

01/09/11

## Why are We Here, Where are We Going, and How Do You Fit In?

- If you've been at our church for any period of time, you know the title of today's message...because we always begin the year with a discussion like this...
  - **Why Are We Here, Where Are We Going, And How Do You Fit In?...**
- now please don't think, that must be because Pastor Viars has been busy over the holidays and didn't want to prepare a message for today, so he just pulled something out of the files from a previous year...
- no, while the overall mission stays the same, the specific ways we hope to accomplish the mission changes rather dramatically from year to year...
  - so this is really a discussion about what we believe the Lord wants us to accomplish together this year as a church family...

### Introduction

- let's start with the big picture...I hope right now that I could point to any member of our church and ask you to stand to your feet right now and recite our mission statement, that you would be able to do so with no problem whatsoever...
- is that true of you?...
  - **The mission of Faith Baptist Church is to glorify God by winning people to Jesus Christ and equipping them to be more faithful disciples.**
    - we're not going to take a lot of time to do it this morning, but I hope that you would be able to connect the key themes in that statement to specific passages and concepts from the word of God...
    - for example – the doxological purpose of man – that's a fancy way of saying that we exist to bring glory to God...to worship and honor Him as a way of life...
    - **Westminster Shorter Catechism – The chief aim of man is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever.**
    - there's a great discussion of that concept, by the way, in the early part of John Piper's classic work, *Desiring God*...
    - but if we're about anything around here, it's promoting, and teaching, and modeling an approach to life as individuals and as a church family that honors God, that brings Him glory, that gives others a better understanding of who he is and what He is like...
    - so passages like 2 Peter 3:18 come flying into our minds... **2 Peter 3:18 - but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him be the glory, both now and to the day of eternity. Amen.**
    - **Jude 24-25 - Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, and to make you stand in the presence of His glory blameless with great joy, to the only God our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen.**
- so the doxological purpose of man (from doxa – glory) is central to why we're here for sure...
- our mission statement goes on to explain the two chief ways we believe God has called upon His children to accomplish this purpose...winning and equipping...
- outreach and discipleship...
- you can be sure that any time we are talking about what we are trying to do, it won't be long until we're discussing either outreach or discipleship...
- and that too is tied specifically to God's Word...

- verses like Matthew 28:19-20 – the great commission, or Acts 1:8 – the passage that speaks about us being witnesses for Christ after the Holy Spirit has come...
- I mentioned 2 Cor. 5:20 last week, which described us as ambassadors for Christ...do you remember that verse?...2 Corinthians 5:20 - Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were making an appeal through us; we beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.
- what a crucial aspect of our identity as believers and as a church...if we're not planning to invest significant resources into that, whether it be as individuals, as a church, here in our community and around the world through our great missionary family...
  - if we're not doing that, what are we doing?...
- and there is a very important biblical sense in which we are trying to win people to Christ...Paul said it this way to the Corinthians... **1 Corinthians 9:19-23 - For though I am free from all *men*, I have made myself a slave to all, so that I may win more. To the Jews I became as a Jew, so that I might win Jews; to those who are under the Law, as under the Law though not being myself under the Law, so that I might win those who are under the Law; to those who are without law, as without law, though not being without the law of God but under the law of Christ, so that I might win those who are without law. To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak; I have become all things to all men, so that I may by all means save some. I do all things for the sake of the gospel, so that I may become a fellow partaker of it.**
- it kind of seems like Paul was pretty fired up about winning people to Christ, wouldn't you say?...so would it surprise anyone here that you are about to hear about some initiatives regarding outreach...not just from the perspective of what we believe God wants us to do...but with a passionate invitation for you to think specifically about how God may want you to be part of that...
- but it doesn't stop there...outreach is ineffective unless we have also thought carefully about equipping...about training...about helping men and women become more and more of what God wants them to be like progressively over time in practical areas of everyday life...
  - that's what it means to be an equipping church...
- **Ephesians 4:11-12 - And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ;**
- so this mission statement is really important -- **The mission of Faith Baptist Church is to glorify God by winning people to Jesus Christ and equipping them to be more faithful disciples.**
- **now, let's just stop for a minute and make two comments about this...**
  - 1. Aren't you thankful for a God who tells us exactly why we exist and then makes the resources available in Christ to accomplish that purpose?**
- but here's the other piece...God has given us the general mission...He has given us a truth filled book....He has given us incredible resources...and then He trusts us to use our own God-given intellect and creativity to determine exactly how we ought to accomplish that mission in any given year...
- that's one of the things we ought to love about new year....a fresh slate to do whatever we believe God wants us to do...
  - all of it tethered very tightly, and very carefully, and very thoughtfully to the mission...
- another way of saying all of this is – we seek to be a mission driven church...

