

Our Destination MATURITY IN CHRIST

By Senior Pastor Scott Boerckel

What is the specific vision of East White Oak Bible Church for you? The following article describes this vision of maturity in Christ. Take some time to read it, and you will learn a lot both about what we do as a church and why we do it.

I once had a friend explain to me how he became lost while driving. He said that he did not know how to get to where he was going. He noticed that there was a car ahead of him that “looked like it knew where it was going.” So, he followed it! Needless to say, following that car caused my friend to become hopelessly lost.

This sounds like just a funny story. However, when it comes to our relationship with Christ and the purpose of the church, we can ill afford to follow my friend’s plan. What is the purpose of the church? How do we accomplish that purpose? In this article, I hope to summarize for you what our destination is and how we at East White Oak have constructed our ministry to get there.

As our elders worked through the question of what a mature disciple of Jesus Christ was like, we summarized it in four areas. Those areas are:

- **Growing in Christ**
- **The Bible and Prayer**
- **Obedience and Christian Living**
- **Mission and Outreach**

Let’s look briefly at what each of these is like.

OUR DESTINATION: MATURITY IN CHRIST

Growing in Christ

Growing in Christ means a relationship with Christ. This means a continuing life of repentance, faith, and submission. We are not just sorry for our sin or, even less, sorry that we got caught. Rather, we face our own sinful hearts, reject our pride of self-justification, and turn our passions toward the honor of Christ’s name. Our faith is not just positive feelings or a mere agreement to facts; rather, it is trusting in and relying upon the person of Jesus Christ to save us from sin and believing that His resurrection assures our own. Faith goes even further to trusting Christ as a living Per-

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son, which engages our intellect, our emotions, and our wills. Our submission is first to Christ as the head of the church. However, submission extends into every area of our lives—to family relationships, to church leadership, to the world at large. The growing disciple's life is a life of submission. Growing in Christ also means a love and worship of God—really seeking Him, not just asking Him for stuff, so that we really do love Him with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength. Love and worship of God, truly engaged, means that we will see opportunities for praise in all of life. Growing in Christ means a meaningful devotional time in prayer and the Word. Spending time in God's Word, memorizing scripture, putting on the full armor of God, and experiencing prayer as adoration, confession, thanksgiving, and supplication are all ways to make that time with God meaningful.

Growing in Christ means a deepening understanding of our union with Christ and God's love for us. The great illustrations of scripture that speak of our union with Christ need to be internalized. Our relationship with Christ is illustrated in the New Testament as: a building with a foundation, a wife to a husband, a living being to its food, a vine and its branches, and a head with a body. These help us to understand the need to comprehend our complete identity in Christ. We are crucified with Him, died with Him, buried with Him, made alive with Him, raised up with Him, and will appear with Him in glory.

The Bible and Prayer

The Bible and prayer means that we grow in our real use of the Bible and prayer. We will grow in a working knowledge of the Bible's events, persons, and themes. We will grow in clarifying Christian beliefs in contrast to current worldviews and philosophies. We will know how to explain the way of salvation using scripture. We will be able to recall from memory some key verses of scripture and explain why those verses are important. We will learn how to do an inductive Bible study. We will know how to look to the Bible for guidance through life on issues of daily life like parenting, marriage, finances, etc. We will be able to identify key doctrines of the faith and grow in our appreciation of them. We will develop a life of corporate prayer. We will pray for rescue—deliverance from all manner of effects of the Fall. We will pray as worship, ascribing to our great God the glory that He is due. We will pray as mission, seeking God's help in making us His effective ambassadors and in opening eyes that are blind to the glory of the Gospel.

Obedience and Christian Living

A true believer's life is truly changed. Obedience and Christian living are the result of genuine salvation in Christ. There will be a holiness and integrity in the believer that will be evident to all. This means avoiding the "sin list" items mentioned several times in the New Testament (see Colossians 3:5-10 for a good example). However, it means more than that. It means that we live lives that exhibit the fruit of the Spirit, that exhibit the work of God expressed by Christ's dwelling in us (see Colossians 3:12-17).

If holiness is the vertical dimension of our changed lives, then fellowship is the horizontal dimension. We do not live in isolation. We live out the "one anothers" of the New Testament. These "one anothers" appear 100 times in the New Testament. They almost all involve the importance of unity with one another, loving one another, and being humble toward one another.

The obedient Christian will grow in decision making that is based on biblical principles rather than personal gratification. To do this, an increasing sensitivity to the guidance and the power of the Holy Spirit needs to be cultivated. This will result in a life that is submitted to the Lordship of Jesus Christ. It will also be a life that is not fault finding, arrogant, or holier than thou, but rather a life that exhibits grace toward others. This grace-filled life recognizes that people who do not know Jesus will not behave like Jesus. Grace filled lives are ready to forgive when others confess and repent. Grace-filled lives think of others first and do not make personal preferences the measure of fellowship. Grace-filled lives have a world Christian perspective and a concern for the poor.

