

Neighbors and Nations

Week 1 | Ambassadors

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Before he ascended into heaven, Jesus gave his disciples a mission that has been passed down to every generation of followers, including you and me. At Christ Fellowship, we summarize that mission by saying that we are to be people helping people find and follow Christ.

It's a simple sentence to repeat, but its implications are all encompassing. Christ's mission affects everything, from the way we parent, to how we do our jobs, to how we spend our money, to the way we prioritize our time. There is no corner of our lives left untouched by the reality that Jesus is Lord, and we are his people, empowered to reflect his character and commissioned to share his truth and love through our words and actions.

For the next few weeks we're going to focus on this mission and some of the ways we can live it out. We'll consider various contexts in which we operate as ambassadors for Christ, including in our homes and jobs, in our communities and nation, and in the world at large. We'll explore how we can share the gospel, serve others, and impact people with the love of Christ.

Along the way, we'll be highlighting various ministries that Christ Fellowship partners with both here and abroad. We think you'll be inspired by the amazing things they are doing and want to be a part.

Day 1

Representing Christ to the world — it's a high calling, and not an easy one. But then, it never has been. The earliest Christians lived under the threat of persecution in a culture that was constantly pressuring them to abandon Jesus for other gods. For the most part, these early believers were not wealthy, well-educated, or from noble families. They didn't have a lot going for them in the eyes of Rome. But in the eyes of God, they had everything they needed to carry out his mission. They had the Holy Spirit, they had each other, and they had the good news that all people are loved by God and welcomed into his kingdom because Jesus Christ is Savior and Lord.

The gospel spread like wildfire through the Roman empire in the decades after Jesus first gave his commission. Life after life was changed by the power of the Spirit, as people experienced salvation and redemption through Christ, and the number of believers multiplied. We have the same Spirit who empowers us to share Christ's love, and we can start with those closest to us.

Read

1 Corinthians 7:17

Nevertheless, each person should live as a believer in whatever situation the Lord has assigned to them, just as God has called them. This is the rule I lay down in all the churches.

- What do you think Paul means by “whatever situation the Lord has assigned to them”?

Reflect

Paul didn't write generic form letters. When he wrote letters to newly formed churches, he took time to answer questions and deal with issues in their communities. In 1 Corinthians 7, he helps the Christians of Corinth work out how their lives should change after they became believers. They were wondering what to do about aspects of their old life now that they'd committed to Jesus. If they were married to an unbeliever, should they stay married? If they were uncircumcised, should they get circumcised? In the verse we read above, Paul tells them to live as believers in the situation that they were in.

Throughout history there have been cults that require their members to abandon everything from their former life — from the way they dress, to where they live, to even cutting off contact with family. That's not what God calls us to do when he saves us. While we need to separate ourselves from sin, we aren't required to renounce every relationship, leave our careers, or isolate ourselves from the world. To the contrary, God often keeps us right where we are, so we can impact those around us for Christ.

The gospel transforms us from the inside out. We are a new creation and the Spirit empowers us right where we are at to live as a follower of Jesus. Our salvation will affect everything about our lives from the way we communicate with our family members, to the way we respond to our boss, to the way we treat the checker at the grocery store. As we live out his love, compassion, truth, and mercy, we are acting as Christ's ambassadors and representing his ways.

There is a reason Jesus doesn't transport us straight to heaven after we're saved — he has work for us to do here on earth. Our mission field starts right where we live. This week we're going to look at how this impacts our relationships at home and in our jobs.

Respond

Think about the people that you spend the most time with — your spouse, kids, roommate, friends, fellow students, or co-workers. This week, ask the Spirit to show you how you can encourage. Whatever their starting point, whether they are far from God, or already walking with him, consider how you can nudge them a little bit closer to Jesus through your words and actions.

Mission Partner Spotlight

Shiloh Place

Throughout the Bible, God reveals his great compassion for the poor and vulnerable. He expects his people to share this compassion. This week, we're focusing on our mission at home, with our own families. But we always want to look beyond our own walls to help those in our community who are struggling to provide safe and secure homes for their families.

Christ Fellowship partners with [Shiloh Place](#), “a ministry to single moms and their children who are homeless or ‘at-risk’ of homelessness. The program provides assistance with housing, childcare and tuition for up to two years with the goal of seeing our families move into a self – sufficient lifestyle that will stand the test of time.”

The COVID-19 pandemic has created an even greater need for the work they are doing. I encourage you to watch this [short video](#) to see the tremendous impact they are having right here in Collin County.

Day 2

In our new series, Neighbors and Nations, we are accepting Christ's mission to reach the world with his truth and love, and we are starting by focusing close to home.

