



# New Day Church

Need a fresh start?

## THE CORE

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Last September, Jeff Ingram of Olympia left home in his blue Dodge Neon. He was on a road trip to Alberta, Canada to visit a dying friend. He never made it there. Instead, he found himself walking around in Denver, unable to recall how he got there, why he was there or who he was. He walked around for about 6 hours, asking people if they knew him or could help him. Finally, someone got him to a hospital.

He was there for a month. Doctors finally diagnosed him as having “dissociative fugue,” a rare form of amnesia where the patient is prone to travel or wander to places they never intended to go. They finally held a press conference to appeal to the public for help. The man said, “I feel totally lost. I feel totally alone. If anybody recognizes me, knows who I am, please let somebody know.” Thankfully, a friend saw him on TV, and Ingram was quickly reunited with his family. They never did find his car, so if you happen to see an abandoned blue Dodge Neon, alert the authorities.

Can you imagine how disorienting that would be? To have no idea who you really are, or how you got to where you are. Having a firm grasp of your own identity is vital.

That’s true of churches as well as individuals. When we began New Day four years ago, we identified what we believed was the vision God had for us and the values we wanted to see expressed in this new church. That formed our identity, and it still does. But we have a lot of new people that have joined this effort after the initial launch, and not everyone is as familiar with that vision and values. It’s also easy for those of us who have been around longer to forget what drove us in the first place. We can end up with dissociative fugue – wandering off course because we’ve lost our sense of identity and purpose.

So every once in a while, it’s good for us as a group to reconnect with the New Day way – the vision and values that have distinguished us from the beginning. Over the next few weeks, we’ll look more closely at our core identity as a church. I’m excited about this series, because I really do still feel passionate about the ideas we put on paper back at the beginning, when we were just a little band of about 15 adults. [RECOGNIZE GROUP]

This morning, we’ll take a look at the New Day vision. Then over the next several weeks, we’ll look at the seven New Day core values. I hope this will be both motivating

and challenging as we step back to see where we're making good progress and where we need to step up a little more.

So what's the difference between our vision and our values? They're related, but they're not the same. Today we're focused on the word vision, which for our purposes I would define this way.

*Vision: An achievable picture of who we want to be, but aren't yet.*

This week was the annual international auto show in New York. One of the biggest attractions at the show was actually the smallest: GM unveiled a trio of mini commuter cars. The cars are ultra sleek and modern looking. GM wanted to create something fun to drive and super efficient.

But don't go looking for them over at Jet Chevrolet. They're not in production yet. They are concept cars – a vision of what the future may look like. That's the fun of the auto show – seeing ideas that aren't yet a reality, but that are completely within the realm of possibility. And very, very cool.

A vision puts an idea out in front of us that is worth pursuing, but that hasn't yet arrived. There's always a little bit of frustration with a vision, because in order to be a vision it has to be something that is not yet realized. But any frustration is overcome by the amount of inspiration that it provides. A vision is something big enough and attractive enough that we want to keep going after it, no matter what the obstacles.

When we apply the idea of vision to a church setting, we also have to keep in mind who will be the one accomplishing the task. In Matthew, Jesus said,

**Matthew 16:18**

*I will build my church.*

We can have all kinds of ideas about where we would like to see the church go. But it's not our church – it's his. We have to get on board with what he is doing – not get him to sign off on our plan.

We need his vision. We need his idea of where we're headed to sustain us and keep us on track. There's a verse that speaks to this directly. In the old King James version, it was translated like this:

**Proverbs 29:18**

*Where there is no vision, the people perish.*

Vision is life giving. Without it we flounder around and wither away.

Now I know most people don't come to church on a Sunday morning thinking about the vision of where a church is going – they're only thinking about that particular morning

and their own individual lives. The average visitor isn't all that concerned about what a church might look like someday off in the future. But if a church loses its sense of vision, it begins to lose its sense of purpose and meaning. And even if a visitor can't put a finger on it, they will know something isn't right.

