

Covenant Partner Sunday 2022 –

(This message forms the first part of the Ministry report to the AGM; 25th September 2022)

Good morning, every one of you in the room and to all of our wonderful online community. Today is the Sunday each year that we refer to as Covenant Partner Sunday. Covenant Partnership is how we do church membership, but we describe it as a relationship and commitment to a mission lifestyle that passionately pursues Christ's cause, with a focus on encouraging each other to play our part in the effort - rather than just ticking off some legal and fiduciary boxes that give people a chance to win some promotable give-aways or the right to vote on things that they mightn't even be committed to, and so on.

We coincide this Sunday each year with our church's Annual General Meeting not just to try and make it more palatable and digestible, but to intentionally align our core business with the mission God has called us to, so that it doesn't get lost in the maintenance stuff, ensuring that the core business we are on about is actually driving a mission effort we believe in TOGETHER.

This day on the annual calendar, gives us a chance to talk about what the scriptures say is needed to support such a mission and to give people connected with us, a fresh glimpse of what we are passionate about, and how we, and they, might engage with each other, whilst playing our unique part towards seeing the vision become a reality. We want to be able to say in one voice as the apostle Paul also did when dragged before King Agrippa to declare his case in Acts 26, 'we have not been disobedient to the vision we received from heaven.'

Now, I COULD preach the exact same message I shared with you 11 months ago BUT that's not because we haven't done anything this past year, it's because a vision like this takes time to move from an impossible wish list, to something more tangible, and then even more time to be something that people believe can really happen, and then even more time to start happening.

We trust God with His timing for all of this and continue to take steps towards what He needs from us as we prepare. If this transition from dream to action is to occur, I also have to play my part. I have to, and need to spend most of my time articulating a vision that people can catch and pass on. Under the Spirit's guidance and with His discernment I need to set and keep setting, adjust, and

keep adjusting, the framework that's needed to give meaning to what we believe we are to do IN Christ so that Jesus can build His church.

Of course, in the journey to this point, God has raised up a growing bunch of wonderful people whom He is revealing the heart of the vision to, and they have begun listening to the Holy Spirit and inputting into the framework, but that's also a process that needs monitoring, shepherding and time.

Now, I accept that there may be some hesitancy going forward, and I get that, particularly if the hesitancy is based upon previous attempts as churches, to grow and have impact for the gospel and that having not worked so well. This is why we need a whole of church 'fullness of Christ' approach and not just rely on a handful of Gung Ho peeps who will try and invite or attract enough people to get an early church like, community transformation outcome.

A 'fullness of Christ' approach to reaching a generation of lost souls with the kingdom gospel, requires all of us, bringing even the little we have, encouraging and sharpening each other for the task, looking out with the Holy Spirit's eyes, for the anointing on that person sitting next to you, and making a practical commitment to help equip them for all THEY have been called by God to be and do.

So that, the prayer warriors are equipped and released to pray, so that the hosts and welcomers are equipped and released to create an atmosphere of acceptance and belonging in all the venues where the church gathers, so that the people-persons can have their pastoral gifts and skills sharpened for greater and more consistent care across the frontline of the battle for souls, so that those whom God gives wisdom and insight into the redemptive plan as depicted in His word, are equipped and released to mentor and teach those lost souls who will mentor, disciple and teach others, so that the prophets and apostles can be found, equipped and released to carve out strategic pathways and plough new fields for sowing and reaping the harvest – all the while, everyone playing their part to the full, so everyone else can play THEIR part to the full.

Fullness In Christ is the whole body of Christ being equipped with the whole of Christ's essence, character, calling and ministry gifts to the end that we as ONE, declare, represent and demonstrate (as Christ did), the kingdom of heaven ON the earth, that the lost may be found, that the broken be made

whole, that human hearts be redeemed and reconciled to the Father, and that God's kingdom rule of love, be restored to all of creation.

It's covenant partner Sunday, and as much as we need those of you who would like to partner with us for this purpose to sign a document or two (see Heather afterwards if you have Q's about this), so that we continue to operate in compliance with the codes of conduct that we would all agree that God should require of His servants working in this damaged world, what I want to continue doing today, is to present WHY I believe that covenant partners IN Christ, can look and act like Elijah and Elisha, Paul and Timothy (reflect)

Last week we started to explore that Fullness IN Christ is the key to completing God's primary purpose task on the earth. We proposed that equipping the saints for service is the core to Fullness and that equipping is not optional if we are going to see the church, any church, progress towards the goal of completion. So, in practical terms, how does the 'Fullness IS equipping theology of Ephesians 4, get applied by followers of Jesus in the life and work of the early church. And so, we started a deep dive into how the apostle Paul and the early church community, equipped and prepared each other, with particular reference to the example of Timothy.