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Mission and Outreach

A true believer's ambition is changed. The ambition is now to glorify God by making disciples. This means that mission and outreach form an essential part of the believer's life. Maturity in mission and outreach goes beyond knowing. It extends to doing—actually sharing one's faith. To do this, there are several abilities which need to be honed. Mission and outreach require the ability to share one's own testimony. The ability is to share one's own story succinctly, describing one's life before faith in Christ, how faith in Christ occurred, and life after faith in Christ. Mission and outreach require the ability to use some tool to share the Gospel (there are many available for use here at The Oak). It requires having a teachable spirit, not pretending to be a know-it-all with unbelievers but seeking to learn about them and love them. It requires a network of prayer supporters. No one can do evangelism alone. It requires the ability to mentor others and the ability to discern in whom to invest one's life. Perhaps most importantly, it requires the development of deliberate and purposeful relationships with non-Christians.

Summary of “Destination: Maturity in Christ”

Don't get scared by what you have just read! It is a LOT. But this is the delightful journey of a lifetime. The Lord will gently work His will in your life, not on everything all at once, but continuing to press you out of your comfort zone so that you become mature in Christ.

A key question at this point is, “How can I get there? This looks hard!” This is precisely why you need the church. The church is not optional. You need the family of God to help you grow to maturity in Christ. Here at East White Oak, we have three key pathways developed to bring us all to that destination of maturity in Christ. It is to those pathways that we now turn.

THE PATHWAY: CELEBRATION, COMMUNITY, CELL

Churches do lots of things. How does a person decide which ones are best suited for maturing in Christ? Some folks decide it by individual preference; others by what gets announced or highlighted; some are by what friends are doing; some even happen by accident. Our elders have given a lot of thought to this. We want to present to you the three clearest, most consistent pathways to maturity in Christ that we have here at East White Oak. Conveniently, we label them all with a word that begins with “c” so that they are easy to remember. They are:

Celebration—Sunday morning worship service

In celebration, we are the body of Christ in a large group setting. There is no limit to the number of people involved. The primary activity is the priority of expository preaching. This is the explanation of the meaning and application of the text of the Bible, going verse by verse. We believe that the center of all worship must be the Word of God. We further believe that expository preaching is the only way to assure that God's people will hear God's Word. In so doing, the body of Christ is taught Growing in Christ, The Bible and prayer, Obedience and Christian Living, and Mission and Outreach.

So, we encourage you to come regularly so that your spiritual diet is consistent and balanced. Pray before you come, asking the Lord to teach you. Prepare by going to bed early on Saturday evening. Prepare your heart with the anticipation that you will hear from God. Bring your family. Do not worry about your children not “getting it.” Don't send your children to Sunday School while you go to church. Give your whole morning on Sunday to the Lord's work in your life.

Community—Sunday morning Adult Bible Fellowships

In community, we are the body of Christ in a medium sized group setting. There appears to be an important relationship of human beings gathered in groups from 30 to 120 in size. See Exodus 18:21-23; Luke 9:14; Luke 10:1, 17; and Acts 1:15 for some specific texts which demonstrate this. There is a connection, organization, and mission of this sized

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group which uniquely aids the maturing process in Christ. The “one anothers” get lived out in this context in a very special way. Here are some reasons why our community ABF groups are important for you:

- 1) Because each person benefits from larger community
- 2) Because life issues get connected to the scriptures
- 3) Because each person needs to know that they matter and are known
- 4) Because our Lord saw that this size group was important
- 5) Because the excellence of Bible teaching is important to our souls’ health
- 6) Because the sense of group mission leads some of these groups to meet together

Cell—Small Groups

In cell, we are the body of Christ in a small group sized setting. This, too, appears to be an important size for the purpose of maturing in Christ. See Exodus 18:21-23; Mark 3:14 (Jesus’ small group); Acts 5:42 (the first church at Jerusalem was organized into small groups); see also 1 Corinthians 16:19; Romans 16:5; Colossians 4:15 for examples throughout the first century church.

The struggles of life cannot be overcome alone. The mission to make disciples cannot be accomplished alone. The small group is a wonderful ministry to the believer. The community that can happen in a small group is unmatched. Small groups vary in basis for meeting. Some meet due to geographical proximity; others are gender based or interest based; some are based on station in life.

Regardless, the mission of the small group is to make disciples. This means that small groups are not static. There will be a life span to a small group. Hopefully, small groups invite others to join them until they need to divide into two small groups, having been a training ground for creating new leadership. We need to avoid the “transfiguration trap” where we feel so comfortable in our own small group that our sense of mission to make disciples gets lost. Folks are welcome to join more than one small group, but everyone should belong to at least one. Knowing, being known, and being on mission for God happen in small groups like no where else.

Conclusion

So there you have it—the discipling process.

The destination is maturity in Christ.

We mature as disciples when we experience:

- Growing in Christ
- The Bible and Prayer
- Obedience and Christian Living
- Mission and Outreach

Then, there are the pathways to maturity.

Here are our pathways:

- Celebration (worship service)
- Community (ABFs)
- Cell (small groups)

Just so you know, our children’s ministry and youth ministry is based on these same principles. We believe that God wants us to grow to maturity in Christ and that He has called us to these pathways to maturity. Our mission is stated well by the Apostle Paul in Colossians 1:28: Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ.

May the Lord bless each of us in both the destination and pathways to maturity in Christ,
Pastor Scott

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