- there are all sorts of things we could do as a group of individuals that we simply won't do because it doesn't fit with the mission...
- conversely, there are some things we do tirelessly...because it does fit in with the mission...
- now, let invite you to do two things...please open your Bible to Ephesians chapter 3 [page 152 of the back section of the Bible under the chair in front of you...]...and please also reach into your bulletin and pull out the 2011 strategic initiatives handout...we'll be going back and forth between those two documents this morning...
- now, if you say – well, how do we arrive at our initiatives...I understand the “why are we here?” piece, but who decides the “where are we going” in any given year piece?...
- that's an important question...and it's a very careful process...
- we are congregationally governed here...
  - and so every 5 years, we go through a strategic planning process that is congregationally driven and actually has to be approved by our church family...
    - so we look at our strengths, weakness, threats, opportunities...
    - we brainstorm hundreds and hundreds of different ways we could possibly serve God in that upcoming five year period of time...
    - and then we start boiling that down to a more manageable number – in this case, 109 strategic initiatives spread out over a 5 year period of time...
    - we are moving into the third year of our current plan [**show pic of doc**]...and if you have never seen this document, or reviewed it recently, I would encourage you to do so because it will help you understand us as well as anything...
- now you might say – well, is that one of those documents that someone put together a few years ago but no one follows today?...not at all...
- I have a framed copy of this document on my wall on purpose...I see it every day...
- we could tell you specifically which staff member and/or layperson was ultimately responsible for each initiative last year...we can do the same for this year---those assignments have already been made...
- our staff could tell you that each quarter they are required to update the rest of the team on the status of that initiative...so there is built in accountability...
- by the way, I would also encourage you to do this same kind of planning as an individual, as a family...and certainly for the specific ministry division you may be a part of here...
- the other issue is what our annual theme is going to be, along with a few extra initiatives we may add as bonuses as the various years progress...those come primarily from our pastors, professional staff members, and deacons...
- in order to understand the point of this year's theme...let me invite you to look carefully at Ephesians 3:14-21 – **Read...**
- in the center of that text is a verse I'd also like you to see this am from the NIV... **Ephesians 3:18-19 - ...may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.**
- that phrase “together with all the saints”...is what I'd like to ask you to especially focus on...
- think about all the other great concepts that are discussed in this text...and please consider this question...how important is being well connected to a church family to the accomplishment of all the other great ideas in this passage?...

- or, was the Christian life designed to live independently, or in community with a group of men and women with whom you can lock arms and grow together?...
- or still another way to think about it – if you took the “together with all the saints” out of this passage, how much have you lost?...
- and here’s the answer – a lot...you may have noticed that verse 14 began with the words “for this reason” which always causes us logically to go backwards in the text...
- and if you look all the way back at chapter 3, verse 1, it begins with the words...for this reason...so obviously this is one long discussion...
- but here’s the summary...here’s the reason...Paul is talking about our union with Christ...how we were born dead in trespasses and sins and through repenting of our sin and trusting Christ as Lord and Savior, we are given a new identity as forgiven children of God...
- and while that is an individual decision, when it is made it automatically places you into a brand new family...that’s why we read this great verse... **Ephesians 2:19 - So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God’s household,**
- God is drawing men and women together into a family, a redeemed household, a community of people who love Him and who love one another...
- please notice the construction project metaphor in the rest of the chapter... **Ephesians 2:20-22 - having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner stone, in whom the whole building, being fitted together, is growing into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit.**
- in this world where sin drives us apart and creates war and division at every conceivable level...God is glorifying Himself by bringing a group of people...together...
- that’s such a powerful word...
- the early verses in chapter 3 explain that God is crossing ethnic lines and boundaries to especially demonstrate His power....Jews and Gentiles are being brought together in the church...
- and then when Paul ends with a great prayer of all the marvelous effects of knowing Christ in a Christian’s life...he makes sure to emphasize in the very center of the passage...you do this... **Ephesians 3:18-19 - ...together with all the saints,**
- That’s why the theme we’ve chosen this year is **Living Life Together...**
- let’s take a few more minutes and set this in its context in Ephesians and then we’ll launch off into some specific planning initiatives...

