

What Now? Sunday morning Worship on June 10, 2018

Intro **WHAT NOW** moments. I believe *what now* moments come to us at certain times, usually at the end of a heightened emotional period or a drastic life change. We find ourselves at a crossroads of response options, preparing for and finding a **new normal**. At Agape, we have found ourselves at a *what now* moment in time. The last few months have passed quickly, there have been many emotional ups and downs and a lot of activity. Today is a day for us to take a deep breath and remind ourselves, not where we have been, but where we are going together; **By refocusing on WHAT our purpose is as a church and then setting our sights on how we go about accomplishing this task**. As a refresher: Our church exists for three primary reasons: **First, to love the Lord above ALL**. LOVE through the lens of pop-culture, is primarily about emotions. We talk about love, we typically are talking about how we feel. This is why many people fall in and out of love, because feelings are ever changing. Truly, love is much more complex than this. As one pastor (Daniel Hyde) puts it: *“Classically speaking, our human faculties are made up of the mind, the will, and the affections. Using these, then, love is rooted in knowledge; love is exercised in willful decision; and love is experienced in the affections. To love someone involves all of this”*. I believe that when it comes to our faith, the bible upholds that our love for God MUST involve all of these. The bible connects love for God with knowledge of God (Psalm 40:8 – I DESIRE to do your will, your LAW is within my heart), with obedience to God (1 John 2:5 – whoever keeps his word, in Him truly the Love of God is perfected), AND with emotions for God (1 Peter 1:8 – Though you have not seen him, you LOVE him...and are filled with inexpressible and glorious joy!). So LOVE for God is all of these ((Mind, Will, Emotions-DISCUSS)). And while the bible is not the entirety of our relationship with God, it IS THE KEY to the directing and intensifying of our faculties – Mind, Will, and Emotions. Remember, Jesus Christ is the founder, the sustainer, and the perfecter of our faith in and subsequently love for God. And Jesus is the WORD that became flesh. **So scripture and Jesus are inexplicably tied to one another**. So, we can then say that Love for God is founded by, sustained in and perfected through the truth of scripture. **Lifetruth: The depth and height of our love for God is directly connected to our experience with His word**. If your experience with scripture is weak, then your love for God will be weak (you will suffer from lack in MIND, WILL, EMOTIONS). If your experience with scripture is strong, then your love for God will be strong. And the same can be said for our congregational experience. We are called to Love God; therefore, we are called to a STRONG pursuit of Jesus Christ through His WORD: We learn his word, We obey His word, and we praise Him for His word. That is the primary reason we gather on Sundays. Other portions of our purpose may be accomplished in God’s wisdom – but our reason for Sunday gathering is to Love GOD, lifting high and looking to Jesus. We do this in song, in psalms, in the teaching and proclamation of His word, and in prayer. We MUST strive as a church, as leadership, that increasingly our gathering is driven by the word. This is one reason that we have begun making the declaration of Psalms and other scripture a portion of our worship gathering. It is NOT to fill in time. Its not to be creative. It is to hear JESUS (the word became FLESH) proclaimed among us. Every part of this gathering must be designed, as imperfectly as it may be, to help us LOVE (Know, Obey, and Experience) God. None of this service is a throw away. As a church, I am asking if we all would strive to be here, for this entire service. **And Let’s strive to give our attention to this purpose**.

Secondly, we exist to love our neighbors as Jesus loves us. Neighbors is literally those who are nearby. In the bible, a neighbor is those who are inside the community of faith; in our day this would certainly include those closest to us in faith, such as those in our local church. But frequently a neighbor was those outside the community of faith who were nearby. And there is a particular emphasis in both the Old and New Testaments, on crossing ethnic and national boundaries. Another **Life Truth for us is that Our love for our neighbor is to be intentionally indiscriminate**. There is no place among God’s people for prejudice or bias on ANY basis (class Wed night), and these must be purposefully dug out of our hearts and destroyed. We are to love As Jesus loves us. Jesus loves with CARE for all nationalities and ethnicities, in a way that is unique to any person in human history. We love **outside the community** in hopes of bringing people to the faith. And we **love inside the community** in hopes of strengthening each other in the faith. (This love should be ESPECIALLY strong – Gal 6:10). None of us and I mean none of us – have it altogether. Every person deals with a fallen nature. Jesus communicates through the Apostle Paul in Galatians 5:17, **“For the flesh desires what is contrary to the spirit, and the spirit what is contrary to the flesh. They are in conflict with each other, so that you are not to do whatever you want”**. So, all of us as Christians, in our quest to Love the Lord – finds that our life is a battlefield in a war

