

“God’s Plan for the Church”

1st Corinthians 12: 12 - 31; Ephesians 4:7 - 16; 1st Peter 5:1 – 11; **Acts 2:42 - 47**

I have been told that on a typical Sunday morning more than 100 million Americans will go to church.

But many church goers have never seriously thought about why they attend church nor do they know what God’s plan for the church is.

Some people go to church out of guilt.

Some people go out of pressure.

Some people go to church out of habit.

Some people go because they think it’s the thing to do.

So, if somebody were to ask you, *“Why are you a part of the Mt Paran Church what would you say?”*

Could you tell them why you give money to the church?

We should not be a part of an organization without understanding its purpose and unless we are committed to its cause.

Our life on earth is too precious to waste on things that do not matter.

We should not be involved in anything that is not of value.

Remember our life on this earth is a journey and we are here on earth preparing for eternity.

Our goal is our eternal home in Heaven.

Before we look at our text from Acts, I want us to look at a couple of other Bible verses that tell us the purpose of the church.

1st Peter 1:3 tells us ***“God has given us the privilege of being born again so that we are now members of God’s own family.”***

When you become a believer in Christ, you become a member of God’s family.

The moment you were born physically, you became a part of the human race and part of a physical family.

When you were born spiritually, or born again, you were born into God’s family.

1st Timothy 3:15 tells us that God’s family is called the church. ***“That family is the church of the living God, the support and foundation of the truth.”***

We should never forget that the church is not a business nor is the church social club.

The Bible clearly says the church is a family.

The Mt Paran family is part of God's family.

The last part of 1st Timothy 3:15 says the Church is the “...*the support and foundation of the truth.*”

If a structure does not have an adequate foundation that structure is going to crumble when the floods come.

In your life, you are going to have some personal floods, some financial floods, some relational floods, some physical-health floods, and maybe some moral floods.

There will be some things that come into your life that shake you to the core.

If you don't have a good foundation and if you do not have good support system in place, you are going to crumble.

One of the purposes of the church on earth is to be the support and the foundation of your life.

God's plan for the church is found in the book Acts.

If there was ever an effective church it was the early church.

I say that because those believers knew why they were a part of the church and they knew their responsibility as a part of the church.

God honored the early church with tremendous tangible results.

This morning I would like for us to do a mental comparison of Mt Paran with the early church.

I am very proud of Mt Paran.

We are a very health vibrant church but we are not perfect.

We can and we should do better.

Ephesians 4:12 tells us that the purpose of the Church is to “*equip God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up.*”

God established His Church for His glory and for our benefit.

When we look at Acts 2:42 – 47 we find five specific ways that the Church prepares us and is of benefit to us.

First the Church helps us to focus on our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

In verse 42 we read “*They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.*”

The early church was built on The Word, on prayer and on worship.

A worshipping church is the result of a sincere desire to praise The Lord and a sincere desire to have a relationship with our Savior Jesus The Christ.

Worship is not something you schedule.

Worship is not limited to 11 am on Sunday morning.

Worship is a spontaneous response to God's love for us.

Worship is to be a way of life for all Christians 24/7.

We are called to worship The Lord in all that we say and all that we do.

The Bible clearly teaches that our primary purpose is get to know our creator God, to walk with Him each day, to enjoy Him, and to bring glory to Almighty God.

In the 4th Chapter of John Jesus said *“the time is coming and is already here when true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and in truth. For God is Spirit, so those who worship him must worship in spirit and in truth.”* (John 4:21-24)

Worshipping in *“Spirit and in Truth”* means worshipping The Lord with our mind and with our heart.

We worship in truth when we know who we are worshipping and why we are worshipping.

We are agreeing with God about who He is, what He can do, what He has done, and what He is asking of us.

Worship is responding to God in positive productive ways.

Our worship of God must also flow out of our hearts.

People show outward excitement about sports and celebrities.

Likewise, all Christians should be excited about worshipping our Lord.

The New Testament was not written down until the latter part of the first century.

So the early Church was dependent upon the spoken words of the Apostles.

Again, in the 42nd verse we read *“They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching.”*

So the next way the Church helps us is knowing how to face life's problems from a Biblical prospective.

The Bible was inspired by God and God created us so we can easily conclude that The Bible is the owner's manual.

God gave us His word as a handbook for life.

The Bible tells us why God made us and what God expects of us.

God gave us His word so we will know He made us, He loves us, He wants to forgive us, and He wants to have a personal relationship with us.

God gave us His word so we will know it is God who enables us, provides for us, protects us, and who comforts us.

The Bible tells us how we can experience the purposeful fulfilled life that God planned for us.

The Bible tells us God's eternal plan so we can be confident that God is controlling all of the events in our lives.

The question for each of us is; *“are we routinely reading, studying, and mediating on God's word to us”?*

All of us are having a major problem right now, or we just came out of a major problem, or we are about to experience a major problem.