## I. The Centrality of Living Life Together

- what can we learn from these verses we just read?...

### A. Even the possibility should cause us to bow in adoration of Christ.

- **Ephesians 3:14 - For this reason I bow my knees before the Father...**
- what reason?...union and Christ and union with one another...
- Paul can’t get over the fact that God is powerful enough to bring diverse people together in a unified family...
- and that theme will continue to be prevalent on into chapter 4, where we read... **Ephesians 4:1-3 – Therefore I, the prisoner of the Lord, implore you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing tolerance for one another in love, being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.**

- whenever that can happen with a group of human beings for an extended period of time...a miracle has just occurred...
- we should adore Christ for the possibility of living life together...
- Kris and I were at an event the other evening with a group of people from our church, and this happens repeatedly...where I walked away thinking...that was just pleasant...what a wonderful thing to be able to have a great time with people...didn't have to have booze, didn't have to be doing something wrong, just sweet fellowship because of our common bond in Christ...that's living life together...
- that's the point of verse 15 -- **Ephesians 3:15 - from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name,...why?**

#### **B. So that we can learn about the power of Christ and His Spirit together.**

- **Ephesians 3:16 - that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man,**
- you who?...you as an individual?...you apart from the family?...you as an island unto yourself with no friendships or relationships with other people of God?...
- of course not...that would deny the entire context we've taken the time to review...
- when a group of God's people learn what it means to live life together, they can experience things about the power of God that cannot be experienced any other way...
- cf. Drew's test this week – Kris put it out on FB asking for prayer – bam, there were dozens of people praying...
  - sure, we could have faced that as a family...and perhaps experienced God's power in certain ways and certain levels...but there is something about living life together that helps you understand God's power in an entirely different way...

#### **C. So that we can give careful attention to our hearts together.**

- **Ephesians 3:16-17 - ...strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith...**
- our hearts are deceitful and desperately wicked Scripture says...
- one of the best ways to really learn what is happening in your heart is to live life together...
- **Paul Tripp – People and situations do not determine our behavior; they provide the occasion where our behavior reveals our heart.**
- the more you live in authentic community—especially when it's with people who are different than you in all sorts of ways, the more likely it is that you are going to be able to see your profound need of Christ dwelling in your heart...

#### **D. So that we can learn about love together.**

- **Ephesians 3:17-19 - ...and that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled up to all the fullness of God.**
  - see, whether we're talking about love for God, or love for one another...that is a skill that is best learned in community...
  - my life is much better because I have been able to watch other people in our church family love their spouses, and love their children, and love our community, and love our God...seeing that, and participating in that...has helped me to do that...
- the point of all of this is – the Christian life was never intended to be lived in isolation...God wants us to learn how to, and invest whatever resources are necessary, to live life together...

- now this also means...

### **E. Overcoming whatever obstacles we may face.**

- let's start bringing some of this around to you and me...
  - building friendships takes time...and we're all busy people already...
    - one of the effects of the new economy is a lot of businesses downsized their staff and increased their expectations on the employees who were left...
  - then' there's the issue of gadgets and technology...you don't necessarily have to interact with people...you pump your own gas and put your credit card in a machine...
    - you swipe your own groceries and bag them yourself...
    - you have electronic friends on FB, many of whom you would barely recognize in real life...
  - the screen on your TV is so big that you have to watch it all the time to justify the investment...
  - who needs people – we have the internet...
- so, living life together has become a dying art form...
- then when you bring this around to our church family...our strengths can become our weaknesses...the Lord has brought more people into our church...which means, you realize, the mission worked...
  - it's not about numbers as an end in itself...but if people are being consistently won, you're going to need more chairs, and more parking spaces, and on and on...
  - and that's means we all have to be more intentional about finding ways for people to build friendships...
- there's also a very important dynamic occurring right now in our community...the hospitals were both built on this side of town...they are going to start extending McCarty Lane ½ mile south of here, parallel to SR 26, and then connect it to SR 26 a mile east of here...the new public school ½ mile from us is scheduled to open this fall...
  - if you took out a map of our entire county and from an infrastructure perspective asked the question...where would you really love your church to be located?...this is it...
- and the housing market will eventually come back around...
- some of us remember what this area was like before there was a Brookfield, and a Meijer, and all these subdivisions between here and I 65...
- and think about all the people who will move in around us who in their heart would say – I would love to have friends who cared about me...I would love to have a loving group of people with whom to live life together...
- we want to do everything we can to focus on this theme this year so we're best prepared for what the Lord may have for us down the line...
- now, please look at your handout and let's think about...

