

***Sermon Starters***  
**NAB Eastern Association Sermon Series 2024**



Dear NAB East Pastors,

Although we're spread over two U.S. states and two Canadian provinces, we have much in common, including our affiliation with the North American Baptist Conference.

The NAB has identified four End Goals that drive the conference ministries. I'd like to invite each of our 33 NAB Eastern Association churches to set aside four Sundays in 2024 to speak about these biblically based End Goals. With the help of several of our pastors, I've organized the following "Sermon Starters"—message outlines, discussion questions, and other ideas—to help you pursue this plan. (You'll notice the diversity of approaches, no doubt!) Of course, you may want to create your own sermons from scratch, so go for it.

Let me suggest that you start the new year with a four-part sermon series. Or you may want to schedule a series a bit later (hopefully before Easter) or devote the first Sunday of each month (Communion Sunday?) to a sermon from this series—whatever works best for you. Be creative. The objective is to draw our NAB Eastern Association churches together around the four common NAB End Goals. Let me know how I can help.

Dana Goodnough, Regional Minister

## **NAB End Goal #1**

### **“Becoming Everyday Missionaries”**

**NAB Churches will be Trained for Missional Ministry:** “The NAB is missional in focus. This begins with knowing who God is and who God is forming us to be in Jesus Christ. It is looking at where God is working and joining Him there. This focuses on multiplying the ministry of NAB churches that reach out to those who do not know Jesus. This also focuses on planting churches and revitalizing churches that are missionally reaching out to those who do not know Jesus.” (Dr. Harry Kelm, NABC Executive Director)

#### **Message Outline**

(Suggested by Chris Arcadi, Pittsford Community Church, Pittsford NY)

#### **1. Missional ministry begins with understanding who we are “in Christ”—our identity.**

- Being “in Christ” shapes our identity (In Christ, I am...statements)
- Being “in Christ” empowers us for ministry (the importance and role of the Holy Spirit in life and mission)

#### **2. Missional ministry means having a meaningful presence outside the walls of the church building—being in our neighborhoods and community. (Paul in Athens – Acts 17:16-34)**

- Attentiveness to God to discern where he is working and joining him there.
- Attachment to God trusting him to open doors share Christ.

#### **3. Missional ministry reorients the focus of the people of God from “club member” to “change agent.”**

- “As you are going” (Matt 28:19) – salt and light – the importance of meaningful presence
- “Seek the welfare of the city” (Jer. 29:7) – seeking to bless and be a blessing
- “Build houses and plant gardens (Jer 29:5) – the importance of church planting
  - C. Peter Wagner (missiologist): “Planting new churches is the most effective evangelistic methodology known under heaven.”
  - Acts 29: New churches best reach the unchurched—period: Dozens of denominational studies have confirmed that the average new church gains most of its new members (60-80%) from the ranks of people who are not attending any worshipping body, while churches over 10-15 years of age gain 80-90% of new members by transfer from other congregations.
  - Tim Keller: “The vigorous, continual planting of new congregations is the single most crucial strategy for 1) the numerical growth of the body of Christ in any city, and 2) the continual corporate renewal and revival of the existing churches in a

city. Nothing else—not crusades, outreach programs, para-church ministries, growing mega-churches, congregational consulting, nor church renewal processes—will have the consistent impact of dynamic, extensive church planting. This is an eyebrow raising statement. But to those who have done any study at all, it is not even controversial.”

### **Discussion Questions**

- How are we discipling people into an understanding of the concept of being “in Christ?”
  - How are we discipling people into an understanding of the concept of being “on mission?”
  - How much time, training, and effort goes to motivating, equipping, and involving people in ministry outside the church?
  - How is our church involved in the work of church planting or revitalization?
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### **NAB End Goal #2 “Engaging Cross-Culturally”**

**NAB Churches will Seek Opportunities to Engage Cross-Culturally:** “It is a priority for us to work together with those different than us in North America, culturally and ethnically. We seek to listen and learn from one another, both within our NAB churches and among our neighbors. We seek to live in godly justice and righteousness that confronts sin and injustice in us and in our world while affirming the dignity and worth of all.” (Dr. Harry Kelm, NABC Executive Director)

### **Message Outline**

(Suggested by Chris Kelley, Canal Town Community Church, Palmyra NY)

**Scripture Reading:** Psalm 67:1-7

#### **Introduction:**

Although every generation can point to division and strife, it seems that current history is taking us to the brink. Israel in the midst of war. Iran funding and encouraging terrorism. Antisemitism is at a fever pitch. Concerns of renewed terrorist attacks abound. Smash and grab thefts grab the headlines. Carjacking is at an all-time high. In Canada, according to Statistics Canada, there a 5% increase in the crime rate per 100,000 citizens and a 4.83% increase in the severity of crime. No one is exempt.

