

Steve Jobs was one of the greatest CEOs of our time. Jeremy Statton wrote in his blog "He led two different companies, one on the verge of bankruptcy, to become two of the most valuable and most creative organizations that we have seen. How did he do this? *Steve Jobs had vision*. Jobs himself lacked the knowledge and skill to engineer such a feat. But *he had something better, a clear vision* of what the computer could be. The vision of what it is today." And so he used this vision of what he imagined a computer could be to drive Apple to produce the Macintosh and then the iPod and then the iTunes store and the iPad and the iPhone, along the way making Apple the most valuable company in the world today.

So what does this tell us about BCF? What should our vision as a church be? Our topic today is "God's Vision for His Church" First question is "What is the church?"

Is it a building?

Many people think so, and say things like "our church needs a new furnace" or "You have a lovely stained glass window in your church" But this is not the meaning of the word in the Bible. The word translated as "church" in the New Testament is *ekklesia*, which literally means the "called out ones". So the church refers to people, not to a building. So when Peter was in prison it was a group of people praying for him, not a building.

Acts 12:5

So Peter was kept in prison, but the church was earnestly praying to God for him.

When Paul and Barnabas were sent out by the church at Antioch, it was the people who prayed and sent them out.

Acts 13:1-3

In the church at Antioch there were prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen (who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch) and Saul. While they were worshipping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off.

So when you see the word "church" in the Bible, it refers to people, not buildings.

It is these people

And these

And these

And you; if you are a believer, then you are a part of the church of Jesus Christ here at BCF in Blacksburg, Virginia. You, collectively, are the church!

Let me comment here on that phrase I just used "if you are a believer." Most of you this morning have already committed your lives to Jesus Christ as you Lord and Savior, but there are probably some of you that are thinking "that does not apply to me; I do not believe that Jesus is my Lord and Savior". Let me just say that we are delighted that you are here, but that what I am sharing this morning may not make a lot of sense to you. This message is intended for Christians, but I hope that it will help you to understand a little bit of what true Christianity is all about .

So how does the NT define the church, beyond a group of people? There are several images used in the NT; the church as the family of God, as the Bride of Christ, as a Priesthood of Believers, as God's Vineyard, as God's Field, as God's Flock, as the Temple of God, and as the **Body of Christ**. Today I want to look at just one of

these images, the last one; the church as the Body of Christ. It is an image used frequently, especially by Paul, and it is often tied to a description of the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

Eph 4:11-16

It was he (Jesus) who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up 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.

Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming. Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ. From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.
NIV

Prayer

So what is Paul, speaking under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, saying here? What is God's vision for His church? There is too much to cover in one short sermon, so let me focus in on just one aspect: **growth through service**.

- v. 12 to prepare God's people for works of **service**, so that the body of Christ may be **built up**
- v. 15 we will in all things **grow up** into him who is the Head, that is, Christ.
- v. 16 From him the whole body... **grows and builds itself up** in love, as each part does its work.

In a nutshell, it is God's desire that His church should grow, first of all in love and in spiritual maturity, and then in numbers, as believers serve God so that others come to faith in Jesus Christ and commit their lives to Him.

It is this understanding of God's desire for His church, together with other scriptures, that prompted the elders of BCF to craft a vision statement for the church:

"We seek to be a fellowship of **ministers, growing** in the Lord Jesus Christ, **sharing** God's love and the joy of knowing Him with the world." This can be summarized by saying that we as a church need to be:

- Serving
- Growing
- Sharing

So today I want to try to unpack this statement to help us as a church put it into practice.

Last week Sandy spoke on Acts 2:42, which described the early church:

They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer

He pointed out that the early church members were devoted to three things:

1. To the apostles' teaching: they loved God's word.
2. To fellowship: they loved God's people.
3. To worship: they loved God.

These aspects of church life cover what we can describe as the inward aspects of the Christian life; loving God's word, loving God's people, and loving God. It summarizes the second part of the BCF vision statement: Growing in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Because Sandy spoke on this aspect of the BCF vision last week, I will not discuss it today, and simply refer you to SermonAudio if you missed his message.

