



The Mission of The Austin Stone

Why a Mission Statement?

MOST CHURCHES have mission statements that guide their organizations. These statements are shared at staff meetings, prominently featured on websites, and perhaps painted on a wall or included in email signatures. But what are they actually for? What purpose do these statements serve? A shared mission serves to unify, clarify, and motivate action for the members of an organization. The mission gives a shared target that the group can work toward together. When the mission is clear, each person can identify how they can best contribute toward that mission and move forward confidently, knowing they are helping the group reach its goal.

The great purpose for The Austin Stone Community Church, the vision we aspire toward, is to be a New Testament church existing for the supremacy of the

name and purpose of Jesus Christ. Our ultimate desire is for the name of Jesus to be lifted high and for His purposes to be accomplished throughout the world. We believe the best way to pursue this vision is by unifying around this clear mission: **love God, love the church, love the city, love the nations.**

The purpose of this document is to clearly define this mission so that elders, deacons, staff, and partners of The Austin Stone can pursue this mission together with clarity and passion. First, the document explains why the word love is central to this mission. Then the four sections of the mission statement are each fully explained.

Why Love?

THE BIBLE DESCRIBES many actions that a church is to perform. A church is to “go and make disciples” (Matthew 28:19). It is to sing to the Lord together (Ephesians 5:19). It is to have its members encourage each other and build each other up (Hebrews 10:25, Ephesians 4:11-12). It is to care for widows and orphans (James 1:27). These are just a few of the instructions that God has given to His churches in the Bible.

Given all the various commandments that God has given to His church, why has The Austin Stone chosen to focus on the word love in its mission statement? As

we put love central in our mission, we are following the teaching of our Lord. When Jesus is asked what the most important law is, He responds this way:

³⁷ And [Jesus] said to him, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.” ³⁸ This is the great and first commandment. ³⁹ And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. ⁴⁰ On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets.”

(Matthew 22:37-40)

Jesus says that the two most important commandments are to love God and to love others. In addition, He says that all the other commandments “depend upon” these two. Love for God and neighbor are primary and foundational for all the other commandments God gives to His people. They fuel obedience to all the other actions that God calls a church to perform. Paul expresses this same idea in 1 Corinthians 13:

¹ If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. ² And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. ³ If I give away all I have, and if I deliver up my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing.

(1 Corinthians 13:1-3)

Paul states that a person could be a wise, eloquent, faithful teacher of God’s Word and still be “nothing.” A person could be so self-sacrificial as to give away all his possessions, and even his own life, and still be “nothing.” If these actions are not motivated by love, they are as nothing in God’s economy.

The frightening implication for us as a church is that we could be a faithful witness to our community, demonstrating and declaring the gospel of Jesus Christ everywhere we go, and still be “nothing.” We could treasure God’s Word, faithfully teaching sound doctrine on Sundays and in our communities and still be “nothing.” We could lead the city in self-sacrifice to those in need and still be “nothing.” We could send more missionaries to the nations than any other organization and still be “nothing.” If these actions are not sourced in and motivated by love for God and love for others, if they are pursued only for our own sake or our own glory, then they are worthless.

Loving God and loving our neighbor is, therefore, our central mission. As we preach and teach God’s Word, we will love. As we pursue growth in Christ through the spiritual disciplines, we will love. As we care for one another and bear each other’s burdens, we will love. As we share our faith with our coworkers, we will love. As we engage in pursuit of justice for the marginalized in our city, we will love. As we seek to take the gospel where it has never been heard, we will love. We will love God. We will love the church. We will love the city. We will love the nations.

Love God

AS QUOTED ABOVE, Jesus says that the first and great commandment is to love God (Matthew 22:37-38). The first clause of our mission is for us to follow this commandment. We love God out of response to His great love for us. We love God as He is revealed in Scripture as the Father, Son, and

Holy Spirit. And we love God in the way Jesus says we are to love Him in Mark: with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength (Mark 12:30).

We love God because of the gospel.

We love God, because God first loved us. In other words, the God of the universe initiated the relationship with us. The beauty of the gospel is that we do not love God in order to get His love in return. Rather, we love God as a response to His love for us. As shown throughout Scripture and made perfect in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, we have been loved by God; therefore, we are enabled and motivated to love Him in return.

¹⁷ By this is love perfected with us, so that we may have confidence for the day of judgment, because as he is so also are we in this world. ¹⁸ There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear. For fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not been perfected in love. ¹⁹ We love because he first loved us.

(1 John 4:17-19)

Love the Church

AFTER SAYING THAT LOVING GOD is the first and great commandment, Jesus goes on to say that the second commandment is to “love your neighbor as yourself” (Matthew 22:39). In Luke 10, we see a lawyer ask Jesus who, exactly, is meant by the term “neighbor.” In response, Jesus tells the story commonly known as the story of the good Samaritan to show that your neighbor is anyone in need or anyone toward whom you can show love, even those we might call our enemies.

We love the triune God.

God exists eternally in three persons: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. When we say we love God, we are affirming this great truth known as the Trinity. We love all three persons of the Trinity and the distinct roles they play in creation, redemption, and restoration.

