



Embracing Our Gospel G's

Titus 2:11-14 on September 7, 2025
Pastor Jerry R. A. Johnson

Please read Titus 2:11-14 before going further in this transcript.

Let's begin today by having everyone take a look at this green/white infographic:¹ A number of us have looked over this sheet of paper before, and we've prayed through it, many times.² But others of us, are just now seeing this for the first or second time.³ Regardless, we all need to know that this is the Strategic Ministry Plan that's been affirmed by our membership, and our Fall Kick-off Sunday is a perfect opportunity for each of us to recommit ourselves to pulling together for our shared gospel purpose.⁴ ⁵ So let's review: this green/white infographic gives us a concise snapshot of our church's Mission, Vision, Values, and Discipleship Pathway.

STRATEGIC MINISTRY PLAN

EVANGELICAL FREE CHURCH OF BEMIDJI



MISSION

What we are supposed to be doing as a church.



VISION

A picture of what the mission will look like when it is realized.

**BECOMING
DEEPLY DEVOTED
FOLLOWERS OF
JESUS TOGETHER.**

WE WILL BE A CHURCH WHO

- GLORIFIES GOD IN ALL OF LIFE
- IS TRANSFORMED BY GOD'S WORD
- SERVES AND CARES FOR EACH OTHER IN LOVE
- WELCOMES ALL PEOPLE AND CARES FOR OUR NEIGHBORS
- PERSONALLY SHARES THE GOSPEL LOCALLY AND GLOBALLY



CORE VALUES

The biblical beliefs that empower and guide our ministries.

GOD'S GLORY

BIBLICAL FOUNDATION

CONGREGATIONAL WORSHIP

CARING FOR THE BODY OF BELIEVERS

CONNECTING WITH THE COMMUNITY

EVANGELIZING THE LOST

DISCIPLESHIP PATHWAY



A plan to guide disciples toward maturity in Christ.



¹ <https://efcbemidji.org/about-us/what-we-believe/>

² Now, some of us may be thinking to ourselves, how many times are we going to put this green/white infographic in the bulletin, and how many more sermons are we going to hear on this? Well friends, to be frank, as many as it takes. In Philippians 3:1, the Apostle Paul says, "...It is no trouble for me to write the same things to you again, and it is a safeguard for you."

³ As a church, we're doing our best not to forget the hard work that our Strategic Leadership Team did back in 2024. We prepared this infographic as part of our 100-year anniversary celebration, but this document is intended to now guide and direct our ministry focus as we move into our next 100 years of ministry, Lord willing.

⁴ The full sermon series from fall 2024 can be accessed here: <https://efcbemidji.org/sermon/our-discipleship-pathway-part-1-gather/>

⁵ Pastor Shane Fleming is brand new on our staff, and he's just beginning to dip his toe in the water of our Strategic Ministry Plan. He's a good example of someone who is new to our church, and committed to forging ahead as we're all "becoming deeply devoted followers of Jesus together."

The MISSION statement on the upper righthand corner probably sounds familiar to many of us by now: “Becoming Deeply Devoted Followers of Jesus Together. If you read the fine print in the lefthand corner of your insert, under the word “MISSION,” you’ll see that our mission should explain “What we are supposed to be doing as a church.” In order for us to be most effective as a church, we need to align ourselves, and our ministries, around the same MISSION: “Becoming Deeply Devoted Followers of Jesus together.”⁶ The rest of our strategy then carries our mission forward through: Our Vision, Core Values, and Discipleship Pathway.

If you read the fine print under our VISION, you’ll see that this is... “A picture of what the mission will look like when it is realized.” So our Vision is this: WE WILL BE A CHURCH WHO...

...Glorifies God in all of life.