The remaining portions of BCF Vision statement relate to what we can call the external aspects of the Christian life, and answer some basic questions:

1. Why do we seek to be a fellowship of ministers? The why of service.
2. How can we minister? The how of service
 - a. Within the church, sharing God's love with our fellow Christians
 - b. Outside the body, sharing God's love with the world
3. The results of service.
4. The blessings of service.

1. Why do we seek to be a fellowship of ministers? The why of service

First of all, what is a minister? Very simply, it is another word for servant. So our aim as a church is not exactly something that will draw people who see the church as a social club or as a place to win friends and influence people. Not many people start out by saying "my aim in life is to be a servant" or "it is my goal to see how many people I can serve today."

So why is this call to become servants in our vision statement? Why are we called to be ministers? Because it is in Scripture. The New Testament makes it clear that all believers are called to ministry and to service. Let us look at a few:

We are called to serve because we are followers of our Lord Jesus, who served and who gave His life that we might have life

Matt 20:25-28

Jesus called them together and said, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave— just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve , and to give his life as a ransom for many."

Jesus Christ is our model and our example of service. He came to earth as a baby, as we remember at this Christmas season, not to live a life of ease but to show us how to live for God and then to give his life for us on the cross. And we who are called by his name need to follow his example.

It is also in our vision statement because it is part of the DNA of BCF. When this church was founded over 40 years ago, it was led by a group of 5 men called elders, most of whom were VT faculty members. All of them gave their time voluntarily to the ministry, and the Lord blessed the church and it grew as both students and townspeople were attracted to the biblical teaching. But because there were no paid staff, everyone realized that the elders could not do all the ministry, and so many BCF members began to serve in areas such as Sunday School teaching, leading House Groups, Pioneer Girls, Christian Service Brigade, treasurer, music ministry, etc. And the Lord continued to bless the church, and it moved from rented facilities in downtown Blacksburg to the present building. And the Lord continued to bless the church, and the elders realized that they needed more help, and first Sandy and then Chris joined the team as full-time elders. But all of this was possible only because the Lord has blessed BCF with men and women with servant hearts, who willingly serve the Lord and the church in many different ways. Ministries which would be done by paid staff in many churches, such as SS

Superintendent or High School leader, are done in BCF by volunteers with servant hearts. And so BCF is a church with hundreds of ministers; only the Lord knows how many, but well over 200 men and women serve within the church while dozens more serve in ministries outside the church.

Let me add a sidebar here, to say how profoundly grateful the elders are to all who serve so well and so faithfully. This church could not function without your help, from the children's ministries of Sunday School and Christian Service Brigade and Pioneer Girls to money counters and money managers to deacons who come at all hours to fix stuff, to people who work with high school kids, lead house groups, serve on the missions committee, work with graphics and publications, minister to international students, run the sound system, lead worship, reach out to mothers of preschoolers, serve in the library...the list goes on and on. Your real reward will come when you stand before the Lord and He says "well done, good and faithful servant" but until then I want you to know that the church depends greatly on your ministries, and the elders are well aware of this and give thanks to God for you and your ministries.

2. How can we be a fellowship of ministers? The how of service

We are able to serve in different ways because God the Holy Spirit equips us with the varied spiritual gifts we need to serve.

God has given us different gifts, but we all have at least one spiritual gift. These are given us to use, not to adorn ourselves with, but to use for the kingdom of God

Rom 12:4-8

Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. We have different gifts, according to the grace given us. If a man's gift is prophesying, let him use it in proportion to his faith. If it is serving, let him serve; if it is teaching, let him teach; if it is encouraging, let him encourage; if it is contributing to the needs of others, let him give generously; if it is leadership, let him govern diligently; if it is showing mercy, let him do it cheerfully.

Eph 4:11-16

It was he (Jesus) who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up 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.

So not only do we have Jesus' example to follow, we also have his power and his gifts through the Holy Spirit

We can serve because we are all priests

Peter 2:9-10

But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

This scripture teaches us that there are no second class citizens in God's church; we are all priests, and so we all have access to God through Jesus Christ. So we must not and cannot excuse ourselves from ministry because we do not happen to have an ordination certificate or some other document that authorizes us to serve; we have the only certification we need, which is our confession that Jesus Christ is Lord.

