

## **MISSION STATEMENT**

**John 14:15-27**

**Dr. Howard Batson  
First Baptist Church  
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Kevin Starr is director of the Mulago Foundation. As companies seek funding from his foundation, he gives them some direct advice: You must express your mission statement in no more than eight words. And you must follow this format: “a verb, a target, an outcome.”

And we all know that Jesus was a man on a mission.

We’ve seen him do much in this Gospel – heal the sick, feed the 5,000, give sight to the blind, raise the dead. And, even last week, wash the feet of the disciples. And today, He commands His disciples to love one another (13:34-35).

No doubt ushering in the Kingdom of God was the key mission of the Christ.

But did He have a mission statement, a pithy expression of His purpose?

I found a mission statement of another organization: “To inspire and nurture the human spirit.” That certainly sounds like a bold mission, maybe even religious. Which corporation imagines themselves capable of inspiration? “To inspire and nurture the human spirit” – that’s the mission statement of Starbucks. The international coffee company is on a mission “to inspire and nurture the human spirit – one person, one cup, and one neighborhood at a time.”

That’s odd. I thought the Starbucks mission was to overcharge for coffee and make you think it’s cool to contribute to their coffers.

That does sound like a spiritual statement – “To inspire and nurture the human spirit.” Starbucks.

Chick-fil-A’s mission is “To glorify God by being faithful stewards of all that is entrusted to us and to have a positive influence on all whom come into contact with Chick-fil-A.” If a business can be so bold, certainly Christ and His church could be no less, if not more.

Mission statements are in vogue for companies today. Every corporation wants a cause above and beyond simply providing quality goods or services in a cost-effective fashion. According to Kevin Starr, however, most of them are long, complex, boring, and sound like they mean absolutely nothing. For example, the mission statement of one organization says, “Our challenge is to assertively network economically sound methods of empowerment so that we may continually negotiate performance-based infrastructures.” Blah, blah, blah. Now, you have no

idea what they are talking about; nor do I. Maybe that's the purpose – that we don't really know their purpose, because maybe they exist just to exist.

The *Harvard Business Review* (August 22, 2010) said mission statements should not be marble-mouthed jargon, with gobbledygook statements that are easily forgotten, misremembered, or flatly ignored by frontline employees.

If you are a man or woman on a mission, you need to make sure that those around you understand who you are and what you are doing.

If you want to receive some investment dollars from Starr and the Mulago Foundation, you'd better have a clear, compelling mission statement with no fluff, no bluff. Remember: eight words, verb, target, outcome.

Start with a strong action word, name the target of the work, and describe the outcome. An example would be an organization that says they exist to "improve African children's health." Well, we know what they want to do – improve. We know who they want to do it for – children in Africa. And the outcome is health. Or another organization: "Save endangered species from extinction." Easy to understand.

But based on the words of Jesus on the night before His very death (14:15-16), what would be the mission statement of the Christ for His people? He says, "If you love Me, you will keep My commandments" (John 14:15). And then He says, "I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate to be with you forever" (v. 16).

If we were to pare down this part of Jesus' farewell discourse to His disciples, spoken on the eve before His crucifixion, an eight word mission statement might go something like this: "Love Christ, keep His commandments, receive the Spirit." This is our mission: to be a community of people who love Christ and keep His commandments, seeing these actions are complementary, not contradictory. Loving and commandment-keeping are two sides of the same spiritual coin, revealing both ardor and order, affection and obedience. And, as a result of following Him, receive the Spirit, the Holy Spirit of God.

Love Christ, keep His commandments, receive the Spirit.

You remember this farewell word from our Lord to His disciples begins back in John 13 (13:31-17:26). He says in v. 33, "Little children, I am with you a little while longer. You will seek Me; and as I said to the Jews, now I also say to you, 'Where I am going, you can not come.' A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another."