What is the root cause? Opinions may vary. However, most would agree that a large portion of the armed conflicts are the result of “religious” ideologies. Crime increases can be attributed to increased drug usage, a sense of retribution or possibly something as simple as soft on crime policies. What will stop this cycle of destruction? How should Christians respond?

Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 5:17-21 (NIV) *Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God. God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.*

It is easy to see the violence taking place around the world, or even close to home and have a sense of righteous indignation. Who doesn't burn with anger at the news of innocent children being massacred? Who doesn't shake their head in disgust seeing videos of cars stolen at gunpoint, or stores looted with impunity? We don't want reconciliation. We want “justice,” and by that we mean punishment. After all, God hates sin.

According to Dennis Prager's Jewish commentary on Genesis, “The ancient Rabbis associated the names Adonai and Elohim with two characteristics: mercy (Adonai) and justice (Elohim). Their reasoning was that both are necessary for the world to function. If the world were ruled solely by justice, it would be destroyed, as it almost was during the time of Noah—where only Elohim is used to describe God. However, if the world were ruled solely by mercy, there would be no room for justice, and such a world, too, would cease to function. An overabundance of mercy means an increase in injustice. If, for example, mercy were extended to all murderers, their victims and the victims' loved ones would suffer a terrible injustice (hence the Midrashic teaching, “those who show mercy to the cruel end up being cruel to those who deserve mercy”). And, of course, if everyone knew they would receive only mercy, not justice, no matter what crime they committed, the amount of crime in society would increase exponentially.”

How does the Bible believing Christian reconcile justice and mercy given all the injustice and strife we witness every day?

### **1. It starts by understanding why we are here.**

**Acts 17:26-27:** “From one man he made every nation of men, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live. God did this so that [people] would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from each one of us.”

Our differences. Our culture. Our heritage and family circumstances, even the place we live, create questions in our minds. Why am I here? What is my purpose? Why do I have struggles? “God did this so that [people] would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from each one of us.” When the questions come, will you be the source for the answer?

## **2. You may be the only Bible some people will ever read.**

In most western countries, church attendance is at an all-time low. Sadly, some churches have forgotten their first love, pointing not to salvation in Christ, but to an “I’m okay, you’re okay” philosophy. In other cases, the church is a stumbling block. The Apostle Paul wrote, “Since you died with Christ to the basic principles of this world, why, as though you still belonged to it, do you submit to its rules: ‘Do not handle! Do not taste! Do not touch!’? These are all destined to perish with use, because they are based on human commands and teachings. Such regulations indeed have an appearance of wisdom, with their self-imposed worship, their false humility and their harsh treatment of the body, but they lack any value in restraining sensual indulgence” (Colossians 2:20-23).

Each of us need to remember our life before Christ. We all need to remember that we all fall short. We should note that when Paul wrote about sin, the list included what we might call the biggies; murder, perversion, theft, along with disobedience to parents, envy, gossip, and deceit (Romans 1). Our memories should lead us to compassion, not judgment.

The Apostle Peter wrote, “But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect” (1 Peter 3:15).

How you react or respond to someone of a different culture, religious background, experience or even their heritage can either slam the door shut or open the line of communication. In our opening Scripture reading the Psalmist wrote, “May God be gracious to us and bless us and make his face shine upon us, that your ways may be known on earth, your salvation among all nations.” Note that the goal of God’s blessing in our lives is so that others will see God and his salvation. Not just to the Jew, but to ALL NATIONS . . . all ethnicities.

## **3. We need to step out of our comfort zone.**

A comfortable church is often a non-productive church. After Jesus told his disciples to be his witnesses in “*Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth*” (Acts 1:8), they stayed in Jerusalem. It took persecution to get believers on the move, leaving homes, familiar faces, and personal comfort. We find ourselves comfortable in the surroundings we are familiar with. We don’t like to be challenged outside of our comfort

zone. Likewise, whether we recognize it or not, we all carry prejudices based on our experiences. The Bible is full of saints who stepped out in faith. Philip had a prosperous ministry in Samaria where “people paid close attention to what he said.” But God sent him on a long walk to encounter an Ethiopian eunuch with the saving grace of the Gospel. Paul, trained as a Pharisee, brought the Gospel to the Gentiles . . . you and me. When we step out in faith and go wherever God leads us, great things will happen. Maybe not right away. Some will plant the seed. Some nurture it, but God causes the growth (1 Corinthians 3:6-7).

