BE ONE
Essential Engagement

BETHANY CHURCH
Commitment to Mission
Over the next few weeks we will learn about the two parts of Essential Engagement:

1. Commitment to Others
2. Commitment to Mission

Next Steps:
1. Watch Essential Engagement videos: click on the BE ONE ESSENTIALS page at bethanychurch.com
2. Read Essential Engagement Study Guide
3. Discuss in a group or one-to-one
4. Come to church next Sunday
Welcome to another session in our Essential Engagement series. We are learning that our growth as disciples requires other people. It is always about “us and Jesus”, not just “me and Jesus”. We have divided this discussion into two related topics: Our Commitment to Others, and our Commitment to Mission. In our previous two sessions we addressed our Commitment to Others, and now, in this session and in the next one, we will look at our Commitment to Mission.

In some respects, we have already addressed this topic in earlier sessions. In our Essential Truths series, we asked the question, “Why Am I Here?”, and we discovered that we are here to become and to make disciples of Jesus, to Be One and to Make One. God defines and assigns this primary mission to us.

Then, in our Essential Disciplines series, we learned about Stewardship & Giving, that we are entrusted with God’s provisions to use in our pursuit of this mission, managing the resources of His kingdom. And, we also learned about our responsibility to Share our Faith, to share God’s Story that has the power to shape our story.

So, we have already established a scriptural foundation for this Commitment to Mission. To move forward, however, and actually execute this mission, we must consider a few more critical concepts. In this session, therefore, we consider the authority, accountability and reward that God attaches to this mission. Then, in the next session, we will examine the power that God provides for this mission.

1. Authority for Mission

When Jesus calls His disciples to this mission, He immediately gives them the authority to execute it. Recall these words from the Gospel of Matthew, known as His “Great Commission”:

“Then Jesus came to them and said, ‘All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.’” Matthew 28:18-20

1 Unless otherwise indicated, all English translations of the Bible in this document are taken from The New International Version. (2011); Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

The Authority of Jesus

Jesus begins by addressing this subject of authority. He says, “all authority in heaven and earth has been given” to Him. But what does this mean? After all, He is God. He is the Word who, together with the Father and the Spirit, created all that is. So, of course, He has all authority. So, what is Jesus talking about?

Here Jesus is referring to His own mission, the reason that He descends from the Father, to take on our flesh. This mission is rooted in the story of the Old Testament. Hear these words, for example, from a vision recorded by the prophet, Daniel:
“In my vision at night I looked, and there before me was one like a son of man, coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days and was led into his presence. He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all nations and peoples of every language worshiped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed.” Daniel 7:13-14

Jesus comes to fulfill this hope, a restoration of God's kingdom, where He reigns for ever and ever. Several times throughout His ministry, Jesus refers to this authority for mission. On one occasion, after 72 of His disciples return from their successful mission, Jesus gives thanks to the Father. He says:

“All things have been committed to me by my Father. No one knows who the Son is except the Father, and no one knows who the Father is except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.” Luke 10:22

This intimacy and unity of Father and Son gives power to this mission, to reveal God in this world, a mission that Jesus now extends to His followers. Jesus repeats this theme, just before His death, in His High Priestly prayer. He says:

“Father, the hour has come. Glorify your Son, that your Son may glorify you. For you granted him authority over all people that he might give eternal life to all those you have given him. Now this is eternal life: that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent. I have brought you glory on earth by finishing the work you gave me to do. And now, Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world began.” John 17:1-5

The Authority of Disciples

- Spiritual Authority

During His life on earth, Jesus prepares His disciples to carry this mission forward. Recall, for example, the authority that He gives to the 72 disciples that we mentioned above. He says:

“Whoever listens to you listens to me; whoever rejects you rejects me; but whoever rejects me rejects him who sent me.” Luke 10:16.

And then He goes even further, saying:

“I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. I have given you authority to trample on snakes and scorpions and to overcome all the power of the enemy; nothing will harm you. However, do not rejoice that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven.” Luke 10:18-20

Jesus gives spiritual power to these disciples, so that they can overcome the evil spirits in this world, lead by the enemy himself, who seek to deceive and destroy.

Spiritual Weapons

The apostle Paul reminds us of this same truth, when He says:

“Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on the full armor of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil’s schemes. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the
authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.” Ephesians 6:10-12

Because this is a spiritual war, then, we must fight with different kinds of weapons. We do not kill or destroy bodies. Rather, we use spiritual weapons, that God's Spirit has given us. Paul refers to these spiritual weapons as the “full armor of God”. He says:

“Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.” Ephesians 6:13-17

Notice how of each of these weapons are tied to God's truth, His will, and His ways. We are not free to exercise this authority on our own. We have this authority only as we remain faithful to His mission and His methods. Which is why we must stay in constant dialogue with Him. Look at how Paul completes this thought. He says:

“And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the Lord's people. Pray also for me, that whenever I speak, words may be given me so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may declare it fearlessly, as I should.” Ephesians 6:18-20

Like Paul, our authority is tied exclusively to our mission. When we are on mission, declaring God's kingdom in this broken world, we have the full backing and power of God's promise, that He will reveal Himself through us to those who still live in darkness and confusion.