When we first moved to Washington years ago, Karin and I were looking for a new home church. Sometimes we would visit 2 or 3 a day, we were so desperate to find a new place to belong. It was really eye opening to see all the variety of churches out there.

I can still remember this one morning we walked into one church building and felt like we had just stepped in a time warp back to the 1950s. The organ was blaring away, there was a row of old men in suits with grumpy faces sitting in front. There was no joy or life in what was happening. Everyone seemed to be going through motions they had performed a million times before. It was obvious that the only people in the small congregation were people who had been attending there for years and years. There was no reason for anybody new to stick around. And at our earliest opportunity, Karin and I snuck out, and said to ourselves in the car, "What was that?"

The author Annie Dillard once said this about church: "In two thousand years, we have not worked out the kinks. We positively glorify them. Week after week we witness the same miracle: that God is so mighty he can stifle his own laughter. Week after week, we witness the same miracle: that God, for reasons unfathomable, refrains from blowing our dancing bear act to smithereens."

Listen, I've been a church brat my whole life. I've seen a lot of dancing bear acts – goofy nonsense that passes for being Christian. Yet somehow, church is still where God has chosen to let his gospel be heard. And that means it's not enough to just play at it or go through the motions. We have been entrusted with an incredible task, and we have a responsibility to know who we are and what we're doing.

Without vision, the people perish. I like the way the more contemporary Message version translates that verse:

**Proverbs 29:18**

*If people can't see what God is doing,  
they stumble all over themselves;  
But when they attend to what he reveals,  
they are most blessed.*

That gives us two opposite principles: The first is that people perish without a vision. We stumble all over ourselves and are lost when we can't see what God is doing.

But it also shows us the positive truth: When there IS a vision and we pay attention to it, the church flourishes. When we attend to what God reveals, we are most blessed. That's what we want to do – attend to what God has revealed, both in his word and in his specific plans for this church. Who is he calling New Day to become, and how can we get there?

A true vision will be worth pursuing, it will be in line with God's vision, it will be life giving.

You may have seen the New Day vision statement printed on the back of your program each week:

*To build a worshipping community of all kinds of people that will be a living testimony to the power of the gospel and the reality of God's kingdom.*

Now, let me say up right up front that there's nothing sacred about that statement. It's not Scripture. It's not air tight. But it's a good start. That sentence is packed with a lot of information. Every one of those 28 words was carefully selected. When you read it straight through, it's easy to miss some of the meaning. So what I'd like to do with our remaining time this morning is walk through our vision statement phrase by phrase and see why it says what it does.

First it says **To build**. In his letter to the Ephesians, Paul wrote,

**Ephesians 4:16**

*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.*

It's part of our job as a church to be building ourselves up in love. I like the connotation of building, because it's a reminder that the church is always going to be under construction. Any ideas we may have about creating a perfect church have to be tossed out the window, because the work is continuous.

On the flip side of that, we sometimes like the thought of a church that never changes. We want it to stay the way we remember it. But church life was never intended to be static. We are "to build," meaning we are to grow and change. Hopefully, if you left today and came back to visit New Day in 5 years, you would find a church that has progressed and matured – not one that "hasn't changed a bit".

In real world construction, building can be boiled down to three main tasks. You can be working on the **structural support**, strengthening the foundations and walls to hold the building in place. You can be **expanding** – adding a room, adding a story, building up or out. Or you can be **beautifying** the space – doing the finish carpentry work, adding moulding or cabinetry, texturing walls, etc.

Those same tasks translate into building the church. We need to provide structural support, giving people the tools to live a Christian life and stay strong. We build through expansion, seeking out new people who need the hope of Christ. We are constantly reaching out. And we look for ways to beautify the space. The Bible talks about presenting the church to Christ as a beautiful bride. Our job is to clean out the ugliness –

confessing and turning our back on sin, and seek those practices that will make being part of New Day a truly beautiful experience.

