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*“Our Mission, Pt. 2”*

1 CORINTHIANS 12:14-26

SEPTEMBER 10, 2023

PASTOR BRIAN SMITH

WILDWOOD CHURCH

EAST MOLINE, ILLINOIS

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## AT A GLANCE

Should I join a church in membership? What exactly is membership in a local church? What is my purpose in life as a Christian? Check out this sermon as Pastor Brian explores the answers to these questions in part 2 of *Our Mission*.

## INTRODUCTION

Last week in Part 1 of *Our Mission*, I outlined the first two mission priorities of Wildwood Church – #1 We connect people to God through the Gospel of Jesus Christ. We’ve been given a ministry of reconciliation and we urge people to be reconciled to God through faith in Jesus. #2 We connect people to others through discipleship.

I concluded last week by pointing out that Jesus’ discipleship model presupposes connection with other people. He commissioned people to make disciples who make disciples who make disciples. The Christian faith is a personal faith, not a private faith. We’re saved individually but we’re saved into a body - the universal body of Christ, made visible by the local church.

## WILDWOOD CHURCH CONNECTS PEOPLE TO THE CHURCH THROUGH PARTNERSHIP

Thus, our third mission priority is of a similar focus to our second, Wildwood Church connects people to the church through partnership. You might be familiar with our process called Partner with Wildwood, which is our membership process. Let’s talk about where we get the concept of membership from scripture and why we call it partnership.

If you shop at Costco or Sam’s or go to a gym, when you hear the term “membership” those might come to mind. You pay a fee and you’re entitled to certain benefits or privileges. You’re entitled to certain access and you have certain expectations of the organization.

That is not what biblical church membership is. The biblical concept of church membership comes from 1 Corinthians 12:14-26. Paul describes the church as a body and he says in verse 14, **...the body does not consist of one member but of many.**

## MEMBERS OF A BODY

Right off the bat, we need to see that being part of a church is compared to members of a body. What is Paul implying with that metaphor? And why would he feel the need to write about this? Even 2000 years ago Paul had to deal with rivalry and dissension and jealousy in the church. In chapter 11 Paul rebuked them for how they satisfied their individual cravings by gorging on the communion wine and bread, disregarding the corporate nature of the Lord’s Supper. He charged them with despising God’s church in 11:22. They had sorely missed the boat when it came to understanding the nature of the church. In our hyper-individualized culture, I’m not sure we’re much different.

Paul continues in **verses 18-20, But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. If all were a single member, where would the body be? As it is, there are many parts, yet one body.**

### A PLACE AND A PURPOSE

He's making the case that the local church is made of many people, all of whom have a place and a purpose because God has arranged that body as He chose. This is God's church. And God places members in the body for them to do what He wants them to do.

Every Christian who discerns that Wildwood Church is *their* church, that God has placed them here, has a responsibility to the Lord to function as a member of this body. That is what we mean by membership.

### WHAT DO WE MEAN BY PARTNERSHIP?

Now let's talk about the word partnership. Why does Wildwood connect people to the church through *partnership*? If we continue to read on in 1 Corinthians 12, we get the sense that the church, like a body, is supposed to work together. It is supposed to be unified and harmonious.

Listen to what Paul wrote in **verses 21-24, The eye cannot say to the hand, 'I have no need of you,' nor again the head to the feet, 'I have no need of you.' On the contrary, the parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and on those parts of the body that we think less honorable we bestow the greater honor, and our unpresentable parts are treated with greater modesty, which our more presentable parts do not require.**

It doesn't matter what categories you use: old vs young, new vs established, ethnicity, income, education, maturity, it's not right for the church to regard the one and decide we don't need the other. Instead, Paul continues in **verse 24-25, ...But God has so composed the body, giving greater honor to the part that lacked it, that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another. If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together.**

God's concern for His church is that the body would be one, that we would be concerned for one another. That we would be a community of believers who follow Jesus as His disciples, who obey Jesus out of love and who love others as He loved us.