Our church is affiliated with the North American Baptist Conference, a group of likeminded churches that share a desire to share the Gospel and disciple believers “until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ” (Ephesians 4:13). The conference has developed four End Goals. End Goal #2 reads, “NAB Churches will Seek Opportunities to Engage Cross-Culturally.”

This End Goal is consistent with Jesus’ command in Matthew 28; “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.”

Notice that Jesus didn’t say, when they come to you, make disciples. He didn’t say tell all your friends, as important as that is. He said, perhaps more literally, as you go about your life, make disciples of ALL NATIONS. We send missionaries. That is good. But we can’t just outsource our witness. As a pastor, I can’t just wait for people to come to church. You and I will interact with more people who need Jesus in their lives, outside of our doors. How are we doing? The Psalmist said that when salvation reaches the nations, “Then the land will yield its harvest, and God, our God, will bless us. God will bless us, and all the ends of the earth will fear him” (Psalm 67:6-7).

Let’s find ways to share the Gospel outside of our comfort zone.

### **Discussion Questions**

- Have we become a clique open only to people who view life just as we do?
  - Are we fearful of people whose political views are contrary to our own?
  - Is our goal to baptize only the rich or affluent?
  - Have we forgotten our first love? What would the world look like if we stepped out of our comfort zone?
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## **NAB End Goal #3**

### **“Developing Spiritual Leaders”**

**NAB Churches will Develop Spiritual Leaders:** “We believe God continues to raise up leaders who are being developed all around us. We will elevate emerging leaders by identifying, encouraging, equipping, and engaging with these leaders. As the NAB, we need to open up ministry opportunities to these men and women.” (Dr. Harry Kelm, NABC Executive Director)

#### **Message Outline**

(Suggested by Steve Lamarco, Victor Community Church, Victor NY)

#### **Introduction:**

Game - Follow the Leader or Simon Says (yeah, play a game!)

Opening question—leadership is . . . what? (People suggest ideas here.)

Leadership is influence.

#### **1. What? (Matthew 20:20-28; Mark 10:35-45)**

- Spiritual leadership is counter to the world’s leadership. (Specify those ways.)
- Therefore, spiritual leadership development is critical.
- Illustration: The first test of leadership is to look behind and see if anyone is following

#### **2. Why? (Ephesians 4:11-13)**

- Spiritual leadership is at the foundation of the church. (Paul, “Follow me as I follow Christ.”)
- Spiritual leadership development is essential for the church. (Observed results of spiritual leadership development . . . the right people in the right places—offices/roles—that are key to development.)
- People (individuals) are prepared to serve, the Body of Christ is built up, unity is evident in the church, the church is maturing.

#### **3. How? (2 Timothy 2:2)**

Investment in people, tactically, could look different in different settings:

- Educate - process of teaching, knowledge & skill development.
- Empower - provide opportunities & turn loose (authority).
- Encourage - leaders lead . . . help provide for their success.

- Evaluate - “inspect what you expect.” (feedback for refinement—loops back to educate!) (Succession of leadership - “entrust/pass on”.)

Jesus’ pattern—*with me, help me, I’ll help you, I’m with you* (you got this).

Illustration: ‘Leadership/coaching tree’ - Vince Lombardi, Bill Walsh, Andy Reid, etc.

(Providing opportunities - locally, sending.)

### Discussion Questions

- What is spiritual leadership?
- What is spiritual leadership development?
- Who are the servers who also have influence?
- How do you educate, empower, encourage, evaluate?

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### NAB End Goal #4 “Sending Missionaries”

**NAB Churches will Send and Support International Missionaries:** “This is about partnering with national Christians and national churches and national church leaders in global ministries. We are committed to equipping Christians across the world to share with their neighbors the message of redemption in Jesus and also to reach out to those who have never heard the Good News of Jesus.” (Dr. Harry Kelm, NABC Executive Director)

### Message Outline

(Suggested by Jon Schuerholz, Cornerstone Community Church, Grand Island NY)

**Scripture Reading:** Philippians 4:14-20

### Introduction:

College professor going over the syllabus: “Do all the assigned reading and the papers and a final project well, then you will pass the class.” College student who misses the first part: all he hears is “You will pass the class.” Assumes he will pass without doing the work. Mad at the professor who fails him. If we take verses out of context we may be surprised as believers and hold GOD to promises he never made.