3. Where can we minister? The where of service

a. Within the church, sharing God's love with our fellow Christians.

As I have just shared, this church could not function without the willing and dedicated ministry of hundreds of willing servants. Men and women give their time and their energy to serve in the ministries I have just mentioned, and many more. And please here me when I say that some of the most important ministries are those that are the least “glamorous”. Paul talks about this in his letter to the church at Corinth:

1 Cor 12:21-24

The eye cannot say to the hand, "I don't need you!" And the head cannot say to the feet, "I don't need you!" On the contrary, those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and the parts that we think are less honorable we treat with special honor. And the parts that are unpresentable are treated with special modesty, while our presentable parts need no special treatment.

So the bottom line is that we need each other, and that no ministry, no act of service is unimportant. God in His grace and love uses all the different parts of His body, the church, to work together. The ministry of being an elder may seem to be important, even glamorous, but in God’s sight it is no more important than caring for children in the nursery or counting the offering. We are all part of the same church body, and we all need each other.

But let me also mention that our children are a particular focus of concern. The church is only one generation away from disaster; if our children do not grow up to love and serve the Lord the church in America will be useless 30 years from now. So we particularly appreciate those among us who serve in the nursery, the children’s SS, or in Christian Service Brigade and Pioneer Girls. These ministries are having an impact in our children’s lives, and I for one am deeply grateful to all who serve in them.

I am also deeply grateful to those among us who work hard in prayer for the church. Some of you are prayer warriors whose prayer lives put mine to shame; please do not stop praying for BCF!

b. Outside the church, sharing God’s love with the world.

But our ministry should not just be within the church. Yes, God does call some and equip them to serve within the church, but He calls others to serve outside the church. This ministry should show God’s love by helping to meet the very real needs of people

1 John 3:16-19

This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers. If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him? Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth.

as well as by sharing the good news about Jesus:

Matt 28:18-20

Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 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."

Sadly, the church in the first half of the last century divided over whether to emphasize meeting people’s physical needs or whether to preach the good news about Jesus. But the plain fact of God’s word is that it is not an either/or proposition; it is a both/and proposition. We cannot and must not ignore the suffering of the widows, the orphans, and the strangers among us, but neither can we fail to share the gospel with those around us. In particular, we are called to minister to the people God has put in our lives; our neighbors, our room mates, our workplace friends, etc.

So in summary, each and every believer who makes BCF his or her home church is called to be a minister, or servant either in the church, or in the world outside the church. The vision for BCF is thus that everyone has both the calling from God and the gifting of God to serve the body of Christ in some way.

4. The results of service.

As we minister and serve one another, two things happen.

- a. We experience God's pleasure and ultimately His reward

John 12:26 If anyone serves me, he must follow me; and where I am, there will my servant be also. If anyone serves me, the Father will honor him.

- b. God is glorified and His church is blessed and His kingdom grows.

Eph 4:15-16

Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ. From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.

God's church will grow in love to each other and in love to the world, and that is a powerful message that will attract people to Christ.

Please note that serving is not always easy and pleasurable. Yes, God does give us times of joy as we see Him using our service to bring blessing to others, but there are times when the serving is hard and inconvenient and involves the sacrifice of time and comfort. But as we serve others, God will bless us with His grace and love, enabling us to serve with joy. And when we serve in the area of our giftedness, we will find that his yoke is burden is easy and the burden is light. (Matthew 11:30)

Matt 11:28-30

"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."

5. The Challenge to service

If you are a believer in Jesus, you are his servant. How are you expressing that relationship? Are you serving His body in some way?

God's vision for BCF, as for all churches, is that we continue to love Him and serve Him. We began by looking at the Ephesian church in Paul's letter, probably written about AD 62.

But about 30 years later, Jesus sends this message to the church at Ephesus through the apostle John:

Rev 2:4-5

Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken your first love. Remember the height from which you have fallen! Repent and do the things you did at first.

We must remember what God has done for us and never lose our vision to love and serve Him.

As a way of recommitting ourselves to God, we will sing Hymn "Be Thou my vision"