



CORE

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A man named Bob came home from a round of golf and sighed as he dropped his clubs on the floor. His wife asked him, "How was your game dear?"

"Not so great," he said. "I mean, I was hitting the ball as well as ever, but my vision has gotten so bad I could never see where it landed."

His wife said, "Well you're 75 now. You can't expect everything to stay the same forever. Why don't you take my brother Jimmy with you next time?"

"Jimmy? Are you kidding?? He's 85. Besides, he doesn't even play golf anymore."

"I know he's getting up there," she said. "But the one thing he's still got is perfect vision. He can just go with you and watch the ball for you."

So the next day, Bob took Jimmy along. Bob teed off with Jimmy watching closely. It was a great shot, right down the middle of the fairway. Bob knew it was a good one, but he couldn't see it. "Well?" He asked Jimmy. "Can you see it?"

"Yep. I see it plain as day."

"Well where is it?" Bob waited with anticipation. There was a long pause.

"I forgot."

The moral of that story for the morning is that you can have the greatest vision in the world, but you better have the memory to go with it. We're talking about vision today. New Day has had a guiding vision from day one. It helps answer the questions, "Who are we?" and "What are we about?"

But a vision and values don't do you much good if you don't keep them fresh in your memory. That's especially true in a church because the group is always changing. How many of you were part of the initial group that started meeting over at OSBC? Not very many, because there weren't many of us. How many of you were here three years ago when we last did a series on our vision and values? Still not a majority.

With new people always coming in, we've got to keep the vision out in front so everyone knows what we're all about. Over the next few weeks, that's exactly what we're going to do. I'm excited about this series, because I still get fired up about the ideas we put on paper back when we were just a little band of about 15 adults.

We've made up some book marks that have the vision on one side and our core values on the other. This will give you our road map for the next couple months. Hopefully they will also serve as a reminder to be praying for New Day, that God will be helping us move toward our vision. This morning, we'll take a look at the New Day vision statement. Then in the following weeks, we'll look at seven core values we're striving to uphold as a church.

So what exactly is a vision? For our purposes, we could define it this way:

Vision: the finished picture we are bringing into reality.

I think of it as being kind of like on those crime shows where the police have a really grainy picture of the suspect taken by a surveillance camera. They say to their computer tech, "Can you zoom in on the face and enhance the resolution? Slowly, they work their magic and the once blurry photo becomes this crystal clear image that shows exactly what the person looks like.

We as a church are working toward a vision. Things might look blurry and messy right now. Parts of it might not be recognizable at all yet in what we do. But we are constantly moving in one direction, and over time, the vision becomes more and more evident. To have a vision means to be a work in progress, one where the dream has not yet been fully realized.

Now you may be here this morning thinking, "This is nice and all, but I don't really pay that much attention to the vision of the church. I mostly just want a place to come on Sunday mornings that I enjoy. Do we really even need to have this discussion?"

That's a good question. If most of us don't think about vision when we come to church, how useful is it? Well let me say off the bat that there's nothing sacred about the New Day vision. It's something that we made up ourselves, so it isn't perfect by any means. But it does serve a purpose, whether you're aware of it or not.

Did any of you see the pictures in the news this week of this Chinese ship? It's a giant freighter that is over two football fields long. It sailed to Australia and picked up 72,000 tons of coal and headed for home. But it never reached its destination.

Somehow or another, the ship drifted 7.5 miles off course. It was way outside the shipping lanes when it ran aground the Great Barrier Reef where it is now stuck. Experts are working feverishly to prevent it from turning into a major environmental disaster.

When we talk about vision, it is really like charting a course. That's what keeps us on track. That's what keeps us from just drifting. When churches drift, they get stuck in places where they are ineffective.

So here's the New Day vision statement:

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.

We want to see this church become a beacon of light and joy and love in this part of the world. When people who don't know Jesus walk through those doors, we want them to be thinking, "Something is going on here. These people are connecting with God in a real way." We want to blow away people's low expectations of church – not with how great we are, but with how evident it is that God is right here in our midst.

Now that's a big vision, and that's what we're trying to capture in these 28 words. What I'd like to do with our remaining time today is break this vision statement down phrase by phrase to unpack it a little more and see why it says what it does.

The very first words tell us our vision is **To build**. We are a church that will always be under construction. 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.

As long as a church is connected to Christ, Paul says by its very nature it will build itself up. I like the metaphor of building, because it's a reminder that the church is always going to be a work in progress. This side of eternity, we're never going to reach that point where we say, "We're all done!" Building is a process word.