That's partnership and partnership is another word for the biblical term fellowship. It comes from the Greek word *koinonia*. *Koinonia* is introduced to us in *Acts 2:42*, "*And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.*" And it is essentially defined in *2:44*, "*And all who believed were together and had all things in common.*"

Having "all things in common" is the essence of fellowship. It describes what we might ordinarily call partnership. Partners share the load with one another. They carry one another's burdens and they rejoice over one another's victories. They don't think only of themselves, but of everyone else with whom they partner.

This is the essence of fellowship and, indeed, of membership. It is cooperation with one another in God's mission in the world. To use the illustration in *Ephesians 4:16*, it is the body building itself up in love when each part is working together properly. That's what we mean when we say Wildwood Church connects people to the church through partnership.

## YOU ARE NOT ALONE

On August 18<sup>th</sup> we hosted the “You Are Not Alone” Men’s rally and 175 of our men gathered together to stand with one another and go to war with pornography. The concept there is the same concept here – we’re not designed to walk this journey alone. We need one another.

You’re a Christian now. Great! Let’s invest in you and help you walk with Christ in greater faith and love and obedience. That’s discipleship. And at the same time let us help you figure out where the Lord intends you to get plugged into this body so you can start doing what He has placed you here to do. Get your hands on the rope and start pulling in the same direction! That’s partnership.

Remember, we’re not a social club, though we do social things together and I am confident that when you get plugged in you’re going to develop some of your best relationships. Still, we’re not a social club, we’re a body with a mission and we need every Christian that calls Wildwood Church *their* church to commit to the body in a few key ways:

1. Show up. We’re warned against neglecting the gathering of the body. Your showing up regularly is encouraging to other people in ways you will never know and it creates opportunities that you would not otherwise have. Gather with our church unless you’re kept from doing so by the Lord - sickness, unavoidable work, family vacation, etc. In those cases, try to watch online so you don’t miss what the rest of the body is getting. For instance, this is part 2 of our Mission. If you missed last week, I’d encourage you to watch or listen online.

A man in our church shared an illustration with me that seems appropriate here. A pastor visited a member of his church who hadn’t been attending for a while. He sat in the man’s living room without a word. They both just watched the flames of the fire flicker and glow. The pastor got up and removed a red hot ember and placed it off to the side, again without a word. They watched as the ember went from bright red to black. It’s flame and it’s radiance were dead and cold. Finally the pastor got up and moved the ember back into to flame and they watched it’s radiance return. The man thanked the pastor for his fiery sermon. “I’ll be back on Sunday,” he said. You don’t get to decide how God made you to need other people to do what He has for you to do. I’ve never met a healthy and growing Christian who neglected the body.

2. Serve. You’ve probably heard that 80% of the work in the church is done by 20% of the people. I haven’t done a study to know if that’s true for us. But I can say this is not what Jesus intends for His Church. We have volunteer opportunities in just about every ministry.

Imagine what we could do if ministry leaders didn’t have to search for volunteers. If you’re not currently serving, please take a moment to express an interest in serving on a Connect Card today. Even if you need help figuring out where you fit. We need every member of the body working together properly.

3. Support. Yes, I’m talking about money. We’ve got Kingdom work to do. This isn’t a for-profit business looking after the interests of its shareholders. It’s a group of people who have received all they have from the Lord and the Lord invites them to give a portion of it back to Him to support the work of ministry in the world.

When it comes to responding to a request for financial support, a Christian’s first response ought to be, “Am I being faithful with what God has given me?” If the answer is no, you should give faithfully according to how the Lord leads you. Faithful giving is the absolute key here. Faithful giving, not compulsion. I hope I don’t ever hear anyone say, “But I can’t give any more than I do. Times are hard.” I get it. No one is asking anyone to give more than what the Lord wants them to give. I invite

everyone to look to the Lord, not our budget, to determine to what degree they are to support the work here financially. I trust the Lord will provide us what we need to do what He's asking us to do.

4. Submit. To the leadership of the elders, so long as we're leading you according to God's Word, and to one another. The body has the responsibility to protect the Gospel and to protect the church's witness. The idea that the elders are here to police the congregation is false. The elders' task is to shepherd the flock to faithfully fulfill the Great Commission. The congregation is charged with doing the work of ministry and part of the work of ministry is holding each other accountable to holy living. Let me note that elders are members, too, and are therefore certainly not beyond scrutiny. Members of the body have a responsibility to the Lord to "...*stir up one another to love and good works.*" *Hebrews 10:24*

Show-up, serve, support, & submit. That's partnership, that's biblical church membership.