Philippians 4:14-20: “Yet it was kind of you to **share** my trouble. And you Philippians yourselves know that in the beginning of the gospel, when I left Macedonia, no church entered into **partnership** with me in **giving** and **receiving**, except you only. Even in Thessalonica you sent me help for my needs once and again. Not that I seek the gift, but **I seek the fruit that increases to your credit**. I have received full payment, and more. I am well supplied, having received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent, a fragrant offering, a sacrifice acceptable and pleasing to God. **And my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus**. To our God and Father be glory forever and ever. Amen.”

Philippians 4:19 is often memorized and quoted. But it’s often misunderstood. “And my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus.” What is the context? If we want verse 19 to be true of us, then let’s look at verses 14-18 and 20. Here we’ll answer the key question, “Why be generous?” especially when it comes to sending and supporting missionaries.

### 1. Why be generous? Because GOD is generous.

- We are so wealthy. Globally and compared to humans throughout history.
- Stuff and the accumulation of stuff should not grip us. We have JESUS.
- GOD will meet all our needs. So we have no needs. Our wealth is incalculable. GOD has given us JESUS CHRIST. We are a co-heirs with CHRIST, co-regents.
- We are to be Christlike.
- How humble was JESUS?
- How generous has GOD been to you?

Ephesians 4:14: “For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith—that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen.”

From India a story is told of a Hindu woman whose family had not eaten for a long time. A Christian gave her a large bag of rice. As soon as she received it, she began to pour some into another bag. “There is a Muslim family who also hungers.”

## 2. Why be generous? Because generosity is rewarded in this life.

- Philippians 4:18-19: "I have received full payment, and more. I am well supplied, having received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent, a fragrant offering, a sacrifice acceptable and pleasing to God. And my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus."
- Luke 6:38: Give, and it will be given to you. Good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap. For with the measure you use it will be measured back to you."
- Proverbs 11:24: "One gives freely, yet grows all the richer; another withholds what he should give, and only suffers want."
- Have you seen generosity? Have you been the recipient of generosity?
- Luke 18:22: "When Jesus heard this, he said to him, 'One thing you still lack. Sell all that you have and distribute to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me.' But when he heard these things, he became very sad, for he was extremely rich. Jesus, seeing that he had become sad, said, 'How difficult it is for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God! For it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God.' Those who heard it said, 'Then who can be saved?' But he said, 'What is impossible with man is possible with God.' And Peter said, 'See, we have left our homes and followed you.' And he said to them, 'Truly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or wife or brothers or parents or children, for the sake of the kingdom of God, who will not receive many times more in this time, and in the age to come eternal life.'"
- 1Timothy 6:17: "As for the rich in this present age, charge them not to be haughty, nor to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly provides us with everything to enjoy. They are to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share, thus storing up treasure for themselves as a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of that which is truly life."

## 3. Why be generous? Because generosity is rewarded in the life to come.

- Philippians 4:17: "Not that I seek the gift, but ***I seek the fruit that increases to your credit.***"
- Matthew 25:31-40: "When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. And he will place the sheep on his right, but the goats on the left. Then the

King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.' Then the righteous will answer him, saying, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? And when did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you? And when did we see you sick or in prison and visit you?' And the King will answer them, 'Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.'"

- Matthew 6:19-21: "Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."

### **Discussion Questions**

- Is your GOD generous?
- What have you been given to give?
- Who do you partner with for the gospel? (Giving to your Church)
- Who are your missionary partners? (Prayer, Giving, Concerned for . . .)
- How can I be more generous? (Start/Increase – Treasure, Time, & Talents . . . GOD loves a cheerful giver. Not a coerced giver.)
- If everyone gave as I did what kind of church would this be? If everyone partnered with missionaries as I do how soon would the world be evangelized? (Not amount - percentage. )
- 2 Corinthians 9:6-7: "The point is this: whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver."
- Philippians 4:19 Is only applicable in the context of being a generous partner in the mission of CHRIST.