We sometimes prefer the thought of a church that never changes. We want it to stay the way we like it. I've walked into plenty of churches that seem to have been frozen in some past era of time where they stopped changing. But church life was never intended to be static. We are "to build," meaning we are to grow and change, constantly becoming more Christlike. 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 where you go, "this place hasn't changed a bit."

So what is it we're maturing into? Our vision statement says we're seeking to build

A worshipping community

When it comes right down to it, a church is a group that loves God and loves each other. That's a powerful combination. When outsiders see a congregation genuinely worshipping and delighting in God, it's an unmatched experience. I remember being at a

Sunday night service at a church years ago. A young man came in off the street who had never been to church before. His name was Lonnie. He had super long, wild hair and I think an even longer drug habit, and this was a pretty sheltered congregation he happened to visit. But Lonnie was deeply moved during the worship time because he was exposed to something that was happening spiritually and he had no frame of reference for it.

A.W. Tozer once wrote, "I wish that we might get back to worship again. Then when people come into the church they will instantly sense they have come among holy people, God's people. They can testify, "Of a truth God is in this place."

That's what we want to be -- a congregation where God is made recognizable. That's what God wants of us as well:

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.

It would be easy to 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. We won't still be doing outreach. We won't be feeding the poor. The one function of this life that carries over into eternity is worship.

In our vision statement, we used the term "worshipping community." We're not just worshipping God individually in our own private way. There is this corporate piece to what we do. Our loving God is in the context of loving each other.

And to me, this has been one of the most exciting things to see happen at New Day. I hear people saying things like, "This church has really become my family." And that has been put to the test over and over as people have gone through different crises and felt the love of this church, done as an act of worship. It hasn't been planned or programmed – it just has happened spontaneously.

The Bedell family recently experienced some of that first hand, and I asked Bill if he would come and talk about how that had impacted him.

As you listened to Bill this morning, maybe you were thinking, "That's great for him, but nobody's been reaching out to me." Maybe you're feeling alone and that the church has let you down. And if that's the case, please forgive us. I'd ask you to do more than that, though. Would you let someone here know? It would be way easier if we always intuitively sensed when someone was hurting, but we don't always pick up on it. And 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 if you can muster the courage to speak up, I'm willing to bet that people here will respond overwhelmingly when they know you need help. So please ask for what you need. Because you'll be the one helping the church fulfill its vision.

The vision statement goes on to say that we want to see this community made up

Of all kinds of people

Annika found an old storybook to read with me the other day, with a story in it called “Wallpaper” by Cynthia Rylant. I’d like to read it for you here this morning.

Poppleton bought some wallpaper for his kitchen. He asked his friend Hudson to help him hang it.

“Sure,” said Hudson. Hudson came over on Saturday morning. Poppleton and Hudson put some glue on the back of the wallpaper. Then they tried to hang it on the wall.

“Hold up your side, Hudson,” said Poppleton.

“I am holding up my side,” said Hudson. Poppleton looked over at Hudson. Hmmm, thought Poppleton. Maybe I shouldn’t have asked a three-inch mouse to help hang wallpaper.

“I’ll call Fillmore to help us,” said Poppleton.

Fillmore came over to help. “Hold up your part, Fillmore,” said Poppleton. Poppleton looked over at Fillmore. Fillmore was chewing on the paper.

Hmmm, thought Poppleton. Maybe I shouldn’t have asked a goat to help hang wallpaper.

“I’ll call Cherry Sue to help us,” said Poppleton.

Cherry Sue came over to help. “Hold up your part, Cherry Sue,” said Poppleton. Poppleton looked over at Cherry Sue. Cherry Sue was stuck to the glue. Hmmm, thought Poppleton. Maybe I shouldn’t have asked a llama to help hang wallpaper.

How can I hang wallpaper,” Poppleton complained to them all, “when Hudson is a mouse, and Fillmore is a goat and Cherry Sue is a llama!”

The three friends looked at Poppleton. “Oh dear,” said Poppleton, ashamed. “I can stand on a ladder,” said Hudson.

“I can eat a big breakfast first,” said Fillmore.

“I can get a haircut,” said Cherry Sue.

Poppleton looked at his three dear friends. Such good friends. “And I can take you all out for ice cream!” said Poppleton. Which he did. On the way back home, Poppleton traded the wallpaper for some paint.

His friends were the three finest painters in town.

I have always loved that story. Because that's how church should be – not trying to force people into some pre-planned agenda, but to recognize people's differences and values them. Then we can seek to find how God can use all this variety to accomplish something we may never have imagined on our own. 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.

It's this picture of all types of people from all kinds of places, standing together as one to sing praises to God. If that's what it's going to be like in eternity, we better practice rubbing shoulders with lots of kinds of people here and now.

I am well aware that the New Day style 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 holding the door open as wide as possible so that everyone feels welcome, regardless of background or age or color or 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.