2. Accountability for Mission

Since, then, we have been given full authority to execute our mission to become and make disciples, we should expect that we will be held accountable for our role in that mission. The apostle Paul reminds the Corinthians that:

“The one who plants and the one who waters have one purpose, and they will each be rewarded according to their own labor.” 1 Corinthians 3:8

He then adds:

“By the grace God has given me, I laid a foundation as a wise builder, and someone else is building on it. But each one should build with care. For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ. If anyone builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, their work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each person's work. If what has been built survives, the builder will receive a reward. If it is burned up, the builder will suffer loss but yet will be saved—even though only as one escaping through the flames.” 1 Corinthians 3:10-15

Paul is careful to point out here that our accountability to mission is not a matter of our salvation. We don't make it into heaven based on how well we perform on mission. No, our entrance to God's eternal kingdom is based entirely on His grace,
as we learned in our Essential Truths series, especially when we discussed the question, Why the Cross?

And, yet, we who follow Christ are still held accountable.

3. Rewards Promised

Most often, as we have seen here in Paul’s letter, this accountability is expressed in positive terms, as rewards. We might even call them incentives. Jesus puts the case for these incentives very clearly. He says:

“Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moths and vermin do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” Matthew 6:19-21

There is a promise here, that we have some sort of heavenly treasure awaiting us, in which we can invest now, as we pursue the mission our Lord has given to us.

Paul sometimes describes this heavenly treasure as a crown of victory. To the Corinthians, for example, he writes:

“Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last, but we do it to get a crown that will last forever. Therefore I do not run like someone running aimlessly; I do not fight like a boxer beating the air. No, I strike a blow to my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize.” 1 Corinthians 9:25-27

And, later, he confides with Timothy, saying:

“For I am already being poured out like a drink offering, and the time for my departure is near. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day—and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing.” 2 Timothy 4:6-8

We Christians do not have to shy away from this promise. We are working for a crown. We expect a reward for our effort. But we understand that our reward lies in our future, and it is tied to our faithfulness to mission. We do not live primarily for the pleasures in this life, we live for the infinite joy of an eternal life. And that joy is linked to words that we all long to hear when we finish here in earth, the words spoken to the faithful steward in the parable of Christ:

“Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master’s happiness!” Matthew 25:23

Conclusion

So, now we see how God has attached authority, accountability and reward to this mission to Be One and to Make One. But how can we accomplish this mission. Where will we get the power? We will address this topic in our next session. Until then, however, we pray that God will lead you even deeper in your relationship with Him. For more information, please visit us at bethanychurch.com.
Welcome to another session in our Essential Engagement series. We are learning that our growth as disciples requires other people. It is always about “us and Jesus”, not just “me and Jesus”. In our last session, we found that this Essential Engagement requires a Commitment to Mission. Jesus has given us this mission to become and to make disciples, and He has attached authority, accountability and reward to this mission.

In this session, then, we address the “how” question. This big mission of disciple-making requires a new kind of power, more power than we humans possess within ourselves. This mission requires divine power, the power of God’s Holy Spirit. We therefore examine the Presence of the Holy Spirit and the Gifts of the Holy Spirit.

1. The Presence of the Holy Spirit

As we learned in our Essential Truths series, the Holy Spirit is fully God, a Divine Person, co-equal with both Father and Son. Together, the Father, Son and Spirit are revealed as Trinity, One God in Three Persons.

In Our New Creation

The Holy Spirit appears in the creation story, “hovering over the waters,” (Genesis 1:2), and He is especially tied to the creation of the first man, as God “breathed into his nostrils the breath of life.” (Genesis 2:7) As we pointed out in our earlier series, the ancient Hebrew language interweaves these ideas of “spirit”, “breath”, and “wind”.1

As He was present in this first creation, the Holy spirit is also present in our new, spiritual creation, our new birth as restored people of God. Jesus makes this point explicitly in His conversation with a man, named Nicodemus. He says:

“Very truly I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are born of water and the Spirit. Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit. You should not be surprised at my saying, ‘You must be born again.’ The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit.” John 3:5-8

Though our spiritual rebirth is not as plainly visible as our physical birth, it is nevertheless quite real and powerful, as real and powerful as the wind, though it too cannot be seen.