between two competing factions: The old self (resistant to God's leading, and is often coerced by the world and the god of the world) coexisting with the new self (Driven by the spirit of God living in us, resistant to the fleshly desires). (**Battle for our LOVE: Mind, Will, Emotions**) And occasionally, in this battle we are wounded (by self-inflicted injury and from injuries by others) and because of that we limp. God has designed that on this battlefield we help each other, we encourage each other, and at times we carry each other. The write of Hebrews teaches that we should, **encourage each other DAILY, as long as it is called TODAY, so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness (Hebrews 3:13)**. The word encourage is multi-faceted: comfort, exhort, persuade, admonish. **We should do these things for each other**, to keep each other from being deceived by sin on the battlefield. So, IF we choose to isolate ourselves from the church, we are separating ourselves from part of God's design for our spiritual protection. IF we do not continually strive for unity, we could possibly be divided on the battlefield. Back in Galatian 5, Paul teaches that corporately **we must not become conceited, provoking, or envying each other. If we bite and devour each other, we will be destroyed by each other**. How do we destroy each other? By joining with the enemy against our neighbor. If the enemy can get us provoking, biting, and devouring each other, then he is breaking apart one of the sources of spiritual protection God has designed for His people. So, that is why we must love our neighbors AS Christ has loved us (**Which means that we must LOVE Christ to be able to LOVE AS Christ**). At Agape that is why we gather in Gospel Community groups in homes around our church, at least once a month. Our aim there is to love well, to learn each other's story, to minister to each other with the word and our gifts, and to see those relationships built up and spilling over into our day by day schedules so that the DAILY encouragement we are commanded to can happen. These groups are not the end, but a means to an end – a catalyst for growing, deepening, widening gospel-centered relationships.

And, we exist to help make disciples of those who are near us. That is why we gather on Wednesday nights – to hold Christ-centered training classes on various topics, to build each other up in the faith. These classes are and will be wide-ranging, prayerfully reflecting the manifold wisdom of God operating in our lives. As part of this, frequently throughout the year we will do discipleship classes with a strong invitation to those near us, that they might come, experience hospitality, and learn with us as people here exercise their gifts; we call this Agape U. This is one way we corporately make disciples, there will be others. But I want to mention to us one aspect of disciple-making that I believe we have failed to properly discuss here over the years – and that is Inviting people to come to a gathering of the believers, **which I believe CAN be a powerful tool in someone's spiritual journey**. The Apostle Paul spends some extended time teaching the church in Corinth on this subject – a church that apparently was very eager for manifestations of the Spirit and Spiritual gifts among them. And Paul did not try to squelch that desire, but he did attempt to give boundaries to it. In 1 Corinthians 14 he – after saying he wished all of them would speak in tongues – warns them that focusing too much on speaking in tongues (with no interpreter) and at the expense of prophecy, **would be harmful to unbelievers and inquirers among them. Verse 16-17, "...when you are praising God in the Spirit, how can someone else, who is now put into the position of an inquirer** (which is a word that means unskilled or inexperienced, in this case with religious activity) **say, AMEN to your Thanksgiving...? You are giving Thanks well enough, but no one else is edified". Verse 24-25, "If an unbeliever or an inquirer comes in while everyone is prophesying, they are convicted of sin and are brought under judgement by all, as the secrets of their heart are laid bare. So they will fall down and worship God, exclaiming, "God is Really among you!"** Now, this is far from instructions to make the service appealing to outsiders, by emulating the culture (which is often called Seeker Sensitive services). But **it is an appeal by Jesus** through His Apostle to be concerned with how ALL people – including inquirers and unbelievers, are edified by the activities in a Christian gathering. And furthermore, the assumption there is that unbelievers and inquirers will be among the Saints in a gathering, **AND the Spirit of God can use that to do a spiritual work** – convicting them of Sin, making them aware of their heart issues, and making them to a worshiper. In other words, conversion. This is not to release us from the personal responsibility to make disciples, NOT at all. **We fail to realize how much our corporate life together is connected to our individual context**. We exist corporately to live out these purposes together including making disciples, **AND** to strengthen each other to live out these purposes individually in the context God has placed us (**Reverse**). So, we come together as a church to seek to accomplish these purposes corporately and IN THE PROCESS we are equipped to go into our personal context and do the same. In your offices, in your schools, in your homes, in your neighborhoods, in your encounters at the barbershop, at the store, waiting on your oil to be changed – in **your routine** YOU seek to Love the Lord, to love