### **II. Living Life Together in the Here and Now.**

- how do we intend to do this?...

#### **A. By emphasizing this theme in our morning services throughout the year.**

- we're going to be studying the book of Exodus this half of the year and the book of Acts in the fall...
- we'll also have several specialty series we'll describe at another time...
- but the reason behind choosing those two books is that Exodus explains how God was molding a group of individuals to glorify Him as the people of God...

- and Acts explains how the resurrection of Christ accomplished that plan through the church of Jesus Christ...
- in both cases, they were people who learned what it meant to live life together...

**B. By designing and implementing a “being connected” strategy church wide with the goal of making it easier for each person attending our church to feel more connected to the Lord and their church family.**

- we want to be intentional about all of this this year...
  - and we recognize that you don’t mandate friendships through administration and programming...
- but we can certainly try to create an environment where it is easier for men and women to feel connected...

**C. Evaluate the possibility of beginning a small group pilot program.**

- we’ve done this in a limited way in the past....we want to explore whether, at least with some age groups, small groups would help us accomplish this goal...

- we also believe that technology can actually help us if we are careful and wise in its use and implementation...so that’s why you read about...

**D. Explore additional ways to strengthen connections with missionaries and post updated missionary letters on-line.**

- we already do some of those things, but we want to think about other ways to live life together internationally...what does that look like?

**E. Develop a way to explore and sign up for serving positions on-line.**

- in the next couple of months, on a church family night we’ll have a report from Brian Nicholson who is in charge of electronic communication here....there are some very exciting things happening in that division...all of our websites are being redone, we are moving into blogging and tweeting...but for the purpose of helping all of us live life together...
- now, let’s just pause there and ask this question – how connected do you feel to your church family?...and do you believe it would please God, and be a blessing to you, if you took steps toward strengthening that connection this year...
- and you might say – wait a minute – you were talking about what the church was going to do to emphasize this---now you’re talking like there might be something expected from me...
- that’s exactly right – at some point you have to decide if you want to be connected...and if you’re willing to put the effort into doing so...

**III. Living Life Together as We Plan Our Future.**

- one of the great effects of living life together is that it creates synergy...the ability to accomplish more together than the sum of our individual accomplishments...
- that really is true...
- a church family can do incredible things together...
- you’ll notice that we’re planning this year to launch our Spreading the Word capital campaign...to fund two projects we’ve been discussing for some time now...
- let me just bring you up to speed on the status of those projects...
- the first one is a ministry center over at Purdue...

- we'd like to have a place for our Purdue Bible Fellowship to have their Friday night meetings along with their Bible studies and other activities throughout the week...
- we'd like to begin offering biblical counseling services to students and staff and residents on that part of town...
  
- we actually had an approved contract to purchase the old Smitty's site...
- if you read about that in the paper the last couple of weeks – that article was talking about us – that's not well known yet but our church family knows because you had to approve the purchase...
- we had hoped to have that purchase finalized last month but we ran into some environmental issues...
  - I'm glad for Mike King, Joe Blake, Paul Refior who have been very careful in being sure that everything was in order before we finalized that purchase...
  - the phase one environmental report showed that long ago there was a gas station on that site...
  - the phase two environmental revealed the possible presence of some solvent of some kind...so the owners and the engineers are still working that through...
    - it may turn out to be relatively minor and we may be able to close soon...
    - but in the meantime we continue to research other sites and we want to be right in the center of God's will on this one, both from the perspective of location and timing...
    - but isn't it fun to dream, and to think about what we could accomplish for the Lord as a result of Living Life Together...
    - please be praying for wisdom and direction...
  
- we also hope to build a new ministry center here on our site...
  - increased counseling center space
  - home for our new seminary...
  - better positioned to work 7 days a week with people the Lord is bringing to our family...so we're not just living life together, but we're doing it in a way that is helping all of us get to a better place