

Mission, Values and Vision

*⁸To 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, ⁹and to bring to light for everyone what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things, ¹⁰so that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places.
(Ephesians 3:8-10. ESV)*

Message 10

Vision: Overflow Church

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Acts 13:1-3

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Introduction:

Good morning! Open your Bibles to Acts 13:1-3. This is the last message in our 10 week series looking at the Mission, Core Values and Vision statement of our church and particularly, the Scriptures that inform the mission, values and vision of this church. Today we are looking at the issue of vision. Here at this church we use a version of what is sometimes called “Value Driven Leadership” to do our strategic planning. Let me show you that briefly so that you understand the way we are using these terms, because some people, using different models use the same terms meaning slightly different things. In our model, the mission represents the broad parameters of commission and permission that frame the legitimate activity of the church. We often use the analogy of foul lines on a baseball diamond. Inside here is fair ground for church activity, outside is foul territory. The “mission lines” for the church would be, obviously, the Great Commission. Matthew records it as: “Go into all the world and make disciples, baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey all that I have commanded you” so we’ll put the words “Make Disciples” on the bottom horizontal axis. Luke’s version includes the command: “Repentance and forgiveness of sins must be preached in my name to all nations” (Luke 24:47) so we’ll write “Preach Repentance and Forgiveness” on this vertical access. That then is the broad definition of what a church should DO. It should make disciples by preaching repentance and forgiveness.

Within that broad definition, every church will have unique opportunities and gifts and passions embedded by God. Ephesians 2:10 says: “We are what he has made us to be, created in Christ Jesus to do good works which he prepared in advance to be our way of life.” God created us with particular good works in mind and he has prepared us and equipped us to do those good works and so by looking at who God has made us, where God has put us and how God has equipped us, we should get an idea of the specific work he wants us to do within our Great Commission parameters. In baseball terms, think of this as “swing path”. We have natural power in a certain direction because of our body’s natural strengths and proclivities. Those are Core Values. We naturally swing this way; we naturally incline this way because of our deep passions and spiritual inclinations.

Lastly then we have the issue of vision. Vision is defined as “an imagined best future for your church within your Great Commission parameters, in line with your Core Value drive”. So we say, this is what God has called us to do, this is who he’s made us to be, now what would it look like if we hit this thing out of the park by the grace of Almighty God? A vision statement is a picture of what your church would look like if it hit a big fat, out of the park home run at what its trying to be and do. It’s a picture, a vision, a dream that captures where you want to go and who you want to be. Ideally, you want it to be visually suggestive and coffee cup clear. You want your vision statement to fit on a coffee cup and you want it to bring to mind a larger body of content and information when people see it. Towards that end we use the phrase “Overflow Church”. That’s what we have on one side of the coffee cup. Overflow church means that we are drinking so deep from the grace of God, his grace and presence are flowing so deep in here, that it overflows the banks, runs down into the valleys and brings life to all it touches. Abundance of abiding in Christ, resulting in an overflow of ministry to others – that’s the idea.

Recently I’ve been thinking of what I would want to put on the other side of that coffee cup. Coffee cups have two sides and so why not put something on the other side that helps explain what we mean by “Overflow Church”? This is what I’ve come up with; now this isn’t “church policy”, this is just Paul, this is just what I want to write on my own coffee cup. This is what I mean when I say “Overflow Church”; let me read it to you:

*Gathering and Going
For The Glory Of God
And the good of all people
In Christ*

I like that; that is a sentence length way of saying: “Overflow Church”. That is an imagined best future for our church that captures my heart and I hope, captures yours. This morning I want to put a picture and passage to that vision. I want to read and open up a text of Scripture that holds up just such a church for our consideration and imitation. Let me read to you from Acts 13:1-3. We’ll read the text through and then make 4 observations about the characteristics of an overflow church.

Acts 13:1-3 (ESV)

¹ Now there were in the church at Antioch prophets and teachers, Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen a lifelong friend of Herod the tetrarch, and Saul.

² While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, “Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.”

³ Then after fasting and praying they laid their hands on them and sent them off.

This is the Word of the Lord, thanks be to God.