Life is a series of problems.

Without proper direction we will get distracted, discouraged, and / or fatigued.

We all have a choice; we can face life alone **OR** we can choose to face life with the help of The Lord.

Jesus said; *“I will never leave you or forsake you.”* (Hebrews 13:5)

God never meant for us to go through life all by our self.

In addition to giving us His handbook and abiding in us, God gave us a church family for support.

Jesus died for us so that we can live together with Him and so we can encourage each other and help each other.

The Christian life is not a solo act.

A Christian without a church family is like an orphan.

We draw strength from each other and we are encouraged by each other.

We are to lean on The Lord and we are to support each other.

Again in the 42nd verse we read *“They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching”*.

The next way the Church helps us is to grow spiritually.

The Church helps us clarify our morals and values.

The church helps us to set our priorities, and to know what we really believe.

A church family helps us develop character, conviction, and integrity.

In Hebrews 6:1 ***“Let us go on and become mature in our understanding as strong Christians ought to be.”***

Are you devoted to learning God’s Word?

A commitment to learning God’s word is more than listening to the preaching on Sunday morning.

A commitment to learning God’s Word means studying our Bibles at home alone and studying God’s word with other Christians during the week.

Learning God’s Word is essential for a healthy church.

That is why we have Bible discussion groups for all ages on Sunday morning.

If we were all truly devoted to learning God’s Word, we would have a lot more people here at 9:45 on Sunday mornings.

We all need to ask ourselves; *Do I have a hunger for knowing God’s word?*

In 2nd Timothy 2:15 we are admonished to, ***“Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed, who correctly handles the word of truth.”***

The next way the Church helps us is to find our personal ministry.

The Church Information section in our church bulletin lists every member of Mt Paran as a minister.

The word minister means *“to serve, to help, to facilitate”*.

God did not put us on earth just to take up space.

God expects us to make a contribution with our lives.

God gave each of us certain abilities, talents, and gifts.

God expects all of us to use all of the gifts He has given to us to help other people.

Any time we use our talents or what we have to help somebody else we call that ministry.

A non- ministering Christian is really a contradiction.

We were all made for ministry.

One day we are all going to stand before God and He is going to ask each of us; *What did you do with the time, the talents, and the possessions I entrusted to you”*

The Church is here to help you discover your ministry and to develop your specific ministry.

The Session is responsible for providing opportunities for ministry but it is each individual's responsibility to take advantage of every opportunity they have been given.

In our lesson from 2nd Corinthians we read that we all are created with different abilities but we all have a very important job if the body of Christ is to function as a whole.

There are different kinds of people and different kinds of ministry but together we form the body of Christ and each of us is a necessary part of the body of Christ.

Everybody is needed for the church to function as God designed it.

God puts each of us at specific places at specific times, to do specific jobs for Him

This is evident at Mt Paran and that is why it is so exciting to be a part of Mt Paran at this particular point in Mt Paran's history.

It is exciting because God is working miracles here at Mt Paran each and every day.

If you are not excited about being a part of what God is doing at Mt Paran you need to check your pulse to make sure you are alive.

The secret of self esteem is knowing that God made you like you are; God loves you, and God made you for a specific purpose.

The secret to living a fulfilled meaningful life is discovering and doing the jobs that God created you to do.

That is your ministry.

As a Christian you were made for ministry.

If you are a Christian, ministry is not optional.

As we read the accounts in the Book of Acts, it becomes clear that everything the first church did culminated in proclaiming the good news of Jesus Christ.

Jesus said "***you shall be my witnesses***". (Acts 1:8)

A witness can only give first hand information.

A witness can only say what they have personally experienced, what they have seen with their own eyes, or what they have heard with their own ears.

Witnessing for Jesus has never been optional.

Witnessing for Jesus is not a job handed out to the evangelism committee or the pastor.

In the early Church sharing the good news of Jesus Christ was part of every believer's everyday life.

They were thankful that Jesus loved them enough to die for them.

They were so thankful that Jesus had removed their sin and guilt that they wanted to tell everybody.

They were so excited about what God was doing in their life that they had to tell other people.

They were so excited to be a part of God's plans that they could not keep the good news to themselves.

The early believers took everyday situations and turned them into opportunities to share the Good News of Jesus with the people around them.

Telling other people about Jesus Christ is a spontaneous response to our love for Jesus and is an important indicator of a healthy relationship with Jesus.

Jesus Christ saved you so that you will magnify His name in worship, be a productive loving member in the family of God, so you will model His character, so you would minister to the needs of the people around you, and so you will be a messenger of His love.

One day we are all going to stand before Almighty God and He is going to ask you, *What did you do with the time, the talents, and the possessions I entrusted to you*"

The Church is here to help you focus on God, to learn more about yourself, to grow closer to Jesus Christ, and to fulfill your God given responsibilities.

But each of you have to choose to take advantage of these opportunities that have been given to you.

AMEN