others, and to make disciples. But, the gathering of the believers is a powerful witness for God and I believe WE should have a culture here where it is routine to invite people to come; particularly the inquirers and unbelievers. You are inviting someone to join with a place that is strongly pursuing God and perhaps God will convict them. You may invite 10 people to get 1 to come, but you persevere and do not give up and you will eventually see a harvest.

So this is where we are going as a church. This is where we have set our sights. The past 10 years at this fellowship has seen the Lord laying, through quality leadership, a strong foundation that **we must now build on together**. Our vision must be straight ahead, because I do believe that there is a harvest coming. **That is what I am praying for - a coming harvest** and I believe we will have it for the glory of His name alone. Additionally, he has seen your heart this week. He knows it has been an emotional time. When we love deeply, we will sometimes have to grieve deeply. One of my mentors told me many years ago, that all gifts from God must be received openhanded. If we close our first around His gifts, we run the risk of loving the gift more than the giver. It is ok to have deep emotions. The New Testament church formed many deep partnerships, and then they often grieved when God separated those. During one of those separations, Paul said to his close friends and partners in Ephesus, **“But I do not account my life of any value nor as precious to myself, if only I may finish my course and the ministry that I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God.” (Acts 20:24)**. Paul was not immune to the grief separation causes. But he said, **it is not my life that I am focused on**; It ultimately is not about me; What is most precious, is Jesus and the course and ministry he has given. It is all about Him. And in our grief if we preach it to ourselves and embrace that truth –then our suffering of separation will produce perseverance, character, hope, maturity, and completeness.

So, our purpose is before us; that is the WHAT. Now, And I would like to mention the HOW. And honestly there is a lot that could be said here, but I want to give you three attributes that I believe must be present as we seek to accomplish this mission. First, **We MUST be a place that relies on the power of Christ** – means dependence. **“Cursed is the one who trusts in man, who draws strength from mere flesh. Blessed is the one who trusts in the LORD, whose confidence is in him” Jeremiah 17:5,7. One demonstration of this reliance is prayer.** **Church I am asking you to pray for this church consistently and routinely**, that we will accomplish our purposes- **PRAY FOR THE HARVEST**. We have a prayer team, that includes a weekly prayer focus that is spoken of each Sunday morning. Please take those serious, and make it a discipline to join in prayer for that focus weekly. Part of the foundation that was laid in this place over the past 10 years was the absolute necessity of prayer. We must continue to build upon that – it is a non-negotiable.

Next, **MUST emulate the character of Christ**. Jesus accomplished His mission with meekness, humility, a servant’s heart, compassion, kindness, mercy, gentleness, steadfastness, boldness – We could go on. As we strive to do what He has laid before us, it is Extremely important that we mimic HOW he did things. We are called to LOVE God and LOVE our neighbor, but **our LOVE must be Jesus defined, not culturally defined**. **1 Corinthians 13**, the word of God describes LOVE, and Jesus embodied every one of those descriptors. **[Tell the story of ‘April and Anonymous Agape Member’]**. **Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.**

We must make the most of every opportunity. **“Be very careful, then, how you live--not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil” (Ephesians 5:16)**. I want to ask you to begin to consider every **5-minute encounter you have, as an opportunity to show someone the manifold grace of Christ**. [If time share about Yard Sale] It might be a kind word, it might be an invite to church – it will require you to be bold, to break out of your shell, perhaps feel a little awkward. But there is so much we could spend our time on, wise people pray to see every small opportunity **as a divine appointment** to encourage someone and point them to Jesus. And you NEVER know what God may do with that sacrifice in faith.

Gospel Ending and an Invite for visitors to join with us in our purpose: **Romans 5:6-9** You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous person, though for a good person someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him!