The first thing we notice from the example of Antioch is that an overflow church:

Characteristics Of An Overflow Church:

1. Cherishes the ministry of the Word AND the ministry of the Holy Spirit

That is the first thing that jumps off the page at me when I read this text. This church had 5 teaching pastors, what Luke calls “prophets and teachers”. Now, I don’t want to get distracted by a conversation about what the New Testament means by “prophets”, I’ll just say that just as there are small ‘a’ apostles and capital ‘A’ Apostles so there appear to be small ‘p’ prophets and capital “P” prophets; you see this also in the OT. In 1 Chronicles for example, all the Levites serving in the temple as singers and musicians are called ‘prophets’, in the sense that they sang the Word of God with the help of the Spirit of God. They were not the same as Isaiah and Moses, but they were small ‘p’ prophets of some sort and we see the same thing in the New Testament. Anyone who speaks the Word of God with the Help of The Spirit of God is in some sense a prophet. They don’t all write books of the Bible – from this list of 5 “prophets and teachers” – only

Saul/Paul is known to have for sure written a book of the Bible, maybe Barnabas wrote Hebrews but we don't know for sure – so we're using that term in a more general sense. What these men are doing is **PREACHING THE WORD** with the help of the Holy Spirit.

What's really interesting is that there are 5 of them. 5 of them for one church, that seems a bit odd. Now Antioch had a large population of Christians and so church historians tell us they likely had multiple meeting sites for their one church. So what you have is a multi-site church under a plurality of elders, 5 of whom were full time preachers and teachers. Clearly, this church prioritized the ministry of the Word – that part is obvious – what is interesting is that even as a Word centered, Bible thumping church, they remain alive and carefully tuned to the ministry of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is all over this passage. The fact that the teachers are referred to as “prophets and teachers” implies that they were teaching the Bible with the help of the Holy Spirit and then right in the middle of their Bible centred worship service, they hear and respond to the specific guidance of the Holy Spirit, however that was delivered. That is a picture of what I want our church to be.

I want to be – **I DREAM OF BEING** – a church that hungers and thirsts for the Word of God but that is totally guided and graciously helped by the ministry of the Holy Spirit. I am zealous to maintain that and to see that increase within our fellowship. That is a balance that strikes fear into the heart of our Adversary. The devil is not concerned about churches that read their Bible but who have exiled or outraged the Holy Spirit. Without the Spirit the Scriptures lie under a veil, the natural mind cannot comprehend its message. Those people are not a threat to the devil. Likewise the devil is not at all concerned with people who are so fascinated with spiritual experience that they have closed their Bibles in search of fresh revelation or who allow spiritual messages to enter the church untested and to stand in opposition to the clear message of the Bible. Those churches are not a threat. But the gates of hell tremble and retreat before a church that wields the Sword of the Spirit which **IS** the Word of God. You put Word and Spirit together and all hell starts breaking loose in your town and the devil is put to flight!

An overflow church is always, by definition, a church that prioritizes, treasures and defends the ministry of the Word and the Spirit.

Secondly, we notice from the example of Antioch, that an overflow church:

2. Fervently worships and seeks after the Lord

Look again at the start of verse 2 and the start of verse 3:

² While they were worshipping the Lord and fasting ...

³ Then after fasting and praying ...

In the New Testament, fasting is often treated as an amplifier for worship and prayer. John Stott puts it this way: “For seldom if ever is fasting an end in itself. It is a negative action (abstention from food and other distractions) for the sake of a positive one (worshipping or praying).”¹ Fasting is something you do to focus and to intensify your worship or your prayer life; it is not an end to itself. If fasting is an amplifier then you should stop doing it when it becomes a distraction from the thing you are supposed to be amplifying. Let me give you an example, a couple of years ago I was invited by some pastor friends to participate in a 7 day water only fast. Now, right away I should have been smart enough to point out that nowhere in the Bible do we find a command or even a suggestion that we should do 7 day fasts. The fasts in the Bible are short, one or two days max. Jesus fasted for 40 days but Jesus also walked on water and flew up to heaven so there are some things Jesus did that we are not invited to imitate and 40 day fasts would be high on that list. About 4 days into my 7 day water only fast I was pretty much useless for anything or anybody. I lay on the couch when I got home from work and could barely lift my arms. I was a burden to my family and I was not more focused in prayer, I was more comatose in prayer. The benefit of the fast, in terms of focus, wore off on the second day. After that, it became the opposite of what it was supposed to be. That’s a problem because fasting isn’t about fasting, its about amplifying prayer and worship.