We determined that in the equipping ministry of the early church there were personal issues AND corporate or body collective issues that individual followers of Jesus had to address TOGETHER in order to prepare for a church build, that looked more and more like Jesus; a church that equipped as Jesus DID. We then started seeking fresh revelation about how this looks in practice for us, as Covenant Partners with God, with each other and with the harvest task. I started working through 7 Personal issues I've identified (so far) from Paul's writings to Timothy, and we'll keep going today, stop when we need to, and just continue when we establish some equipping workshops shortly.

So, Covenant Partnership is about being fellow workers IN Christ, committed to equipping OTHERS to be FILLED to the brim WITH Christ, so that all those God asks us to live, work and play with, will get a revelation of who the Christ, the Messiah IS, resulting in Jesus doing the adding, Jesus doing the multiplying, reproducing ... Listen then to the apostle Paul

(2 Tim:1) Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, in keeping with the promise of life that is in Christ Jesus, ² To Timothy, my dear son: Grace, mercy and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord. ³ I thank God, whom I

serve, as my ancestors did, with a clear conscience, as night and day I constantly remember you in my prayers. ⁴ *Recalling your tears, I long to see you, so that I may be filled with joy.*

Alright, remembering that this passage is Paul's practical application of His Fullness theology – a covenant partner's first personal responsibility in playing their part in this equipping ministry is ...

1. Constant Prayer and not just constant prayer but constant prayer which flows out of God's call and is drenched in longing. This sort of prayer for each other and the whole exercise of the mission, resolves every challenge in the presence of God so we can be filled and led by Holy Spirit power. It's how intimacy becomes heaven's resource for us.

It deals with ALL the unacceptable alternatives like relying on personal ability, character, personality, tribal strength (you know, people we like and who are like us etc) and doing a lot of talking and not praying. Constant Prayer, constant presence of Jesus (constant grace)

⁵ *I am reminded of your sincere faith, which first lived in your grandmother Lois and in your mother Eunice and, I am persuaded, now lives in you also*

A covenant partner's 2nd personal responsibility in playing their part in an equipping ministry like what we are seeking after here at CCC, is

2. A Sincere, attestable, accountable Faith. *Not just acts of faith, not the gift of faith, but an open, transparent lifestyle faith, that embraces challenge with a confidence that comes from God & not from humans, a faith that is shared throughout and passed on by the whole community (in Tim's case his Mum Eunice & Granny Lois) But accountable community isn't Mum and Granny in EVERY case. It wasn't in my case. I had to find a sincere, transparent faith in the community that I could trust, a faith that had integrity. My faith community didn't come from my immediate family or grandparents or friends I had at school. (I was part of the generation that was Sent to Sunday School because it was the right thing to do – socially, morally)*

As you now know well, I didn't come from a Christian family background, (no Christians 6 generations either family tree – moral unbelievers) so when I was asked recently, in preparation for the Keith Green Tribute, if I could pinpoint a time when I believed I was being called by God to step up into something that only God could instigate and make happen, I said that this sense of calling had grown steadily over a few years but the seeds were probably sown when a man called Eddie believed he saw the gift of leadership on me at the time he

and other leaders were conducting our Anglican confirmation group when I was 14 y/o.

He and the others helped me establish a drop-in centre up on the highway in Corrimal just prior to this, during a time when I was trying to stay away from home life as much as possible. During confirmation, Eddie convinced the other leaders to take us to see the 'Cross and the Switchblade' movie when it was first shown in Wollongong and I remember when I read the book Eddie presented to me that night, one of the books the movie was based on, I started to see visions about opportunities and dreamed never before imagined possibilities about how to share the truth of God's kingdom.

I wanted that and I was desperate to represent that to my peers. So, I set out to devote myself to this (much to many people's concerns around me who believed I'd been abducted and messed with by aliens). Let me testify to this. I didn't just have this sort of faith, I had to go after it. I had to seek more of God. I had to put myself out there, and it was costly at times over the ensuing years.

A covenant partner's 3rd personal responsibility in playing their part in this equipping ministry IS ... (from vs 6) *⁶For this reason I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands. ⁷For the Spirit God gave us does not make us timid, but gives us power, love and self-discipline.*

3. Stirring up the Calling & Anointing – Backing the gift of God: God has called us to do things and has made available everything we need in order to glorify him as we get the job done on the basis of that calling (at last year's solemn assembly and company commissioning, we COMMITTED ourselves to looking for the anointing in others and working for those others to reach their full potential) This is our JOY. If we are to become God's church that sees community, and even nations' transformation, we will need to experience joy as OTHERS are empowered and released (**that's humbling**)

So, like Constant Prayer and Sincere Faith, fanning anointing's flame is ONLY appropriate in the constant presence of God AND community, because this is the theatre within which the Spirit works, and all things can be (a)tested. Paul goes on to say that this humbling joy we have for finding and exhorting the best in each other, isn't timid, it's not bashful or ashamed and so he goes on to say in verse 8 ..