It's a sad reality that the people who are closest to us are also the ones we are most likely to hurt. When we're being selfish or feeling unhappy, frustrated, or angry, they are the ones who often bear the brunt. The Spirit empowers us to do better. Part of living out Christ's mission means loving people, and we can all work to be more intentional in showing Christlike love to those in our immediate sphere — our family, friends, neighbors, and co-workers.

Read

1 Corinthians 13:1–8a

If I speak in the tongues of men or of angels, but do not have love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. ² If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. ³ If I give all I possess to the poor and give over my body to hardship that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing.

⁴ Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. ⁵ It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. ⁶ Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. ⁷ It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.

⁸Love never fails.

- Why, according to Paul, is love essential? What does love look like?

Reflect

Any discussion of love should acknowledge its source. God is love and we love because he first loved us (1 John 4:8 & 4:19). Every description Paul gives in 1 Corinthians 13:1–8 is first and foremost a description of Jesus — the godman who loved perfectly. Take a breath, and read this slowly: God loves you with a faithful, unending, never-failing love. Jesus went to the cross so that you could be reconciled to the Father and sent you the Spirit to comfort and guide you. When we accept his love and allow it to fill us, more and more we will generously give love to others.

In 1 Corinthians 13, Paul reminds us that love is not just an emotion, it must be lived out. Love is a passionate commitment to the well-being of another. Loving someone includes being patient, kind, caring and forgiving. We will be genuinely happy when they are happy and will help carry their burdens when they are in need. We have a unique opportunity in our closest relationships to grow in love and in our ability to love.

There is an old saying, “people don’t care what you know until they know you care.” That’s true even in our close relationships. A parent can be full of Bible knowledge, but if they don’t give love to their son or daughter in ways he or she can receive, it might not matter how many Bible stories and memory verses they teach. A Christian may want to share Christ with an atheist friend, but if they aren’t demonstrating Christ’s kindness, not a single argument for the existence of God will penetrate. It’s all just noise, like a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal.

When we love others, we are reflecting out into the world the love Jesus pours into us. In the same way that Jesus was a tangible presence of God’s love, his followers are called to be a faithful presence to those around them. This kind of love can manifest itself in the simplest of ways — from a kind act, to a friendly word, to a reassuring hug, to simply being there. If we want to help our friends and family find and follow Christ, we must show them love.

Respond

Offer up praise to God for the love he has poured out on you. How does experiencing his love allow you to love others and empower your call?

In trying to live out Paul’s description of love with family and friends, what areas do you struggle with the most? Ask the Spirit to show you how to love them more and more.

Mission Partner Spotlight

Emily’s Place

Sadly, not every home is a loving one. Some women and children endure abuse and need help finding safety and rebuilding their lives. [Emily's Place](#) was founded “to break the cycle of violence for women and their children through long-term transformational care that seeks to restore faith, hope, and health.”

“Emily's Place provides long-term housing that is critical for helping domestic violence survivors permanently escape abuse. It is the ‘bridge’ from a shelter, which typically allows women a safe place for 30 to 90 days, to independent living, free of the barriers preventing them from achieving self-sufficiency away from their abusers.”

This is a wonderful ministry that could use our support. Visit their [website](#) to find out more.

Day 3

It's a cliché, but that's because it just might be true: parenting is the hardest job in the world. Teaching and molding our children to be the people that God wants them to be is a sacred task that requires constant prayer and guidance from the Spirit. We want our children to experience Christ's love and salvation, and teach them what it means to be his follower.

Raising the next generation is a responsibility every member of Christ's body shares. While the primary role belongs to the parents, all of us should love and support children as they grow. Even if you're not a parent or if your kids are grown and gone, you can have a profound influence on the children in your extended family, church and community.

Part of our mission to be people helping people find and follow Christ is to reach out to the next generation with his powerful truth and unending love.

Read

Deuteronomy 6:4–7

⁴Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one.

⁵Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength.

⁶These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts.

⁷Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up.

Ephesians 6:4

⁴Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.

- What should parents do? What are they warned against doing?

Reflect

My grandmother tried to warn me. I love the look of English Ivy and decided to plant it in one of my flower beds. “It’s pretty,” she said, “but you’ll have to keep after it, or it will take off and spread everywhere.” She was right.

Since I’m not much of a gardener, and I didn’t “keep after it,” the ivy grew well beyond the boundaries of my flower bed. It spread across the yard and choked out a patch of grass. It wound its way up the nearest trees and bushes. If I’d done what my grandmother suggested and trained it to stay inside the bed, it would have been beautiful. Because I didn’t, it became a serious nuisance.