We love God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength.

In Mark 12, Jesus commands us to love God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength. We are to love God with all that we are. Our emotions, intellect, and volition are all devoted to the cause of loving God.

In order to help bring clarity to our specific mission at The Austin Stone, we have divided this general term of “neighbor” into three specific areas: the church, the city, and the nations. Our church feels a specific calling toward these groups of people, and our focus on these three targets is part of our unique identity as a church. We will look at these three—the church, the city, and the nations—one at a time.

First, what does it mean to love the church? The church is the family of God consisting of people who have trusted in Jesus Christ for salvation. The term church refers to both a small, localized community of believers (including our own church), as well as the entire, global community of all believers, everywhere, throughout all time.

We love each other as God's family.

Throughout the New Testament, believers are encouraged to view each other as members of one family. For example, in 1 Timothy says, "Do not rebuke an older man but encourage him as you would a father, younger men as brothers, older women as mothers, younger women as sisters, in all purity" (1 Timothy 5:1-2). God has made all believers into one family through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. And as a family, we are expected to love each other in good times and bad, regardless of the circumstances. The many "one another" commandments throughout the New Testament instruct believers on how they are to treat their brothers and sisters in Christ. These commandments direct us on what it looks like to love one another as family, not simply as members of an organization.

We love the local church.

The local church is God's primary agent in His redemption plan for mankind. While God is using all things in creation to move history toward His will, the local church is spotlighted above all others. Paul emphasizes this reality in his letter to the Ephesian church:

⁸ To me, though I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, ⁹ and to bring to light for everyone what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God,

who created all things, ¹⁰ so that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places. ¹¹ This was according to the eternal purpose that he has realized in Christ Jesus our Lord.

(Ephesians 3:8-11)

In addition, when Jesus speaks of the local church, He speaks of a bride. We love the local church, because our Lord Jesus cherishes His bride, and we love what He loves.

We love the global church.

No one local church can complete the mission of God any more than one Christian can complete it. God has called local churches to work together for the good of His churches, the good of our cities, and the good of the nations. The Austin Stone works with a variety of churches and gospel-centered organizations to advance the kingdom and encourage the saints. We happily give of our resources and our people to see Jesus lifted up among all people. This is modeled from the very beginning of the story of God's church:

²⁷ Now in these days prophets came down from Jerusalem to Antioch. ²⁸ And one of them named Agabus stood up and foretold by the Spirit that there would be a great famine over all the world (this took place in the days of Claudius). ²⁹ So the disciples determined, every one according to his ability, to send relief to the brothers living in Judea. ³⁰ And they did so, sending it to the elders by the hand of Barnabas and Saul.

(Acts 11:27-30)

Love the City

THE SECOND CATEGORY of “neighbor” that our church has specifically named in its mission is the city. In Jeremiah 29, we read God’s instruction to His people as He sent them into exile in Babylon. Despite the fact that they were entrenched among their enemies, God instructs them to “seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the LORD on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare” (Jeremiah 29:7). The Hebrew word that is translated into “welfare” is the word *shalom*, which is more literally translated as “universal flourishing.” God is telling His people to seek the good of the people among whom He has placed them.

God has placed The Austin Stone in the city of Austin, Texas. Austin is a great city with much to offer. Many people come to Austin seeking gain for themselves. They come seeking a college degree, or pursuing a business opportunity, or hoping to be a part of the art, music, and film industry here. People come to enjoy “the live music capital of the world” and to eat at our amazing restaurants. While Christians in Austin can and should enjoy all that our great city has to offer, our general approach to this city should be to seek its *shalom*. We should work for the universal flourishing of our city. We are to approach Austin with an eye toward being contributors, not consumers.

The flourishing we desire for Austin is not simply spiritual. We also desire for the city to thrive socially, economically, politically, environmentally, artistically, educationally, and more. We desire to love the city and to see it flourish holistically.

We love the entire city of Austin.

By the providence and kindness of God, He has placed The Austin Stone in the Austin metroplex. We love Austin. We believe it is our specific calling to be a faithful local church in and for the Austin area. And because we desire to make a difference for Christ across our whole city, we have established The Austin Stone as one single church with multiple congregations throughout the Austin metroplex. We believe this is the best way to pursue our vision to minister to the entire city of Austin.

We love the marginalized in our city.

Part of seeking the universal flourishing of Austin is loving the poor and oppressed in our city. We are to seek justice for those who are treated unjustly and to offer aid to those who are unable to help themselves. In the book of Amos, God has harsh words for His people, because they are not dealing justly with the marginalized among them. He says that He will not accept their sacrifices or hear their songs until they “let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream” (Amos 5:24). God clearly expects His people to pursue justice for others.

God also instructs His people to care for those who need assistance. In the days of the early church, widows and orphans were in danger economically, socially, and physically. Men were the providers in that society, and without a husband or father, these individuals had little hope for being able to take care of themselves. God instructs His people to step in

and help these individuals in James 1:27: “Religion that is pure and undefiled before God the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction.”