This same Holy Spirit who breathes new spiritual life into us, then remains with us and in us, empowering us to live a new life of obedience. Jesus makes this promise to His disciples:

“If you love me, keep my commands. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever—the Spirit of truth.”
The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you.” John 14:15-17

When we make that decision to follow Jesus, to love Him and keep His commands, He responds with a promise, that the Holy Spirit Himself will live in us. He will act as our “advocate”, one who works for and along side us, as we work to follow through on our commitment to our Lord and His mission.

The apostle Paul confirms this same truth in his letter to the Romans, when he says:

“You, however, are not in the realm of the flesh but are in the realm of the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, they do not belong to Christ. But if Christ is in you, then even though your body is subject to death because of sin, the Spirit gives life because of righteousness. And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies because of his Spirit who lives in you.” Romans 8:9-11

For those who follow Christ, a tremendously powerful Person is at work in us, even if we cannot see or measure His divine work. God's Spirit is at work transforming our dying, sin-filled, flesh-bound existence into new, righteousness-filled, immortal, eternal, and abundant lives.

In Our New Mission

The Spirit's work, then, in re-creating us extends also into our mission, since we now have a new purpose in our life. After Jesus' resurrection and before He ascends to the Father, He prepares His disciples for what will follow. During one of those conversations, Jesus makes an astonishing promise:

“Then they gathered around him and asked him, ‘Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?’ He said to them: ‘It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.’” Acts 1:8

The disciples thought that their wait would soon be over, but Jesus indicates that they are just getting started. This good news regarding Jesus, this gospel, had to be shared outside their local precincts, into the world that surrounded them. And Jesus promises this same Spirit to empower them in their mission.

Soon afterwards, God fulfills this promise in a spectacular way. It happened on the day of Pentecost, an annual, Jewish festival that celebrated the “first fruits” of the wheat harvest. (See Exodus 34:22; Numbers 28:26) Each year, many people from other nations would travel to Jerusalem to celebrate this festival. And, in this particular year, God would display “first fruit” of an entirely different variety. In Acts we have this account:

“Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.” Acts 2:2-4
The Spirit shows up and enables these disciples to declare God's glory in languages that they had never studied before. God is declaring the fact that His message is for all the people, all nations, and all languages. In this stunning moment, we learn that we, His people will receive His Spirit to share God's story with people around us, in our nation, in our world, in all of our languages.

The Gifts of the Holy Spirit

1. The Same Spirit

The Father gives this gift of His Spirit to all who follow and obey the commands of His Son. We all share the same power of the same Spirit. However, He reveals His power differently in each of us, and we refer to these differing revelations of God's power as “gifts of the Holy Spirit”. Paul describes these gifts in his letter to the Corinthians. He says:

“There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit distributes them. There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. There are different kinds of working, but in all of them and in everyone it is the same God at work. Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good.” 1 Corinthians 12:4-7

This description balances diversity and unity. While we see different manifestations of God's power among us, there is only one Lord and One Spirit, and all this power is to be used for the “common good”.

2. A Diversity of Gifts

To give us an idea of the diversity of gifts, Paul then provides a sample list. He says:

“To one there is given through the Spirit a message of wisdom, to another a message of knowledge by means of the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by that one Spirit, to another miraculous powers, to another prophecy, to another distinguishing between spirits, to another speaking in different kinds of tongues, and to still another the interpretation of tongues. All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he distributes them to each one, just as he determines.” 1 Corinthians 12:8-11

Here we find nine different gifts listed. Elsewhere in Paul's writings, we find similar lists, although none of the lists are entirely identical. Compare 1 Corinthians 12:28-30; Romans 12:6-8, and Ephesians 4:11. The fact that each list differs reminds us that none of these lists are exhaustive. Paul is providing examples of spiritual gifts, but we should not assume that these are the only gifts or graces that God gives to His people.

So, we should not be alarmed if we cannot immediately find which of these gifts we have been given. None of us has been left out. We each have at least one gift, and probably more than one. As Paul makes clear, the Spirit gives powerful gifts “to each one” of us. (1 Corinthians 12:7). Each of us has been uniquely empowered to fill a role in God's mission.

3. Gifts Working Together

And, since each of us is important, we must all work together, as a body, to accomplish God's purposes. As Paul reminds the Corinthians:

“Now if the foot should say, ‘Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,' it would not for that reason stop being part of the body. And if the ear should say, ‘Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body,' it would not for that reason stop being part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would the sense of hearing be? If the whole body were an ear, where would the sense of smell be? But in fact God has placed the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be. If they were all one part, where would the body be? As it is, there are many parts, but one body.” 1 Corinthians 12:15-20

All gifts are necessary, and everyone must exercise his or her gifts appropriately, in order for the body to do what God has called us to do collectively, as His people.
- 3a Identifying our Gifts
How then do we identify the spiritual gifts that God has given to us? What unique role has He prepared us to fill? We recommend that you consider the following factors.