Some people hear the words “to build” and instantly start to think about a building. I get asked all the time if New Day is ever going to build its own facility. And that’s definitely a possibility someday, if we decide as a congregation that our needs call for it. But that’s not what the vision is about. Church isn’t a piece of real estate – it’s people. We’re focused on building something else, and that’s the next phrase of our vision statement, which is

### **A worshipping community**

If we stick with our construction theme for a moment, imagine that you had purchased a large piece of property on a lake. The property is nice, with some beautiful trees and green grass, but what’s really spectacular is the view of the lake.

So let’s say you asked your architect to draw up some plans, but when he shows them to you, something is wrong. He has the side of the house facing the water, with one tiny window in the bathroom that actually has any kind of a view. You would want him to turn the house to have a lake orientation, so that all the big windows could take full advantage of the view.

Churches can have all kinds of orientations. People expect church to meet a wide range of needs. Kids programs. Youth groups. Social services. Counseling. Mission trips. And the church naturally should be involved in many things. But we have to make sure the house faces the lake. We have to insist on a Godward orientation. He needs to be our primary view. In the book of John, Jesus tells us that God is looking for worshippers:

#### **John 4:23**

*Your worship must engage your spirit in the pursuit of truth. That's the kind of people the Father is out looking for: those who are simply and honestly themselves before him in their worship.*

We can get so caught up in doing “church” work that we lose sight of God in the process. There is only one activity that the church will continue to do in heaven, and that’s worship God. Everything else we do here will eventually fade away. So we have written it into our identity that we want New Day to be about worship. We’ll talk more about that next week when we discuss worship as a core value.

As it relates to our vision statement, we used the term “worshipping community.” Community is another loaded term that deserves a moment of our time.

Tom Parks gave me a USA Today article last week that highlighted a new phenomenon that’s happening in Internet gaming. In one virtual world, you can now create a character that attends church services, praying and singing music in an imaginary congregation.

George Byrd, a real estate broker in Ohio, built a virtual church on one web site. He holds weekly services at it that draw more than 40 people, and he says that the virtual services are as authentic as those in the real world church he attends. He says "The spiritual connection is in your brain and in your soul. It's the same either way."

Anyone can worship God on their own – at home, on a mountain, in the car. But worshipping at a virtual church isn't the same as a real one, because you are missing the component of community. Creating community is sharing life, not cyberspace. It's walking with people through the joys and the sorrows.

To me, this has been one of the most exciting things to see happen at New Day. Genuine community is beginning to take shape. That's something that takes time and shared experiences and a willingness to let people know you. And I see that everywhere. Relationships are getting deeper. It's happening through small groups, Bible studies, on the mission trips and just in friendships. People are looking out for each other. In the last year alone, I have heard so many people say, "This church has really become my family." Some of you have gone through extremely stressful circumstances, and friends from church have stepped in to provide support. It hasn't been planned or programmed – it just has happened spontaneously. To me that's a sign of health.

It always helps to hear things first hand, and I've asked Kim Rivard to come and share briefly with you from her own personal experience of community at New Day.

Now as you listen to her story, you might be sitting there thinking, "That's great, but nobody ever called me when I was having a rough time." Maybe you're feeling alone and you wish you had that kind of support. We would like to think that people would naturally reach out to us on their own, but sometimes the burden is on each of us to seek out help, to raise our hand and say, "I'm drowning here." I'd encourage you to make yourself heard. The church needs to know where the power of community isn't yet being felt. As long as anyone is still feeling alone, we have a calling to continue pursuing our vision. There is work still to be done. And I'm willing to bet that people here will respond overwhelmingly when they know someone is hurting.

Church is about community – doing life together with a focus on God. We share a common purpose to worship him in the context of relationships with each other. Building community itself becomes an act of worship, because it is as we serve one another that we often see God the most clearly.

There's an important description of that community in our vision statement. It says that we want to see it made up

### **Of all kinds of people**

That might sound like a phrase that wouldn't be all that necessary to the vision. Why spell out the obvious?

