them—why do you stand here looking into heaven? Jesus will come again in the same way you saw him go.

This is exemplary of those moments in the Bible when we often wish for further details of the story. Perhaps the ensuing conversation between the disciples included phrases like—“that was amazing”; “I wish he could taken us with him”; “when do you think he will come back?”; “yeah, how long will it be?”; “guys, I think that is the whole point—we do not know when he will come back”; “true and that means he has left us here with a mission”. And so goes the conversation.

Jesus was telling his closest followers, I am leaving you here to tell the world the good news of my death and resurrection. Since you have experienced this redemption, witness! Since I am coming back—witness!

In Acts 1, Jesus was clarifying the apostles' mission; he was emboldening them with the promise of power from the Holy Spirit; and he was motivating them with the reality of his earthly return. In all of it, he was reminding his closest friends and followers that because they are redeemed children of God they are witnesses of his grace and forgiveness to the ends of the earth.

The gospel makes me a witness, and my witness is all about the gospel. I am a witness of God sent by God to proclaim the good news about God.

Personal Evaluation

A good question for the Christian to regularly ask of him or herself is “Where am I in my witness?”

I am either apathetic, embarrassed, or unashamed¹

If I am apathetic, I lack any compassion for the lost, and thus I lack motivation to share the gospel.

If I am embarrassed, my compassion for the lost is overshadowed by my fear of rejection.

If I am unashamed, then the gospel has broken through to give me compassion and boldness. I am a witness for Jesus. I am a light, an ambassador, sent by the King of kings.

So where are you on this continuum between apathetic and unashamed? We have said the Gospel should compel us to tell of our change from death to life. So consider two questions:

- Who in your immediate circle needs to hear a witness?
- Where is a place you frequent regularly that has lost people there? Start by praying for those around you—coffee shop, break room at work, etc.

There is no effective witness without the Spirit, and the way to spiritual empowerment is to pray.

¹Montgomery, Daniel; Mike Cospers (2013-01-31). Faithmapping (Kindle Locations 2711-2721). Good News Publishers. Kindle Edition.