Part of our responsibility in parenting is to train our children in the way they should go by providing boundaries that we establish according to God’s design. In Ephesians 6, God gives parents the responsibility “to bring up their children in the training and instruction of the Lord.” To understand what that looks like we can go back to Deuteronomy 6 to the guidance God gave to Israel — to impress God’s Word on the hearts of Israel’s children by talking about it during the course of everyday life.

In every stage of their development, we can help our kids understand who God is and what he desires for his people. This can come in the form of regular family devotionals, and intentional teaching moments, but it can also come in the real time application of God’s Word to everyday situations. Some of the most meaningful conversations I’ve had with my kids are ones in which we talked through their conflicts, struggles, and even successes and together applied God’s love and truth to what they were experiencing.

In Ephesians Paul warns against exasperating children. To exasperate means to irritate, to provoke to anger or resentment. One way we exasperate our children is by failing to give them clear, consistent, loving boundaries and hold them accountable when they cross them. Like the English Ivy in my yard, we have to train our children in the way they should go, and correct their course when they are growing in the wrong direction.

The model we want to follow is the one God provides as he disciplines us. Because he loves us and wants what’s best for us, God encourages our growth in the right direction and prunes us back when we need it. The pruning can be painful in the moment, but it’s nothing compared to the pain that will come if we move outside of the loving boundaries God has set up for us.

While the majority of training and instruction will come from parents, there is nothing better than having other adults in your children’s lives who will back you up. From school teachers and coaches to children’s and student’s ministry shepherds to grandparents, aunts and uncles, and family friends, having people who love, support, and correct your children is a true blessing. I’m so grateful to the people in my life who’ve taken the time to get to know my

children, love on them, and nudge them towards Jesus. Another cliché that is overused is “It takes a village to raise a child,” but I’m convinced that one is true as well. Let’s be that village.

Respond

If you are a parent with kids at home, how are you intentionally doing Ephesians 6 and Deuteronomy 6? What part does prayer need to play (hint: a very big part!). Are you actively praying for your kids?

How can you be an influence for Jesus in the lives of other kids in your community? (Another hint: Christ Fellowship’s Promiseland and Student Ministries could use you!)

Mission Partner Spotlight

Webb Elementary

From Lynn Gallimore, our Webb ministry coordinator:

“Through the Adopt-A-School program of McKinney ISD, Christ Fellowship partners with the Webb Elementary school staff and faculty to support the students as well as the community at large. Webb Elementary serves about 500 students, of which over 70% are considered at risk due to family income. The staff at Webb are devoted to meeting the academic, emotional and physical needs of their students to equip them with the necessary skills to reach their highest potential. Christ Fellowship is a faithful partner in this endeavor.

The vision of this ministry is to be an encouragement to the staff, provide students a trusting relationship with an adult, and help meet the needs of this community as they navigate through the school year. We have been privileged to be a part of the Webb family for the past 15 years. Since parents are often working in multiple jobs, their PTA is not able to provide to teachers and students what many of us have experienced at our kid’s schools. Our partnership is greatly appreciated by those at Webb, not just because we serve them lunch, but because by continuing to serve their needs they know they are loved, prayed for and appreciated.”

To find out how you can get involved in serving Webb Elementary, visit the [church’s website](#).

Day 4

This week we’re talking about how we can be Christ’s ambassadors in our homes and work places. We want to reflect Christ’s character in our words and actions, and share his love with those around us.

Many of us spend considerable time each week working at our jobs. How we do our jobs and interact with our bosses and co-workers can be part of our mission to help people find and follow Christ.

Read

Colossians 3:23–24 (NIV)

²³ Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for human masters, ²⁴ since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving.

- What is Paul's point in these verses?

Reflect

The average adult spends a lot of time working. Whether you are a CEO, a sales person, an auto mechanic, a stay-at-home mom, or a booster club president, you are using your abilities and efforts to get things done. (Some of you even get paid for it.) Unfortunately, a lot of people view their work as a drudgery. They often find their minds drifting to visions of icy cold drinks consumed on white sand beaches. If only life could be an endless vacation!

While vacations are wonderful, and rest is necessary, God created us to do meaningful work. Before sin entered the world and our work became toil, God's image-bearers were designed to use their gifts and abilities to create and cultivate. We are to honor God and bless one another with our efforts. Although sin can corrupt our motivations and frustrate our efforts, God's purpose for work has not changed. Our work is supposed to matter!

Martin Luther said that when we pray for our "daily bread," we are praying for everything and everyone involved in the making of that bread. Stop and think about that for a moment. Consider all the people that contributed to the food in your cupboard. Recognizing how God's provision comes through other people impacts our view of our work and theirs, and it helps us appreciate our fellow image-bearers.