1. Your God-given Passions
Throughout our entire Essentials series, we have seen how passionately God loves and cares for His people. As His children, He pours a part of that passion into each of us. We all see different needs, different hurts and different possibilities. So, ask yourself what keeps you up at night? Lost Souls? Victims of Oppression? Those trapped in addiction? The errors and lies in our culture? The beauty of God's story?

These are all God-given passions that He will fill with His Spirit. Those passions are a clue to your spiritual gifting.

2. Your God-given Experiences
All of us have had a unique life, filled with a rich, diversity of experiences, some more pleasant than others. And all of these experiences can inform our part in God's plans, even the painful experiences. In God's power, even our failures are redeemed and used for His glory.

So, maybe your recovery can inspire someone else to recover. Maybe your marriage or parenting adventure can help someone navigate their own difficult journey. Maybe your business background can help a well-meaning body of Christ get organized. Maybe your own period of doubt and questions can help some other seeking soul. Whatever circumstances you have worked through in your lives, God can use those experiences to encourage others.

3. Your God-focused Prayer with Others
As you reflect on your passions and your experiences, make sure that you dialog with God about them. As we learned in our Essential Disciplines series, the Holy Spirit is at work in our prayers. As we pray, He forms our desires in accordance with God's desires. (Romans 8:26-27) And be sure to pray about this with others. Listen to their advice and counsel as you pray together regarding your role in God's kingdom. God listens and responds to these cries of the heart.

Conclusion
So, now we see how God has given us the authority, accountability, rewards and power to engage in this mission Be One and to Make One. We just need to cross the line, to decide to get off the couch and do what our Lord commands us to do. And when we cross this line, we will discover the true, abundant and eternal life that He promises us. So, we pray, therefore, that God will lead you even deeper in your relationship with Him. For more information, please visit us at bethanychurch.com.
Opening

What are the biggest challenges we face as we seek to serve God?

Going Deeper

1. Authority for Mission
   - The Authority of Jesus
     • Read Matthew 28:18-20 and John 17:1-5. What sort of authority does Jesus pass on to us?
   - The Authority of Disciples
     • Read Ephesians 6:10-20. How can we use the spiritual weapons that God gives us?

2. Accountability for Mission
   - Read 1 Corinthians 3:10-15. In what sense will God hold us accountable for the way in which we pursue our mission?
   - By taking our responsibility for mission seriously, are we trying to “earn” our way to heaven? Why or why not?

3. Reward for Mission
   - Read Matthew 6:19-21. How do we “store up for ourselves treasure in heaven”?
   - Read 1 Corinthians 9:25-27 and 2 Timothy 4:6-8. What sort of “crown” is Paul working for?
   - Read the parable in Matthew 25:14-30. What is the main point that Jesus is communicating in this story?

Next Steps

• What do you need to change in order to increase your reward in heaven?
Commitment to Mission Discussion Guide

Opening
What comes to mind when you hear the phrase “spiritual gifts”?

Going Deeper

1. The Presence of the Holy Spirit

✓ In Our New Creation
  • Read John 3:5-8. How is the Holy Spirit involved in our rebirth as renewed children of God?
  • Read Romans 8:9-11. How does the Holy Spirit help us to live as God intends us to live?

✓ In Our New Mission
  • Read Acts 2:1-13. Describe the scene that is described in this passage. What does this event have to do with the power promised to us as we share the Gospel with others?

2. The Gifts of the Holy Spirit

✓ The Same Spirit
  • Read 1 Corinthians 12:1-7. Why is it important to realize that there is one Spirit who inspires all the gifts?

✓ A Diversity of Gifts
  • Read 1 Corinthians 12:8-14. Why does the Spirit pour out a diversity of gifts among God’s children?
  • Compare the lists of spiritual gifts that Paul provides in 1 Corinthians 12:28-30, Romans 12:6-8, and Ephesians 4:11. Are we given in these passages a complete, exhaustive list of all the possible spiritual gifts? Why or why not?

✓ Gifts Working Together
  • Read 1 Corinthians 12:15-30. Why are all the gifts worthy of the same honor?

✓ Identifying Your Spiritual Gifts
  • How can we identify our spiritual gifts? Hint: A simple test or survey will not do the job by itself. We must engage in the spiritual discipline of prayer with others as a significant part of the process.

Next Steps

• Write a short paragraph listing the spiritual gifts that God has given to you. Or, if you are still trying to figure this out, describe the steps you have taken so far to discover these gifts.

• How can you develop and use your spiritual gifts more effectively?