...Is transformed by God’s Word

...Serves and cares for each other in love

...Welcomes all people and cares for our neighbors

...Personally shares the gospel locally and globally

Our CORE VALUES are listed on the bottom left corner; they lay the foundation for our Mission, Vision, and Discipleship Pathway. If you read the fine print, you’ll see that they’re... “The biblical beliefs that empower and guide our ministries.” They include:

- God’s glory

- Biblical Foundation

- Congregational Worship

- Caring for the body of believers

- Connecting with the community

- Evangelizing the lost

Now clearly, there’s a significant overlap between our CORE VALUES and our VISION, but that’s to be expected, because everything on this page is closely intertwined. These CORE VALUES not only represent who we are as a church today, but also who we’ve been as a church for a long time, even going back to our very beginning. You see, we not only find these Core Values in the Bible, we also find them in our own hearts. We find them in the very fibers of our being. Our CORE Values are just like they sound, they are at our core, at the center of what we believe/practice, and what we hold most dear.⁷

⁶ Learn more here: <https://efcbemidji.org/sermon/what-do-we-mean-by-becoming-deeply-devoted-followers-of-jesus-together/>


⁷ As the fine print on the insert makes clear, these Core Values do two important things: EMPOWER and GUIDE our ministries. So make no mistake, our Core Values are crucial to carrying out our Mission, Vision, and Discipleship Pathway.

Our Discipleship Pathway is on the bottom righthand corner of the insert; it's the 4th and final part of our infographic. It contains our 4 Gospel G's: GATHER, GROW, GIVE, GO. These 4 G's summarize our church's strategic plan for discipleship. If you read the fine print, by the circle with the tree in the middle, you'll see that it says, "A plan to guide disciples toward maturity in Christ." So you might say that there's a 5th G imbedded within this pathway: The GOSPEL "G", the Gospel of Jesus Christ! Apart from the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and our focus on becoming His deeply devoted followers, these 4 G's wouldn't be very impressive.⁸ But these 4 G's are significant for our church, precisely because they're infused with the power and purpose of the Gospel of Jesus Christ! In other words...

- > We GATHER around the gospel, in the name of Jesus Christ.
- > We GROW in the gospel, in spiritual maturity as co-followers of Christ.
- > We GIVE toward the gospel, our time/talent/treasure for Jesus' sake,
- > We GO with the gospel, taking it out in Jesus' name to make disciples.


So all four of these "G's" are Gospel G's. They lay out a 4-part, ongoing DISCIPLESHIP PATHWAY that guides us in our MISSION of "Becoming Deeply Devoted Followers of Jesus Together."

With our Gospel G's in mind, would you please take a look at the green/white ½-sheet? Here's the thing about our Discipleship Pathway: It's not "ours" unless you make it "yours." In other words, the reason we're asking everyone to fill out this sheet is to encourage each other toward personal buy-in. Hebrews 10:24 says, "And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds." Each one of us needs to take personal responsibility for our own discipleship, that's why each of the questions on the handout include the word "I." > "I plan to gather..." > "I hope to grow..." > and so on... We're only together on this DISCIPLESHIP PATHWAY if each and every one of us makes a personal plan for how we will personally GATHER, GROW, GIVE, and GO with the GOSPEL. So please fill out this sheet and then put it somewhere you'll see it each day (In your Bible, on your Frig, tape it up at work or school.)




2025 KICKOFF SUNDAY
Ministry Fair

Fill out this sheet for yourself and stick it in your Bible, on your fridge, or somewhere you'll see it. Then fill out the bottom portion and return it in to the church office or at the Ministry Fair for a chance to win a coffee shop gift card!




I plan to **gather** for worship at: 8:30/10:45 am

I hope to **grow** this season by joining:




- a Life Group
- a Sunday School class
- a Youth, Young Adult, or Men's/Women's group
-

This season, I plan to regularly **give**:




- cheerfully, what I have decided in my heart to give financially to support the ministry of E-Free Bemidji and its Global Partners.
- using my spiritual gifts by serving on the _____ ministry team.
-



Go! I want to share my faith locally and engage with the gospel globally by: _____

☐ With the Lord's help, I've got a plan to GATHER, GROW, GIVE, and GO this year!