How do you fit in this body? If you don't know, let us help you figure that out. If you're not a member, I invite you to come to our Partner with Wildwood course and make membership at Wildwood mean something to you! We just started one today. There's a lot more to unpack, but I'm going to come back to membership in two weeks when I speak on our core value of meaningful membership.

## WILDWOOD CHURCH CONNECTS PEOPLE TO PURPOSE THROUGH SERVICE

For now, let's move on to our fourth and final mission priority, Wildwood Church connects people to purpose through service.

Jesus said, "*The Son of man did not come to be served but to serve and to offer Himself as a ransom for many.*" *Matthew 20:28* He also said, "*A disciple is not above his teacher, but everyone when he is fully trained will be like his teacher.*" *Luke 6:40*

Jesus modelled sacrificial servant leadership and being a disciple means doing what He did. We believe that the height of discipleship, or being "fully trained" to use Jesus' words, is not so much about having greater knowledge, as about engaging in greater sacrificial service to others.

We believe that your true purpose in life is found in Christ. In fact, your life ought to be so deeply connected to Christ that without Him it's as if you can do nothing. After all, this what Jesus said in John 15. "*...As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing...By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples.*" *John 15:4-5, 8*

## WE EXIST TO GLORIFY GOD

Jesus is telling His disciples that the purpose of their life is to bring glory to God and that God is glorified in us when we produce fruit. The vine produces what the branch produces. As we abide in Jesus, He produces the fruit of righteousness in us and He makes us more like Himself.

Last week we learned that by our love for each other people will know we are Jesus' disciples. Here Jesus says that bearing fruit by abiding in Him is evidence we are His disciples. I think what we can deduce from Jesus is that love looks like sacrificial service to others. When we abide in Jesus, we bear the fruit of Jesus; and Jesus, who loved us and commanded us to love one another, came to serve.

His disciples will look like Him. And love like Him. And serve like Him. "By this my Father is glorified that you bear much fruit," Jesus said. That is our purpose. You and I exist to this end. And the way we glorify the Father, the way we fulfill our purpose in life, is by serving other people as Jesus' disciples. This is why we say, Wildwood Church connects people to purpose through service.

We believe the evidence that you are a disciple is that you lovingly serve people, that this brings glory to God, and there is no greater purpose to your life than that.

### **MYRIAD WAYS TO SERVE**

How do we do that? We have a number of opportunities to serve people through our church. We pack and send Operation Christmas Child shoeboxes. We serve elementary school kids in local public schools at before school bible studies. We partner with local agencies like Pregnancy Resources and Safe Families and 180. We open our homes to orphans and vulnerable children. We visit widows and widowers in nursing homes. We preach at homeless shelters and we share the gospel at festivals and carnivals and parades. We send people to Haiti and Kenya and Galveston. We serve children and youth on Sunday mornings and Wednesday evenings. We serve guests, helping them feel welcome and loved here. We serve in myriad ways that help make Wildwood Church mission-effective in the Quad Cities and around the world.

### **JUST THE BEGINNING**

But this is only the beginning of our service. As we'll see next week, our vision is to see every member a missionary, taking the Gospel across the street and around the world. So when you leave this campus and scatter all over the Quad Cities in your neighborhoods and work places and schools and gyms and parks and everywhere else, we believe you ought to be scattering as disciples of Jesus who have been sent out to serve people everywhere in His name and for His glory. That in fact, you leave here recognizing that your whole life is one big mission trip. That you, yourself, go out seeking ways to share the Gospel with people and make disciples.

Wildwood Church connects people to God through the Gospel of Jesus Christ, to others through discipleship, to the church through partnership, and to purpose through service.

Our mission is simply the Great Commission – make disciples who obey Jesus who then make disciples who obey Jesus. We preach the Gospel always, understanding that man's greatest need is reconciliation with God through faith in Jesus. We disciple those who believe the Gospel by connecting them to other people and we plug them into the church body according to how God wants them to work. Then we send them out into the world to serve others in Jesus name. That's our mission. That's what we do.