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Week 11, Mission as God's Children

Starting: 16th November 2025

Read Isaiah 61:1–3; 1 Corinthians 3:9-17 The part we play in God's mission flows directly from our identity in Christ as children of God. To understand what this looks like in our church family we must first look inward and upward.

Isaiah's messianic prophecy, confirmed by Jesus' reading of these words in the synagogue (Luke 4:16–21), helps us in understanding our identity. We were once among those whom Jesus came to proclaim freedom, release and comfort for. We are now those who have received 'a crown of beauty . . . the oil of joy . . . and a garment of praise.' As such, we have been planted by the Lord as 'oaks of righteousness' for the purpose of displaying his splendour. Jesus declared in the synagogue that he was 'anointed to proclaim good news to the poor,' confirming that he was the long-awaited Messiah. During his earthly ministry, Jesus tells his followers that they too will be anointed by the Holy Spirit for a ministry that mirrors his own. As we read the accounts of the ministry of Jesus' followers from Pentecost onwards we see many examples of them proclaiming good news to the poor, freedom for prisoners, recovery of sight for the blind, and setting the oppressed free.

Our identity as children of God brings with it the astonishing reality that we are 'co-heirs with Christ' (Romans 8:17). This means that we are entitled to nothing less than sharing equally in the spiritual inheritance that belongs to Jesus. That includes sharing in the hardship of God's mission now, and the coming eternal glory.

How does it feel to be described as children of God and co-heirs with Christ?

What might it look like in practical terms for God to have planted us as 'oaks of righteousness' for the purpose of displaying his splendour?

Paul picks up some of these themes in 1 Corinthians 3. He declares that 'no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ' (v. 11). Paul then looks ahead to the coming eternal glory and teaches us that our efforts to build on this

foundation will be tested by fire. As children of God, our salvation is secure. However our eternal reward is in some way (not clearly specified here) related to our participation in God's mission. We should notice Paul's description of the followers of Jesus as 'co-workers in God's service' (v. 9). And Paul's description of his work being built on by someone else. This is good news! We work together, each playing particular parts in God's mission and trusting that God will bring all our work together in ways that will be surprising and exciting. When our work is done in obedient submission to the Holy Spirit we can be confident that we are building with gold, silver and costly stones. This includes the work we do in being God's sacred temple. We, together, are that temple and we each carry a responsibility to uphold God's sacred temple. Paul reminds us that God's Spirit dwells in our midst (v. 16). We are to recognise that and be a people who acknowledge and honour the presence of God's Spirit in our midst. As this temple we are sent out in the power of the Spirit to continue building on the foundation that is Jesus Christ. It is as we proclaim good news, freedom and recovery that we proclaim the presence of God's kingdom.

In what ways can we be God's sacred temple and uphold the sacredness of this temple?

List as many ways as you can think of to proclaim good news to the poor, freedom for prisoners, recovery of sight for the blind, and to set the oppressed free.

Pray for one another to grow in confidence in obedient submission to the Holy Spirit.

Week 12, Mission in the Church

Starting: 23rd November 2025

Read: Malachi 3:16–18; Romans 12:4–13

Last week we explored how mission flows from the reality of our identity as children of God. This week we look at the place of mission in the church. The prophet Malachi would describe us as ‘those who fear the Lord.’ When we read the word ‘fear’ in Malachi 3:16 we should understand it as ‘being in awe of,’ ‘showing reverence and honour to.’ Malachi is describing those who recognise that God is sovereign, almighty, creator of everything and over everything. In contrast to the arrogant people and evildoers referred to in v. 15, the people who honour the Lord talk with each other and the Lord listens. Consider the image of being with your brothers and sisters in Christ Jesus, speaking with one another and the Lord being present in your midst listening to the conversations. That is a picture of the church family being active in giving honour to the Lord.

What are the times and places you talk with your brothers and sisters in Christ Jesus?

Considering that image of the Lord being present in these places listening to the conversations, what would you do more of or less of in the presence of the Lord?