Name: _____
Phone: _____
Email: _____

⁸ In fact, I suppose just about any organization could use these same 4 G's to lay out any number of plans.

Now, the elders also want you to know that we're planning to launch a series of workshops this fall, in order to better implement this Strategic Ministry Plan throughout all of our various ministries. These workshops will train each ministry area in our Ministry Assessment Tool. This tool is designed to encourage every single ministry in our church, to consider its alignment with our MISSION, VISION, VALUES, and DISCIPLESHIP PATHWAY. To be clear, the elders aren't assessing these ministries themselves, we're coming alongside the leaders of each ministry area to support them in doing their own assessment. We're asking each ministry area to measure how it thinks it's particular ministry area is lining up with our church's Strategic Ministry Plan. In fact, our worship leaders were the first group to try out this assessment just a few weeks ago (they were sort of our "Guinea pigs"!). Our desire is to rejoice in what's on track at E-Free Bemidji, and also to have each ministry make discipleship adjustments to anything that's not on track.

Well, with our Strategic Ministry Plan in mind, today's Scripture reading was from Titus 2:11-14. Verse 11 begins, "For the grace of God has appeared that offers salvation to all people." Were it not for God's gracious offer of salvation, none of us would even be here this morning. There would be no E-Free Church on this corner of Bemidji. But since so many of us listening to this message this morning have been saved by God's amazing grace, we are honored to be here, so that we can GATHER, and GROW, GIVE, and GO with the gospel. God's gracious offer of salvation to all people, is extended not only through God Himself, and through the incredible display of His power and beauty in the world He's created.⁹ God's gracious offer of salvation is also extended through this local church; through its people and its ministries, both locally and globally. Our church was placed here with a MISSION, of "becoming deeply devoted followers of Jesus together."

Titus 2:12-13 goes on, "12 It [the grace of God] teaches us to say "No" to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, 13 while we wait for the blessed hope—the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ." My *Study Bible* has a helpful note about verse 12: "The word translated 'teaches' refers to more than [just] instruction; it includes the [entire] process of training... instruction, encouragement, correction, and discipline."¹⁰ ¹¹ In other words, God's grace not only saves us from sin, it also *teaches* us and

⁹ See Acts 14:17 and Romans 1:18-20.

¹⁰ *NIV Study Bible*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, 2011, p. 2057 footnote on Titus 2:12.

¹¹ παιδεύω = "① to provide instruction for informed and responsible living, educate ② to assist in the development of a person's ability to make appropriate choices, practice discipline. @ correct, give guidance... (to) someone." William Arndt et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 749.

encourages us and corrects us when we get off track, and it even disciplines us when we need it.

The end of verse 12 clarifies that God's grace teaches us how we are to live: self-controlled, upright, and godly lives. And it teaches us not only how we are to live, but that we are to live! So when verse 13 says, "while we wait," it's calling followers of Jesus to do more than just sit around and wait for Jesus to return. Rather, "while we wait," we should be living for Jesus. If we consider ourselves a deeply devoted follower of Jesus, we are to live while we wait. We are to be busy, doing while we wait.¹² A key part of living a godly life for Jesus, is serving, giving of our time and talents to God's work in our church and our community. If we were to take some time to read through the little book of Titus, we'd notice that when Paul is writing it, he puts a strong emphasis on "good works." In fact, the word, "God" is the only noun used in Titus more frequently than the word "works," referring to "good works."¹³ It's worth noting that Titus 2:13 makes a clear and explicit reference to Jesus' full divinity: "our great *God* and Savior, Jesus Christ."¹⁴ And as important as this is, to our having a right theological understanding of Jesus' deity, it is equally important, to our having a right understanding of our own theopraxy. My *Study Bible* says it well: "Christ's divinity is not an abstract truth, however glorious, but a transformative witness that [compels] followers to good works. ...Paul's many ethical promptings are therefore calls for believers to show, in real life, the gospel they profess. For Paul, saving faith is shown, not least, in its actions."^{15 16}

Titus 2:14 goes on, "[Jesus] who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good." What an incredible thought: Brother or Sister in Christ, we are Jesus' very own, His very own redeemed and purified people.¹⁷ And He gave Himself for us not only to save us and make us holy, but also to make us a people who are "eager to do what is good." So we're not called to do "good works" as a way to earn our salvation, nor are we called to do "good works" because we have to, we're called to do "good works" eagerly.