You remember Peter objects. "Lord, where are You going?" And Jesus answered (v. 36), "Where I am going, Peter, you cannot follow Me now; but you will follow later." Peter claims that he will lay down his life for his Lord, but Jesus tells him otherwise – "Peter, you will deny me three times before the cock crows."

They had been three years following their rabbi. These disciples did have troubled hearts because the Lord was leaving them. “Do not let your heart be troubled; believe in God, believe also in Me” (14:1). You remember that beautiful promise about God’s Kingdom of many mansions. And then verses 15-31, He declares that he will give them the Holy Spirit, the Comforter.

Let’s unpack this mission statement from our Lord.

## **I. The first command is “Love Christ.”**

Fellowship and partnership with God is a relationship of love – not only God’s love for us, but also our love back to God. For you see, love in the New Testament is never a sentiment or an emotion; it’s always moral. Up to this point in the Gospel of John, the main message has been God’s love for His people (John 3:16). The disciples’ love for God has hardly been heard. And then, maybe only implicitly. Jesus says in John 8:42, “If God were your Father, you would love Me, for I proceeded forth and have come from God...He sent Me.” Jesus’ words to the Jews were, “If God really is your Father, then you will love the one that He sent.”

But from His farewell discourse forward in the Gospel of John, our love for God becomes an explicit thing. This is not a threat to the disciples, but, rather, the rabbi defining true love for His followers. Jesus says, “The person who loves God will keep My commandments.” The Greek emphasizes the pronoun “my.” My commandments. What He is saying is this: In my physical absence – remember, He is about to die, rise, and ascend to heaven – the standard for the life of a disciple is the one lived by our Lord. Love for God is always founded upon and directed toward His Christ, His Messiah. (See 14:21 23-24.)

**Years ago, a sociology professor at John Hopkins University in Baltimore assigned his class to a city slum to interview 200 boys. “On the basis of your findings, predict their future.”**

**Shocked at what they saw in the slums, the students estimated that 90 percent of the boys interviewed would someday serve time in prison. Twenty years later, the same professor asked another class to locate the survivors of the 200 boys and compare what happened. Of the 180 boys they could find, only four had ever been to jail.**

**Why had the predictions by the earlier class proven false? A common denominator – over 100 of them remembered having the same high-school teacher, Miss O’Rourke, who had been a tremendous influence on them at the time.**

**After a long search, Sheila O’Rourke was found in a nursing home in Memphis. When asked for her explanation, she was puzzle and replied, “All I did was love every one of them.”**

**Never doubt the power of love, especially the love of God in Christ Jesus. (Alan Cole, “Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?” *26th Street Church of Christ* Homepage, [mupfc.marshall.edu](http://mupfc.marshall.edu).; [homileticonline](http://homileticonline))**

The way Sheila O'Rourke loved those boys changed their behavior, their future. The way God has loved us in Christ should do no less.

## **II. Keep His Commandments.**

**God is less interested, I suspect, in our acts of obedience than in the pleasure of our company.**

**(Richard A. Schmidt, St. Paul's Episcopal Church, Daphne, AL, quoted in *The United Methodist Reporter*, 10/8/1993, 2; homileticonline)**

Sounds clever, but the Rev. Schmidt's cute comment does not square with scripture.

Oddly enough, throughout the centuries of Christendom, many have seen love for Christ and the admonition to keep His law as opposites. Love vs. Law. In other words, some groups teach that our relationship with God and God's relationship with us is based primarily upon our keeping the commandments. While others would say, "No, all that changed with the arrival of the Christ, and now it's all about the power of His love – a love that is crucified and resurrected, even for sinners." It's now love, not law.

But what we discover by this closest follower of Jesus, a man named John, that loving and commandment-keeping are two sides of the same spiritual coin. Of course, we love God – that is Jesus – because He first loved us. He comes to us with patience and love, and He saves us. Then, as a response to His love, our love is demonstrated in our active obedience of keeping His commandments. John says this not only in his Gospel, but in his letters as well (1 John 5:1), "If you love me, obey my commands."