Positively though, let’s note that this overflow church brought amplification, brought FASTING, into everything they did in seeking God. When they worshipped, they worshipped WITH FASTING, when they prayed, they prayed WITH FASTING. When they went to seek God they went FERVENTLY. They went with focused intention. That is the only way to go. Jesus said that:

¹ John Stott, The Message Of Acts (Downers Grove: Inter Varsity Press, 1990), 217.

Matthew 7:7 (ESV)

⁷ “**Ask**, and it will be given to you; **seek**, and you will find; **knock**, and it will be opened to you.

Matthew 11:12 (ESV)

¹² From the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven has suffered violence, and **the violent take it by force.**

Luke 13:24 (ESV)

²⁴ “**Strive** to enter through the narrow door. For many, I tell you, will seek to enter and will not be able.

James the brother of the Lord learned this lesson well and spoke about the power of FERVENT, focused prayer:

James 5:16-17 (NKJV)

The effective, **fervent prayer** of a righteous man avails much.

¹⁷ Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and **he prayed earnestly** that it would not rain; and it did not rain on the land for three years and six months.

An overflow church doesn't wander into worship 15 minutes late, they don't maybe, sometimes come to prayer meeting, they don't sometimes, sort of read their Bibles – THEY SEEK THE LORD **EARNESTLY**, they KNOCK ON THE GATES OF HEAVEN **FERVENTLY** and with VIOLENT INTENT. They mean to see, they mean to hear, they mean to discern the Lord's will so as to do it; they mean to receive grace so as to overcome the darkness. That kind of church has more than enough from God and they overflow in ministry toward others.

Thirdly, an overflow church, like this one here in Antioch:

3. Willingly parts with valuable assets for the sake of the Kingdom of God

Look again at verses 2-3:

the Holy Spirit said, “**Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul** for the work to which I have called them.”

³ Then after fasting and praying they laid their hands on them and **sent them off.**

The word used in verse 2 for “set apart” is the Greek word *aphorise* which means “you must separate or appoint”. The Holy Spirit is saying that these two men, the two most gifted teachers in the church, two of the most gifted teachers in the history of the church, are to be SEPERATED from their church unto the ministry God has called them to. Then in verse 3 it says they prayed

and fasted – this time it seems to test and confirm this word - and then they laid hands of them and sent them off. The Greek is actually more powerful; its the word *apelusan* which means “they released them”. They let them go. They let go of what was awesome about their church, humanly speaking, and they released these two men into mission for the sake of the glory of God among the nations. That’s a good church and that is the attitude you have to have to be an overflow church.

Think about that in our context. We have 5.0 ministry FTE here – meaning we have the equivalent of 5 ministry staff, some of our staff are part time, but we have the equivalent of 5 ministry FTEs; imagine that God told us to put all their names in a hat and he was going to send 40% of our ministry staff to India on semi-permanent reassignment. How would you feel about that? I would be a little nerve wracking wouldn’t? Who are we going to lose? Who are we going to have to replace? We did that a little bit with Redeemer City Church didn’t we? We gave up 40 of our youngest, brightest, and most engaged people when we started that church and many more have gone over in the last year. Redeemer City has been growing by more than 45% while the church as a whole has been growing by more like 5% so part of what that means is that we are continuing to release people, month by month from here to there in addition to the people who are coming in and coming to Christ from “out there”. That has a cost doesn’t it? Its good for us to begin feeling that because we need to grow in this. We need to be willing and eager to surrender our best resources for the sake of the kingdom of God – that’s what it means to be an overflow church.

Fourthly and lastly, the example of Antioch shows us that an overflow church:

4. Launches out in obedience trusting the Lord to guide

As a pastor this text both excites and terrifies me. What if the Lord spoke in a prayer meeting one morning and said: “Set apart for me 40% of thy staff and send them unto India for purposes of mine own”. What would I do with that? Assuming that we tested it and it was confirmed, what would we do with that? In my flesh I admit that I would want to ask for a follow up email. I would like the answer to some questions:

- i. How long will they be gone and will they be coming back alive?

- ii. How will we afford to pay for the missionary travels of this team, including the salaries of 2 people who no longer work here, while also hiring their replacements?
- iii. Are you sure your original message wasn't meant for some other here church in town, because I have a list?

There are some details outstanding from this original communication aren't there? How very like God to not provide those details. When God called Abraham he said:

Genesis 12:1 (ESV)

¹ Now the LORD said to Abram, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you.