As those who honour the Lord, we are God’s treasured possession (v. 17). We are spared judgment because of the Lord’s compassion. The image in verse 18 anticipates the ultimate fulfilment of God’s compassion in the relationship between Jesus and his heavenly Father. We see these themes of family unity through shared identity, compassion, and salvation in the reading from Romans 12.

Paul instructs us to ‘be devoted to one another in love’ and to ‘honour one another above yourselves’ (v. 10). The inward work of mission in the church is for us to encourage, serve, honour and build-up one another with the gifts Christ has given us. This work equips us for the outward work of mission through the church that we will explore next week. Paul reminds us that we ‘do not all have the same function,’ and

‘have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us’ (vv. 4, 6). Above all, our love must be sincere (v. 9). This means that all of our conversations with each other, all of our speaking about each other, all of our actions towards each other must demonstrate sincere love for one another. We are to know and experience our church family as a place where we are sincerely loved. This is an environment in which we experience faithful friendship, hospitality and belonging. This is an environment in which we can grow in confidence in our identity as children of God, our unity as brothers and sisters in Christ Jesus, and our ministry in the power of the Holy Spirit. This is the sacred Temple into which God builds us as living stones, and it is the place from which we build God’s kingdom amongst those who do not yet know him.

What is your experience of church family? What do you give and what do you receive?

In what ways would you like to see your church family grow?

We learn together what it means to be a family united in Christ Jesus. We know that we do not do this perfectly. And we know that we can ask the Holy Spirit to equip and grow us to be the family that God is calling us to be. God meets us as we are now, teaches us to love one another and through our words of encouragement There is a circular nature to this. As the Holy Spirit leads us in encouraging one another, we speak God’s encouragement more confidently to one another and discover that we become increasingly transformed by the Holy Spirit into a family that reflects the glory of God. This is God’s mission in action in the church.

List three specific ways you can encourage one or more of your brothers and sisters in Christ Jesus in the coming week.

Week 13, Mission through the Church

Starting: 30th November 2025

Read: Isaiah 43:19–21; Colossians 4:1–6

Isaiah declares that the Lord is ‘making a way in the wilderness and streams in the wasteland’ (v. 19). The whole of Isaiah 43 is a message of comfort to the Lord’s people. Today, we can take comfort in the knowledge that God will sustain us in the places he has called us to proclaim his praise. We can think of the wilderness and wasteland as the worldly society and culture in which we are placed. In these places God sustains us with the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit as we participate in his mission. Our work is to proclaim his praise. This includes the acts of speaking or singing of who God is. However, it is primarily the revealing of God to a world that has lost the ability or desire to recognise him. We declare the gospel of Jesus through the entire witness of our lives together. When we do this, we reveal the truth of God’s love and grace to the world.

In conversation with others write down as many different ways as you can in which the entire witness of our lives together declares the gospel of Jesus.

Being the local church is so much more than simply attending a weekly gathering together. I wonder what things you identified above as being evidence of our life together declaring the gospel of Jesus? How about when we gather to worship Jesus and pray together? Through Isaiah, God calls his people to be involved in his ‘making a way’ by proclaiming his praise. When we, as the local church, stand together through our ordinary Christ-shaped life of prayer, worship, preaching, and witness we are a beacon to those outside the church. God has strategically placed us to shine the light of his glory in the place he has rooted us.

In his exhortation to the church in Colossae (Colossians 4:1–6), Paul speaks of justice and fairness, devotion, wisdom, grace and opportunities. He instructs them, and us, to ‘make the most of every opportunity.’ Doing this requires us to be wise in the way we act toward those outside the church (v. 5). And that is seen when all our conversations are ‘full of grace’ (v. 6).

Have you experienced an opportunity where you’ve been able to respond to someone who doesn’t know Jesus with grace-filled conversation? Capture some of the details below and share this with a friend in your church family.