The truth is, it's not all that obvious. Most of the strategy books for starting new churches encourages you to pick a target group to go after. The theory is that "birds of a feather flock together," and that you can grow a church faster if you are only trying to attract one specific group. In his book, *Church Planting for a Greater Harvest*, Peter Wagner says, "The overwhelming odds are that God will call you and equip you to plant a church among people who are pretty much like yourself."

I'm sure that's true in many senses. But the gospel, the good news of Jesus, is for everybody. It's universal. In my mind, intentionally limiting yourself to one people group or one economic class is shortselling the gospel. I love the picture of heaven that John paints for us in the book of Revelation.

### **Revelation 7:9**

*After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb.*

One day we will stand together with people from every corner of the world to sing praises to God. We may as well get used to it here and now.

I am well aware that my style of preaching or the type of music we worship with here at New Day won't appeal to everyone. There will be people of various ages or ethnic groups or social classes who may choose NOT to be here. But we are committed as a church to doing everything within our power to make everyone feel welcome who walks through that door – no matter your background, no matter your color, no matter your income.

We do that because that's what Christ has done for us. He welcomed us when we were sinners. He loved us when we were as unlike him as we could be. For us to practice anything less isn't an adequate representation of him to the world. We are called to love more than just the people who are most like us.

That's a bold vision. It's hard to know how to live that out. That's why they say Sunday morning is the most segregated in America. It's not easy to step outside your comfort zone and reach your hand out to someone who couldn't be more different. But what an amazing glimpse of heaven to give the world.

That glimpse is a big part of our job as a church, which is why our vision statement says this will be a community

### **That will be a living testimony**

In the movie *The Neverending Story*, the boy Bastian goes into a bookstore and asks the owner of the shop about a special book he sees in the store.

“What’s that book about?” asks Bastian.

The owner replies, “Oh, this is something special.”

“Well what is it?”

The owner says, “Look – your books are safe. By reading them you get to become Tarzan or Robinson Crusoe.”

Bastian says, “But that’s what I like about them.”

“Ah – but afterwards you get to be a little boy again.”

“What do you mean?” Bastian asks.

“Listen. Have you ever been Captain Nemo, trapped inside your submarine while the giant squid is attacking you?”

“Yes?”

“Weren’t you afraid you couldn’t escape?”

“But it’s only a story!”

The man says, “That’s what I’m talking about. The ones you read are safe.”

“And this one isn’t?”

That’s what we discover about the Bible. It’s not just a book we leave when we’re done reading. We enter into it. Our lives become part of the story. We become living testimony.

Down through the ages, that has been the role of the church – to testify to the world – to be the witnesses who stand up and say, “Christ is real and here’s what he’s done for me.”

Colossians 4 says,

**Colossians 4:5**

*Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity.*

What’s unique about a church vision is that it is written in part for people who aren’t even here yet. Our interaction with the rest of the world matters tremendously. New Day is not intended to be a place you come on Sundays for your weekly church fix. You are New Day when you’re out in your daily life, in the parking lot or the office or your neighborhood or the grocery store. You are living testimony.

## **To the power of the gospel**

This is the part of the vision statement that keeps us honest. Because it calls for hard evidence. Do our lives indicate that the gospel is more than just words?

The only kind of power most people associate with churches is an abuse of power. All the scandals in the news point out that even church leaders can become corrupted when they have too much authority.

Other than that, by and large, church isn't seen as a powerful force. We no longer live in a time when the opinion of the church is taken all that seriously in the larger population. People searching for answers in life rarely think to turn to a church.

But we have something incredibly powerful to offer, and that's the gospel. Paul said,

### **Romans 1:16**

*I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes.*

We can't take it for granted and forget just how mighty the good news about Jesus is and what it's capable of doing. Through and through, our lives should show just how far God's grace has reached. There is no other way to explain the change that has happened in so many lives, other than by the work of Christ. Nothing else in this world has that kind of power.