The land that I will show you? What land is that? Do I pack for hot or cold? Do I pack a lunch or will there be food there? Are we driving or flying? Hello? That is not a lot of content; God would not get hired by a travel agency. Later when he called to Abraham again in Genesis 22 he said:

Genesis 22:1-2 (ESV)

"Abraham!" And he said, "Here I am."

² He said, "Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you."

Again, there are a lot of unanswered questions there. How will I become the father of a great nation if I sacrifice my only son? How will I teach the nations about righteousness if I commit murder on the top of a mountain, which by the way, you have not precisely identified? There are a lot of unanswered questions there but in Antioch as with Abraham, to walk by faith means obeying BEFORE all those questions are answered.

My friends, rarely, if ever, in the Christian life are we given all the answers before we take our first and second steps of obedience. When God tells you to do something, he usually waits to see how you handle his initial word before he trusts you with further detail. If God gives you a command just start obeying it and trust that in time, often just in time, he will handle all the ins and outs, and all the intricate logistics of how that change will be accomplished. Just start moving. Its easier to steer a moving vehicle than one standing still and so it is with people and with churches. I'd rather pastor a church that jumped at God's command, even if it meant

multiple course corrections and slight alterations along the way, as opposed to a church paralyzed by uncertainty and doubt.

Antioch responded obediently and adventurously to the call and command of God. They didn't wait until they'd hired replacements, they didn't wait until they had raised the money, they didn't wait for the approval of the church in Jerusalem, they didn't wait until they had a coalition of like minded churches to support them – they just started walking down the path of overflow church. And as the years rolled on, many of these issues ended up being solved, just in the nick of time. In Acts 15:32 we read of them being encouraged by new teachers, ultimately they did in fact get the approval of the Jerusalem church for their Gentile mission, eventually other churches like Ephesus started copying their model – it all worked out but they didn't know any of that when the first call came in. They just knew it came from God and so they obeyed. You have to be like that to become an overflow church.

Affirmations And Exhortations:

Now, we've been talking about Overflow Church for 3-4 years now, so in the time we have left, I want to real quickly affirm us in two areas and challenge us in two areas based on these four observations from the text.

First of all I want to affirm our willingness to part with valuable resources. We sent some of our absolute best people down to Redeemer City Church to start that work. I held my breath when I considered the list of people who signed up for that work. The present chair of our Board, several worship team members, a bunch of young, committed SOLID Christian families – we sent the best people we have to offer and I'm concerned about that, but I'm also really proud of you for that, if I can use that word. It tells me a lot about you and it tells me we are on the way to being an overflow church.

Secondly I want to affirm our obedient and adventuresome spirit in pursuing the Lord's will. This church will try something even when they don't have all the details, even when there is a decent chance it will fail. We didn't know all of what we needed to know when we launched Redeemer City Church, we didn't know half of what we needed to know when we launched CLRA, we still don't know what we want to know and we still need God to open doors and clear

the way if those things are going to work. But that didn't stop you from approving those things, or from releasing the time, money and energy needed to pursue those things. God will guide. He will redirect, course correct and lead us forward by his grace. You believe that and so you are walking the path of Abraham by faith.

In terms of exhortations, let me encourage us to guard the centre with respect to the ministry of the Word and the Spirit. Some of us are by nature "ditch to ditch" drivers. We come clawing our way out of the cessationist ditch only to crash head long into the charismaniac ditch. Or we come clawing out of the charismaniac ditch only to crash head long into the Hyper-Calvinist ditch. Let's try to avoid that. Let's trust in the Word and be led by the Spirit. Let's put a hand over our mouths and try to avoid speaking beyond Scripture. Let us not despise prophecies but let us test everything, clinging to what is good and rejecting that which is false. Let's guard the centre with respect to the ministry of the Word and the Spirit.

And lastly, let me plead with us to rediscover our zeal in seeking the Lord. Our flow isn't quite what it used to be. Maybe that's because we've more outlets for the water; if you turn on every tap in the house, maybe the pressure isn't what it used to be; maybe. But maybe the problem is that we haven't been priming the pump as often or as earnestly as we used to. We've been neglecting the means of grace. Let's not do that. Let's lean in to worship. Let's wake up early and prepare, let's be on time and ready to go with the first song, let's FAST even, cutting out all distractions and intensifying our focus and let's LEAN IN! And let's get back to prayer. Yes its early, yes its cold – LEAN IN! God does not shout. Lean in if you wish to hear his voice. Ask, seek, knock and the door shall be opened unto you. This is the Word of the Lord, thanks be to God.