Being sent to those outside the church to communicate the love and grace of Jesus can feel quite daunting. We are equipped by the Holy Spirit to do this in God's strength and not our own. Integral to this work is our life of prayer. Paul calls us to 'be devoted to prayer, being watchful and thankful.' This means to attend to prayer constantly. How are we supposed to do this in the midst of busy lives with many commitments? Prayer is simply communication with God. As followers of Jesus, God is constantly with us through the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit. It is our responsibility to be present with God as much as we can so that we will grow in our relationship with God, know his call for us and outwork this in our lives. This involves frequent times of listening to our heavenly Father, dialogue with him to deepen our understanding and obedience to him to outwork his mission. How would you describe your weekly rhythm of prayer?

Whilst these decisions are our to make, the church is intentionally corporate. Last week we explored how we walk in unity with our brothers and sisters in Christ Jesus, strengthening and encouraging one another. God's mission through the church will involve us working together to proclaim the gospel clearly to people around us. Helping each other find the opportunities to share the gospel and supporting each other in developing the courage to share our testimonies of life with Jesus.

Have you experienced a time when you've worked together with people in your church family to share the gospel with those who don't know Jesus? Capture some of the details below and share this with a friend in your church family.

How did it feel to work together with people in your church in sharing the gospel?

Week 14, Mission in the World

Starting: 7th December 2025

Read: Jeremiah 29:4–7; 1 Peter 2:11–17

Throughout this series we have worked from the foundation of the church being us as living stones built together by God into a spiritual house. God has intentionally situated the house in the world so that his mission through us can be outworked in the world.

Both Jeremiah and Peter urged God's children to live responsibly in the surrounding society contributing positively to its welfare. Jeremiah commands the people to 'build houses and settle down' for the long term whilst still treating Babylon as their temporary home. Imagine that you had been taken captive in Babylon and the Lord's prophet was telling you to seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which you had been exiled. This instruction would have been hard to accept even with the logical argument that if the city prospers, you too will prosper (Jeremiah 29:7).

Peter commands followers of Jesus to keep their conduct honourable and submit to human authority. He urges them as 'foreigners and exiles, to abstain from sinful desires' and to 'live such good lives among the pagans that . . . they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us.' The implication is that the way we live plays an important part in proclaiming the gospel of Jesus.

What different ways can you think of by which we seek the peace and prosperity of Bristol and live good lives, that demonstrate the gospel, amongst those who do not yet know Jesus?

Jeremiah instructs the children of God to 'pray to the Lord for' the city. When we pray we ask God for his kingdom to come over our city as it is in heaven. That is a powerful declaration of the presence of God over our city and his invitation for people to be transformed from darkness to light. Prayer feels like an intentionally spiritual act. Jeremiah also instructs the children of God to get on with the ordinary things of life. In effect, to get on with living well in the place where they have been exiled. Peter issues the same invitation to the followers of Jesus. An invitation to simply live good lives, as foreigners and exiles, amongst people who don't yet know Jesus. Our ordinary lives matter to God and they matter in his mission. We have the opportunity to declare the

glory of God in every aspect of our lives. Peter continues: 'live as free people'; 'live as God's slaves'. Perhaps these sound contradictory to you? We are at our most free when we choose to live our lives in willing and obedient service to God. This means listening to the Holy Spirit to check that our lives are in alignment with being the children of God and with his specific call for us. Peter continues with four practical commands.

1. 'Show proper respect for everyone.' By proper respect he means respect that reflects the love, mercy and grace that God demonstrates towards us.
2. 'Love the family of believers.' Our love for one another will demonstrate our love for Jesus to those who don't know him. (John 13:34-45)
3. 'Fear God.' God is sovereign and the right attitude towards him is one of awe for his glory and majesty. We are filled with wonder and thankfulness that we are invited into relationship with the awesome God.
4. 'Honour the emperor.' We are not to fear those who have been given worldly authority, but we are to honour them. God is sovereign and able to work through godly or worldly leaders. Not that God always approves of their means, but that they are not outside of his purposes.

What practical actions could you take to reflect the glory of God in the contexts where God has placed you?

Commit to doing two of the things you have identified above and share with a trusted friend who can encourage and support you.