While many of us are working for a paycheck so we can support ourselves and our families, Colossians 3:23–24 teaches us that our ultimate boss is not the person who signs that check, but the Lord. God is the primary audience for our work. That should shape not only the quality of our work, but how we respond to our boss, and treat our co-workers. In everything we do we are ultimately serving the Lord, and while we are grateful for the pay we receive, our ultimate inheritance will come from our heavenly Father. We are accountable to him in the work we do and the relationships we cultivate through our work.

As Christians, we want to live a fully integrated life where we are just as much a Christian at work as we are on Sundays at church. We want our words and actions to reflect the image of Jesus as we perform our daily tasks and interact with people. We can demonstrate the grace and love of God in how we serve others at work, do our jobs with integrity, and treat people with kindness. Let's share credit, and resist throwing co-workers under the bus when something goes wrong. Let's speak encouraging words and stop complaining or gossiping. And if we have employees who report to us, let's honor them and treat them with respect.

There are temptations in any job. Whether that temptation is to take the credit for someone else's work, take some inventory home for ourselves, or to put in the minimal effort required to keep the paycheck coming, we need the Spirit at work. He will help us not only avoid those temptations, but see our work in a fresh way and help us make the most of every opportunity to share Christ's love with those around us.

Respond

Thank God for the gifts and abilities he's given you and the circumstances in which he's placed you to use them. Whether you are currently working at your "dream job" or not, God has you in a place where you can glorify him and serve others.

Think about your co-workers. How can you show them the love of Christ through the way you do your job? The way you treat them? The conversations you have with them?

Did you know that Christ Fellowship has a Career and Coaching ministry? This is for people who are looking for a job, or who are looking to make a career change. There is a six week course starting October 26, 2020! Find out more at the [CF website](#).

Ministry Partner Spotlight

Belle and Sparrows

"Many women in our community, nation, and world are facing insurmountable odds to not only keep their families together, but to do that in a way that is uplifting and not demeaning. [Belle and Sparrows](#) is a by women/for women non-profit that reaches women both locally and globally. One way we stand in the gap for marginalized women around the world is by teaching them skills that allow them to provide for themselves and their families. You can be part of a team that actively comes alongside these women to lift them up and help them with support and skills they need while also sharing with them about the redeeming love of Christ!"

Visit their [website](#) to find out more about the work Belle and Sparrows is doing here in North Texas and around the world.

Day 5

Happy Friday! On Day 5 we review our scriptures for the week and pray for the Spirit's guidance on how we should respond.

Reflect

Look back at the verses we focused on this week:

- [1 Corinthians 7:17](#)
- [1 Corinthians 13:1–8a](#)
- [Deuteronomy 6:4–7](#)
- [Ephesians 6:4](#)
- [Colossians 3:23–24](#)

What’s your biggest takeaway from these verses? How do they help you understand why and how to fulfill Christ’s mission at home or at work?

Connect

If your nation calls you to be one of its ambassadors, you are sent to represent your country to another. When you speak to that country’s citizens, you are in essence speaking on behalf of your nation.

In 2 Corinthians, Paul reminds us that we are ambassadors for Christ and that God has given us a wonderful message of reconciliation to share with the world.

*“And all of this is a gift from God, who brought us back to himself through Christ. And God has given us this task of reconciling people to him. For God was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself, no longer counting people’s sins against them. And he gave us this wonderful message of reconciliation. **So we are Christ’s ambassadors**; God is making his appeal through us. **We speak for Christ when we plead, “Come back to God!”** For God made Christ, who never sinned, to be the offering for our sin, so that we could be made right with God through Christ” (2 Corinthians 5:19–20 NLT).*

Reconciliation is at the heart of the gospel message that we get to share! It’s something that those who don’t know God need to hear, and something that those who do know him may need to be reminded of. “Come back to God!” He is waiting with open arms.

Ambassadors not only share important messages, they are a faithful presence representing their home country. That’s true of us as well. In our words and actions, let’s reflect the character of King Jesus and the values of his kingdom. In our daily conversations, even with those we see all the time, let’s be a faithful presence to the goodness and mercy of God. Let’s love people well, and ask the Spirit to use us to nudge them closer to Jesus.

Respond

- Think about the people you spend the most time with — family, friends, co-workers, neighbors. If our goal is to nudge them closer to Jesus, we need to know where they are at now. While we may talk to these people all the time, we may not be having many meaningful conversations.

You can have one by asking good questions about what they think and how they feel. What they are passionate about, and what scares them. Don't assume you already know. Set aside some time and be intentional about having a meaningful conversation.

- At the end of this series, on November 15, 2020, we'll be asking our Christ Fellowship family to donate to a missions offering. This offering will fund our partnerships with organizations like the ones highlighted this week, Shiloh Place, Emily's Place, Webb Elementary, and Belle and Sparrows. Begin praying now about how you might participate.