⁸ So do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord or of me his prisoner. Rather, join with me in suffering for the gospel, by the power of God. ⁹ He has saved us and called us to a holy life—not because of anything we have done but because of his own purpose and grace. This grace was given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time, ¹⁰ but it has now been revealed through the appearing of our Saviour, Christ Jesus, who has destroyed death and has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel. ¹¹ And of this gospel I was appointed a herald and an apostle and a teacher. ¹² That is why I am suffering as I am. Yet this is no cause for shame, because I know whom I have believe-ed, and am convinced that he is able to guard what I have entrusted to him until that day.

So .. A covenant partner's 4th personal responsibility in playing their part in this equipping ministry IS ... **4. Holding the Line through Voluntary Submission to one another.** That's the helpful tool. In this section of the passage, Paul is identifying that there are always things that will threaten and challenge anything that God wants to do.

Those threats come from both the darkness that is inside us, as well as from the darkness that comes through other people and from the circumstances of life. According to Paul we will be able to hold the line if we:

- **Continue** to declare and live a bold testimony in all that we know God wants, and never qualify it, compromise it or rationalize it whether it is cloaked with suffering OR not ... he says we will be able to hold the line if we
- **Continue** to depend on God's grace and not our ability ... we will be able to hold the line if we
- **Continue** to keep representing the gospel of the kingdom as the primary business on the personal AND corporate agenda ... and ... we will be able to hold the line if we
- **Continue** to keep growing in intimacy with God – depending on the fellowship and presence of God and what **He reveals**, which is a great segue into where we'll finish today (the end of 2 Tim 1) ... the covenant partner's 5th personal responsibility in playing their part in this equipping ministry God has called us to

¹³ What you heard from me, keep as the pattern of sound teaching, with faith and love in Christ Jesus. ¹⁴ Guard the good deposit that was entrusted to you—guard it with the help of the Holy Spirit who lives in us. ¹⁵ You know that everyone in the province of Asia has deserted me, including Phygelus and Hermogenes. ¹⁶ May the Lord show mercy to the household of Onesiphorus, because he often refreshed me and was not ashamed of my chains. ¹⁷ On the

*contrary, when he was in Rome, he searched hard for me until he found me.
18 May the Lord grant that he will find mercy from the Lord on that day! You know very well in how many ways he helped me in Ephesus.*

5. Holding the line of revealed truth Here's something I wrote in my journal about this .. (it might have come from my mentor Brian or from a conversation we had)

Often people think that just reading their favourite bits of the Bible every day is the way to keep embedded in the truth. It is just not so. We need to fill ourselves with all that God has said and go after truth every time we don't have it & even when .. we think we have it. We need to read the Bible to get hold of all that God has said, not just the bits that we find easy to embrace. The Bible is there because we need it. If we don't read it because we need it like the air we breathe and the food we eat; we will simply keep living by reason, and not by revelation.

OK, well, there is a bunch more to talk about. But I'm stopping, coz, in my most recent couple of HOPE devotions, I have discussed that it would be easy to become overwhelmed about all of this, the lifestyle changes that's needed, the sacrifice and effort to be faithful and obedient.

What I believe the Holy Spirit is trying to get across to us is that ALL He requires, is for us to acknowledge what's needed for this mission to be possible, orientate ourselves towards that goal together, accept that we can't do any of this without Jesus BUT (pause) then to actually step in faith towards what's required so Jesus can build His church on a bunch of faithful, obedient people who are living out their lives, committed to the revelation we've received from heaven about who Jesus is.

So We'll keep seeking first the kingdom of heaven AND his righteousness as He wants from us, and today's list of personal covenant partner responsibilities could more likely sound something like this.

A desire and commitment to take small achievable steps towards being in Constant prayer for each other, longing to see each other succeed in the calling God has given us – and trusting God to do something with that desire and commitment even when it waivers and falters. Covenant Partners of this church will, with the help of God and us, cultivate a sincere and accountable faith, to encourage a culture that stirs up the calling and anointing on others when they see it, Covenant Partner's will, with complete submission to the

Holy Spirit, hold fast to the idea that voluntary submission to each other is one of the best ways to ensure that threats of ego, or control or abuse of power won't be able to overcome us, AND they will, with the help of Christ, lay hold to revealed truth as the only safe way to be assured that we are IN the will of God.

We are in this together, and we need to step up our game together, and be less timid when Christ is adamant that we'll never be good enough to achieve this in our own strength anyway. Accepting this we can pro-actively seek to urge each other onward and upward with all humility and selflessness. This is covenant partnership ... it's still a big ask but its eminently do-able. It's how Elisha stuck to Elijah and it's how Timothy stuck to Paul and both for the sake of advancing God's primary, redemptive purpose for OTHER human hearts.

This is the first part of my 2022 ministry report to AGM
I'm in How and who will you stick to as we trust God together for this journey?