Choosing to act in such intentional ways is why our vision statement says this will be a community

That will be a living testimony

One of my favorite quotes that I have shared with you before is from the diplomat, Ralph Bunche. He said, "If you want to get across an idea, wrap it up in a person."

Changed lives speak way louder than words. People don't want to just hear that God loves them – they want to see it translate into the way someone treats them. That has always been the role of the church in the world, to be the primary evidence of God's activity in the world, to be the witnesses who stand up and say, "Christ is real and here's what he's done for me."

That's what Jesus coming was all about – putting flesh and bones on the word of God. And Jesus didn't write a book that he left behind as his legacy – he left people. And he told them this:

Acts 1:8

But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.

If we're witnesses, that means there has to be someone else to witness to. By calling the church to be a living testimony, we are reminding ourselves that church can never be just about the people who are already here. There's an outward component woven into the very fabric of our existence.

It's easy for churches to forget that. If we don't keep the vision in front of us, we slip from mission to maintenance, focusing more on our own needs and less on what our lives are telling the outside world about who Jesus is.

We are living testimony. And in our vision statement, we highlight that the testimony is

To the power of the gospel and the reality of God's kingdom

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.

This is it. That's the only place where the power is. As Peter said in the book of Acts, there is no other name that saves us. It's Jesus and nothing else.

If I'm being completely honest with you, I don't think when we started New Day that I fully grasped how much that was true. Deep down, I secretly believed I had a bit of my own power. I was going to be a different kind of pastor, one who said just the right things that would be THE key to people turning their lives around. I would be so insightful, so brilliant yet approachable that people would instantly see their need for God.

It didn't take me too long to learn just how powerless I was to change anyone's mind or rescue them from their problems. Any notion I had of my own abilities to fix or save somebody went out the window. Only the Holy Spirit can bring the message of Jesus to bear on someone's life with all its transformative power. But when we get out of the way and he does that, it is an awesome thing to watch. We are here to point to the power of the gospel.

We also point to the reality of God's kingdom. That word kingdom makes an important difference in this statement, for two reasons.

First, **God is bigger than the church.** We're not building a little empire for New Day, trying to make our name for ourselves. If our vision statement is all about us, then our purpose becomes wrapped up in maintaining the strength of the church. That leads to a

church being fearful and self-absorbed. Everything will revolve around keeping the institution 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 one small expression of God's rule in the world. That means we are free to support what is good for God's kingdom, even things that look like they don't do anything for New Day. We can be excited about what God is doing outside these walls. There's a freedom in not having to compare ourselves to other churches or ministries, because we are not competing – we are working together.

I think I've shared before about a church in the south of England that Tom Parks told me about. One Sunday, the pastor mentioned in his sermon that if God ever called somebody from their congregation to go and serve as a full-time missionary in a foreign country, 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 having a kingdom vision. In terms of self-preservation, it made no sense for that little congregation to send all that money overseas. They risked not having enough for their own needs. But they knew that God's kingdom was bigger than their survival. So they stepped out in faith, and God honored their obedience.

God and his work are bigger than the church. Secondly, **reality is bigger than what we can see**. 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 world feels like it is all that there is. The pressures are so intense, the distractions are so fun, the fatigue is so overwhelming. Who has the energy to get through a day, let alone remember that there's something more beyond?

They say that during the civil war, when soldiers would be fighting in the smoke of battle, things would get incredibly chaotic and disorienting. Sometimes even the enemy uniforms were hard to tell apart and you couldn't tell friend from foe. So the flag became incredibly important. The color guard would hold it up high so the troops could see it. It would give them a sense of direction and serve to remind them of something bigger that they were fighting for.

That's the role of the church in the world – to hold up the flag of the kingdom, to stand courageously in the chaos and say “This is not all there is. God is at work beyond what we can see, and what he is doing matters.”

As you think about the vision we've outlined this morning, ask yourself, “Which piece of it resonates with me?” Because this statement isn't for some abstract group somewhere – it's for all of us. How am I doing at applying it in the way I live my own life? Am I wrapping up this idea in a person?

Secondly, what is my role in helping New Day build itself up toward this vision? The verse we read this morning said the church only builds itself up as each part does its work. What work might God be inviting me to join him in?

1 Corinthians tells us

1 Corinthians 4:20

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

That's the real vision – to be a church that doesn't just talk about God, but that lives in the middle of his power. We don't want to waste time on just words – we want to see and know God's presence among us.

Christ is building his church. The vision is huge and our mission is urgent. My prayer is that these next few weeks will about more than memorizing a bunch of values. May God recapture our hearts and fan the flame in us so we will burn more brightly for him than ever before.