¹² "Wait. Not in idleness but 'like servants waiting for their master to return' (Luke 12:36), which implies fervent readiness." *NIV Zondervan Study Bible*, Grand Rapids, MI, 2015, p. 2483 footnote on Titus 2:13.

¹³ *NIV Zondervan Study Bible*, Grand Rapids, MI, 2015, p. 2480 introductory notes.

¹⁴ Also see John 1:1,18; 20:28; Romans 9:5; Hebrews 1:8; and 2 Peter 1:1.

¹⁵ *NIV Zondervan Study Bible*, Grand Rapids, MI, 2015, p. 2480 introductory notes.

¹⁶ Jesus teaches His disciples to be busy doing the work that was entrusted to them; in Matthew 24:45-46, Jesus says, "45 Who then is the faithful and wise servant, whom the master has put in charge of the servants in his household to give them their food at the proper time? 46 It will be good for that servant whose master finds him doing so when he returns." Also consider Matthew 25:14-30. Earlier, in Titus 1:16, Paul writes, "They claim to know God, but by their actions they deny him. They are detestable, disobedient and unfit for doing anything good."

¹⁷ See 1 Peter 2:9.

Since Jesus has made us His very own people, we are not only willing, we are eager... “EAGER to do what is good.”^{18 19}

Now, did I happen to mention that our church is having our Ministry Fair today!? Yes, I make no apologies for ending this sermon with an intentional challenge to God’s people at E-Free Bemidji: Each one of us needs to sign up and serve! If you’ve been thinking to yourself, “well, if they really needed my help, they’d let me know; they haven’t called me yet, so they must not need me to serve.” Well, consider this your phone call! (*Can you hear me now?*) Consider this your church letting you know right now: We need you! Unless there’s some compelling reason that you just can’t serve right now (and that may be true for a few of us), then you need to serve... for such a time as this.²⁰

Our top need in Kids Ministry right now is:

- > 2 kindergarten leaders for Kids Club on Wednesday nights.

We also need:

- > A 3rd grade leader for Wednesday nights
- > Beginner’s/Kid’s Church helpers for Sunday mornings (serve 1x/quarter)

Our top need in Youth Ministry right now is:

- > 2-3 female small group leaders to help with our 6th grade ladies on Wednesday nights.

We also need:

- > A game helper for Wednesday night youth group.

And there are many other needs as well. So please come on down to the gym, enjoy some refreshments at the free cookout, and get plugged in to what God is doing in/through *your* church. So stop by the Ministry Fair and learn more about the life and ministry of your chrch.

- > If you’re already serving, then check in with the ministry in which you are already planning to serve.

- > If you’re not currently serving, then prayerfully consider serving somewhere in the life and ministry of your chrch.

- > Whether you’re already serving or not, you should...

- ...see what’s going on in the life and ministry of your chrch.

- ...learn how to pray for your chrch.

- ...encourage the ministry leaders of your chrch.

Now, I realize that the word chrch is spelled kind of strangely here; it’s almost like something is missing... like a vowel maybe?

You see, it’s impossible for our chrch to be complete without “u”.

¹⁸ “Salvation involves the double work of redeeming us from guilt and judgment, and of producing moral purity and helpful service to others.” *NIV Study Bible*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, 2011, p. 2057 footnote on Titus 2:14.

¹⁹ Ephesians 2:8-10 comes to mind, “8 For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— 9 not by works, so that no one can boast. 10 For we are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.”

²⁰ See Esther 4:14. If not now, then when? If not you, then who?