**Norman Stone is a veteran (25 year) British television director. He's the one who directed the BBC's Shadowlands and many other specials. In his speech before the Center for Applied Christian Ethics at Wheaton College, he said that the issue is "Obedience, not success. Please, America! I went to the National Religious Broadcasters Association one time and I sat down on a seat. I jumped up rather smartish because I sat on a little pack[age]. The pack[age] was called, 'Ten Ways to Guarantee Success in Your Ministry.' It had a razor, toothpaste, and lots of stuff telling me how to guarantee that the Holy Spirit would bless my ministry. This is weird, this is wrong, this is not biblical – and it was certainly uncomfortable to sit on. What are we talking about when we worship success? success with dollar signs, head counts? This is not right. Obedience and faithfulness are the true measures of success." ("The Medium and the Message," *Discernment*, 5, Spring 1998; homileticonline)**

Faithful commandment keeping doesn't mean we can sit with an Excel spreadsheet and check off all the ethical admonitions of the Sermon on the Mount as we master them. But, in response to Christ's sacrificial love and death, the disciple is to live an orderly and obedient life. Keeping His admonitions includes the new commandment that we should love each other. John 13:34-35, "Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this, everyone will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another."

In fact, in his first letter, this same writer – John the Apostle, the beloved disciple – says, “This is how we know that we love the children of God: by loving God and carrying out His commands” (1 John 5:2). In fact, he says, “This is the love of God, to keep His commands” (v. 3).

**In an article entitled “God Lite,” theologian James R. Edwards traces how “The more we obey God, the more real God becomes to us and the greater our love grows. And the more we love God, the more we become like God.”**

**“It is like a good marriage: People who love their spouses want to please them; and if they do not want to please their spouses, they can hardly talk of loving them.”**

**Edwards then shows the way in which “obedience is not a penalty levied on faith. It is the strength of faith. The Bible absolutely will not separate faith and obedience, as though obedience were some kind of inheritance tax that God levies on the free gift of salvation. God cannot separate them and still offer salvation. There is something about love that is no longer love apart from obedience. Dietrich Bonhoeffer kept saying this in *The Cost of Discipleship*: ‘Only those who obey can believe, and only those who believe can obey.’” (Christianity Today, April 29, 1991; homileticonline)**

In John 14, Jesus has already said the same. “Whoever has my commandments and keeps them is the one who loved Me; and he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and will disclose Myself to him” (John 14:21). What Jesus is saying is this: “If you love Me in your heart, then your hands will surely show it.” (See also 14:23-24.)

These commands involve the full scope of Christ’s revelation. He is saying this: If you hold to My teaching, then I know you are really My disciples.”

But in reality, we can’t keep His commands without the presence of God’s Spirit within us. Thus, we come to the third portion of the mission statement.

### **III. Receive the Spirit.**

The obedience that God desires is beyond any human achievement. So Jesus promises the believer divine help. The word for the Holy Spirit here is *Paraclete*. You can translate it with words like comforter, advocate, counselor, helper. The word is used five times in the New Testament, and every time it is used by our writer, John.

According to Jesus, this comforter has always been the intention of God. God always intended a multi-faceted sending of Himself – first in Jesus and the second in the Holy Spirit. And all that the Holy Spirit does is initiated and established by the work of the Son.

Remember, Jesus is about to leave, to depart. He told them so. And their hearts are unsettled or troubled. “Don’t leave us,” the disciples are saying.

How many times is that phrase uttered every day? As parents leave the house with their children at the door, jumping up and down, crying “Don’t leave us. Don’t leave us. Where are you

going? Don't leave." My daughter Jordan, when she was four-years-old, asked that same question every time I walked out the door. It didn't matter if I was going to work all day or going to the corner store. As I left, she looked me eye-to-eye and asked, "Will you be back?" – as if she wanted a verbal contract.