At The Austin Stone, being on a mission to love the city means that we pursue justice and mercy for the most marginalized and vulnerable people in our city. How do we do that? The For the City Network was founded in 2009 to empower our church partners to engage in ministry to those who are marginalized or being treated unjustly. Through this network, partners at our church can connect with hundreds of opportunities to partner with nonprofits in Austin to seek the welfare of our city.

Love the Nations

THE THIRD AND FINAL category of “neighbor” that our church is on mission to love is the nations. From the calling of Abraham to the gathering of people from every tribe, tongue, and nation around the throne of God in John’s Revelation, God has consistently revealed His heart for all nations throughout the pages of Scripture. We long to see Jesus exalted in the nations and for the earth to be “filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD as the waters cover the sea” (Habakkuk 2:14). To that end, God has given our leadership a specific vision for how our church is to join with Him in loving the nations. The vision of The Austin Stone and the 100 UPG Cooperative is to catalyze a church-planting movement in one hundred unreached people groups.

We love to share the gospel with our city.

While the commission Jesus gives to His church to “go and make disciples of all nations” does mean to take the message of Christ across the globe, it also means to share the good news of Jesus with those across the street (Matthew 28:19). There are many people within our city who are lost, dead in their sins, and in need of salvation (Ephesians 2:1). Our church loves to engage in our neighborhoods and workplaces, prayerfully seeking opportunities to demonstrate and declare the gospel of Jesus to those we encounter.

We love unreached people groups.

An unreached people group is one in which there is no indigenous community of believing Christians who has the resources needed to evangelize this people group. Missiologists agree that a people group is categorized as “unreached” when evangelical Christians make up less than two percent of the population. Our leadership is convicted that sharing the gospel with unreached people groups is a strategic priority to pursue in light of Matthew 24:14: “This gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.” Our church’s focus is to send missionaries to unreached people groups rather than nations that are considered reached.

We love planting churches that plant churches.

Our desire among these unreached people groups is that we would see church planting movements form. Specifically, we desire to see movements where there are multiple occurrences of a church planting a church, that in turn plants another church, and so on. As God forms church-planting movements among unreached people groups, our hope and prayer is that some of the unreached people groups would be taken off the list.

In order to determine the success of our efforts to create church planting movements, we have created five criteria that must be met for a group of believers to be categorized as a church by The Austin Stone:

1. The group consists of two or more people (Matthew 18:15-20).
2. The group regularly gathers as baptized believers in Christ (Matthew 28:18-20).
3. The group gathers for the preaching of Scripture and the worship of Christ (1 Corinthians 14:26).
4. The group gathers for the service of each other and those outside the church (Hebrews 10:24-25, 1 Corinthians 14:24-25).
5. The group administers the ordinances of baptism and the Lord's supper (Matthew 28:17-20, 1 Corinthians 11:23-26).

We love partnering with others to reach the unreached.

The vision to see one hundred church planting movements among unreached people groups is too big for one church to accomplish alone. That is why we have joined with others in the 100 UPG

Cooperative, a multi-layered collaboration between churches, leaders, ministries, and sending agencies around the world.

We love that the mission to the nations will be accomplished.

Whether or not the vision of the 100 UPG Cooperative is fulfilled is up to God. We do not presume that God will lead us to see this vision realized in our lifetimes, or ever. However, we pursue this vision with great confidence that God will accomplish His mission to see people from every tribe, tongue, and nation gathered around His throne. In *Let the Nations Be Glad*, John Piper says that missions only exists because worship does not. God does not yet have all the worship He deserves, for not all of our future brothers and sisters have been saved and have joined us in worshipping God. One day, missions will end, for all of God's people will have been saved. Yet worship will continue on, for all eternity.

Conclusion

OUR MISSION AS A CHURCH is to love God, love the church, love the city, and love the nations. This love will propel us forward in service to our King and to our neighbor. The work of loving God, church, city, and nations will be difficult. It will require sacrifice of time, energy, money, and attention. Each partner at our church will, at some point, be compelled by love to sacrifice much for the sake of Jesus and others in pursuit of our mission. But it will be worth any sacrifice Jesus calls us to give.

As we love God, we will see Him lifted high and gain His rightful glory in our hearts, in our church, in our city, and among the nations.

As we love our church, we will see our partners and attenders grow in grace. We will see our children and students disciplined and shepherded in truth. We will see physical, spiritual, and emotional needs of our body met. We will see spiritual gifts identified and deployed. We will see repentance of sin and embracing of Jesus.

As we love our city, we will see businesses, non-profits, neighborhoods, and schools transformed for the glory of God. We will see the orphan, the homeless, the impoverished, and other marginalized Austinites cared for. We will see justice and mercy unfold across our city.

And as we love the nations, we will see the gospel shared where it has never been shared before. We will see new believers, new brothers and sisters in Christ. We will see new churches planted and see those churches plant new churches. We will see the unreached become reached for our King.

How will we persevere in this mission, even when it gets hard? We will look to Jesus. It was not nails that kept Jesus on the cross; it was love—love for His Father and for us. Both His love for us and our love for Him and others will sustain us.