It's a power that directs our attention to the last phrase of our vision statement:

## **And the reality of God's kingdom**

In seminary I had a class where they split us into groups to write a vision statement for an imaginary new church. We each came up with our own take on it. Afterwards, the professor knocked them all down and said, "No vision statement for the church is complete if it doesn't refer to God's kingdom."

Why was he so adamant about that? It didn't seem at the time to be all that big of a deal. But the truth is that it makes all the difference in the world, for two reasons.

First, **God is bigger than the church.** If we're not careful, we can end up trying to build a little empire for New Day. We can pour all our effort into maintaining this group. If that happens, we'll end up hunkering down into a protective, self absorbed mode where everything is centered around keeping the church going.

But God is bigger than the church. His kingdom is bigger than this church. New Day isn't an end in itself – it's a vehicle for promoting God's rule in the world. That means we are free to pursue what is for the good of God's kingdom, even if it looks like it might

be risky for New Day. We're free to not stay in preservation mode. God will take care of us.

Tom and Stephanie Parks went to school in England, and while they were there, a professor shared with them the story of a pastor friend and his church in the south of England. One Sunday, he stood up in front of the congregation and shared that he felt if God ever called somebody from their church to go and serve as a full time missionary in a foreign country, that the church should finance them. This was not a large church – only around 120 people. Well, the next week, someone stood up and said, “I think I’m the one God is calling to be a missionary. So the church leadership prayed about it, and chose to support them. It was a huge commitment.

About 2 weeks later, someone else stood up and said, “I think God may be calling me too.” So the church prayed about it again, and decided they were supposed to support this person as well. This continued to happen, and at last count, the church had grown to about 250 people and was supporting 25 missionaries as well as 2 full time staff people.

That’s vision for you. From a practical standpoint, it made no sense for that little congregation to commit themselves to that many salaries. They risked bankrupting the church. But they knew that God’s kingdom was bigger than their survival. So they stepped out in faith, and God honored their obedience.

That may be a highly unusual case. But it’s a great example of what can happen when a church doesn’t make self preservation its first priority. Keeping kingdom in the vision helps us remember that God and his work are bigger than New Day. And if we commit ourselves to his mission and being faithful to what he has shown us, he will take care of us far better than we can take care of ourselves.

Secondly, **reality is bigger than the world.** We need to keep the kingdom in our vision to remind people that there is so much more than what is visible. To quote Paul again,

### **2 Corinthians 4:18**

*So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.*

This life pounds us with thoughts and images and worries and responsibilities and fun and distractions that would convince us this is all there is. Everyone is so preoccupied with just getting through each day.

In the movie The Matrix, the character Neo is living in this world that is an illusion generated by computers. Somehow, though, he can sense that there has to be something more. He meets a man by the name of Morpheus, who confirms what he’s been feeling. Then Morpheus offers Neo two pills – a blue one and a red one. If he takes the blue one, he’ll forget everything and go back to the illusion. But if he takes the red one, he’ll learn the truth and see the reality beyond the Matrix.

Our job as a church is to keep holding out that red pill. There's a deeper reality than what can be seen. Beyond this world is another that is even more real.

1 Corinthians tells us

**1 Corinthians 4:20**

*For the kingdom of God is not a matter of talk, but of power.*

That's why I am motivated to be part of New Day. I firmly believe that God's kingdom is more than talk and that we have an essential job to do in helping people connect with that.

As you hear this vision statement this morning, I want to leave you with two challenges. First, pray for New Day. Pray on your own, pray in these gatherings we'll be having over the next couple months. Pray that we'll know how to act on the vision God has given us. Pray that we'll have courage to do more than play it safe.

Secondly, pray for your own kingdom mindset. Ask God to further his kingdom through you. Ask him to give you a heart that is willing to say yes to a ministry commitment, a phone call you need to make, a wrong you need to forgive. Ask him to show you where he is already at work in your life.

Christ is building his church. We are the carriers of his truth in a time and place that desperately needs it. Our mission is urgent and our vision is big. God give us the strength to pursue it boldly.