We're that way as children. We don't want to be left behind when our parents go. "Don't leave us," we cry. Separation anxiety. The disciples are having separation anxiety, fearful that Jesus is going away.

That's exactly what's happening in this section of John. It's near the end of the ministry of Jesus. His disciples had followed Him each and every step of His ministry. They had just celebrated the Lord's Supper. And as we saw last Sunday, He had just washed the disciples' feet, showing them the meaning of a servant's heart. They were very uncomfortable as Jesus – their rabbi, Lord, and teacher – took the towel, girded his robe, slid the basin across the floor and washed each of their feet – the very thing they were unwilling to humble themselves to do for each other. And then He tells them, "Children, I am leaving. And where I am going, you cannot come" (13:33).

Jesus is telling the disciples, "I'm about to leave and you cannot go with me this time." "Don't leave us," they cry out. But Jesus has to go to make ready a place for God's children. "For I go to prepare you a place," He says in John 14. And, of course, a good parent never leaves his children unattended. They need someone to care for them, to watch over them. And the *Paraclete*, the comforter, is just ahead. Verses 16-17: "I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may be with you forever; that is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it does not see Him or know Him, but you know Him because He abides with you and will be in you." And in verse 18, "I will not leave you as orphans."

"Don't leave us."

An orphan is one who has known the warmth of a father's and a mother's love, the security of home and hearth side, and is deprived of those wonderful gifts. That's the way the disciples are feeling. Jesus had been their beloved companion, their staunch friend, their never-failing guide, and now He is only talking about death. The time is at hand. It was dismaying to the disciples to hear Him say, "I'm going to go away."

But He promises the Spirit.

Even as we stand at the doorway as children and declare, "Don't leave us," He says, "It's best." Jesus is saying, "There is something better than My presence in limited human flesh. My presence in the form of the Spirit is always with all believers at all times." He is saying it has all been calculated to your advantage (16:7).

Look at John 14:26-27. "The Helper, the Holy spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I said to you. Peace I leave with you; My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Do not let your heart be troubled, nor let it be fearful."

Jordan was asking, “Daddy, will you be back?”

“Yes, of course I will, Jordan. Daddy always comes back.” Sometimes she just had to hear it again, even though she knew the answer to her question. It’s the same every time. Sometimes I told her I’d be back in ten minutes, and sometimes when I walked out the door I told her I’d be back at the end of the day. And sometimes I even had to tell her it’s going to be three mornings, “and then you’ll wake up and I’ll be here on the fourth morning. I’ll be back with you. But ultimately, Jordan, I’ll always be back.”

Jesus says in verse 18, “I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you.” Meaning both His glorious resurrection and His eventual return as King of kings and Lord of Lords.

The disciples received the Spirit – a new life which will give them a new inner force, a new start, a new vision, a new freedom that will separate them from the ways and the influences of the world who do not know the Spirit. They will no longer be enslaved by fear or greed. *Paraclete* means, etymologically, “the one who answers the call.” What a beautiful name. The Spirit, the *Paraclete*, gives us new strength and a new love to do the works of God, to do the things we seem unable to do by ourselves, the things we cannot do by the strength of our will-power. Like commandment-keeping. Things like loving certain people or forgiving our enemies. Or becoming friends with those who are so different from us. To be open to those who have a different vision.

**Dan Johnson tells of studying with a well-known biblical scholar in Cambridge, England. One day Dan asked him, “What is the rock-bottom essence of the Christian life?” The scholar replied: “I think I have found it. It sounds much too simple, but I am convinced of its merit. It is found in an old song whose chorus goes like this: ‘Trust and obey, for there’s no other way to be happy in Jesus but to trust and obey.’” (*Neglected Treasure: Rediscovering the Old Testament*, p 53; [homileticsonline](http://homileticsonline.com))**

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