



## **VISION SUNDAY** - Small is the New Big

**A mission is a task. A vision is how you accomplish the task. That's all appealing to goal oriented people — missions and tasks and things to do, boxes to mark off. But the first thing we need to realize about the church's mission and vision is that they are very personal, meaning they are both all about people.**

### **John 20:21**

**21** Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you."

God calls us personally and He calls us personally together. Church life should be very personal. The mission of the church as well should be very personal, because we are sent to personalities.

The gospel is very personal. It's specific. Jesus didn't die for a general mass of humanity. He died for specific personalities. The Father has personal love for every single one.

For any church to have a vision, it has to be a God-given vision. So, the first thing about our vision is that it's personal.

And God has personally given me a grand vision for small. Small is the new big. Did this come by way of a dream? Did the Holy Spirit speak to me audibly? No, it came by way of statistics. God used statistics. But we'll get to that.

Now, to engage in the mission and vision there must be a call.

## Acts 13:2-3

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.

Now, I can say with utmost confidence that I am called to be a preaching pastor.

Secondly, I can also say with confidence that this church was birthed by God answering prayer. "What are we to do now, Lord?" The answer came in the form of the Word of God coming to mind.

## 1 Peter 5:2 New Living Translation (NLT)

2 Care for the flock that God has entrusted to you. Watch over it willingly, not grudgingly—not for what you will get out of it, but because you are eager to serve God.

## Psalms 119:105 King James Version (KJV)

105 Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path.

- The theme for 2017 is the Word of God.

## Acts 16:10

10 And when Paul had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go on into Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them.

So, based upon the circumstances, they concluded that God had called them to Macedonia.

## Acts 8:4

4 Now those who were scattered went about preaching the word.

Along those same lines, based upon the answer to prayer and the rest of the circumstances, I know we're supposed to be here. God has personally put us here.

Now, we know our mission: to make disciples and then train disciples.

## Matthew 28:18-20

18 And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 19 Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

The question becomes, "How do we go about doing that in the day and age we live now?" Because there is no blueprint, there is no detailed layout, but there are examples of

those who have gone before us, such as the Apostle Paul.

It has been noted that the interesting thing about studying the life and missionary work of the Apostle Paul is that Paul did not learn a foreign language to do his missionary work. (You all qualify.)

He only used the languages he already knew — Greek, Aramaic and Latin.

Moreover, Paul did not go to a foreign land to be a missionary. (You all qualify.) Except for his time alone in the desert of Arabia, he was born, lived, and died in the confines of the Roman Empire. He he did not have to learn a foreign culture.

In a very real sense, therefore, the Apostle Paul was a home missionary. (You all qualify.) Though a Hebrew of the Hebrews, he was a Roman citizen, and his mission was to plant churches all over his own land, the Roman Empire.

His goal did not seem to be planting a church that would become big and important in and of itself, but planting a church that would start new churches in the areas around it.

By God's grace we have been a self-sustaining church since our first service last Easter. On Christmas we had a total of 109 adults and children together. On New Year's Day we had 62 adults. And that's our average fluctuation in attendance. Yet, I feel completely encouraged. I feel utterly content, even though we don't have a drummer.

Now, clearly, those numbers tell you that no one is begging me to share my secrets of success at church conferences around the country.

However, before I explain what has led to this peace in my soul, let me paint the landscape before us.

I think the church as confused marketing and mission.

### **Marketing vs. Mission**

At the 2015 Gospel Coalition Conference, author and pastor Timothy Keller said, **"In the past we have known... that great preaching and great music and great youth ministry are all ways of gathering a crowd and you can grow your church a lot faster by focusing on**

**those things."** He went on to say that we have looked to marketing rather than evangelism to grow our churches.

**There's is a subtle emphasis in most of the emails I receive about church leadership. The emphasis is on how to grow your church. Not on how to win people to Christ, but how to grow. That's the subtle message is — you can grow without actually winning people to Christ.**

This is why at church conferences in America the speakers are always from the largest churches, because numbers indicate success. This conference emphasis has created inferiority complexes in many (if not most) small churches. That is often why most church planters and church attenders dream of growing large. It's validation that you matter as a church. We all want to be part of a great work that God will do... someday. Someday... not now obviously, because we're just small and insignificant. But God will use us someday.

This mentality fosters discontentment.

- **The Redland's Church Event**

**“The church, as an outpost of the Kingdom of God, inexplicably effective because of the presence and power of God has been refabricated into another ‘business enterprise.’ This, in turn, has rendered the church as one more institution shaped by the culture in the name of relevance.”**

### **The Someday Church**

If you're like me, human, then most likely your thinking has been along the lines of, “Someday our church will be...” and then you dream about those future days of what God will do at our church.

Personally, I believe the glory days of our church are right here and right now.

Here's why.

### **The Methods of the Mission**

There is little debate among churches that believe the gospel that the mission Jesus has given the church is to make disciples. Not that doing things with excellence isn't important, but a marketing mentality has captured our concern.

I believe this mindset is prevalent in churches of all sizes. The point is this —

### **Great Commission Churches Should be the Norm**

So, in theory we're here to bring people from darkness to light. But I fear the church at large is preoccupied with something other than the Great Commission. We seem more interested in the Great Platform, attracting and keeping an audience.

- ***The average life of a church and why new churches are good for older churches***

We are here for this grand work of making Christ known. We want to grow in our understanding of the gospel and grow in our faith *in* the gospel so that we might *share* the gospel. We are completely focused on Great Commission goals.

- ***This grand vision depends completely upon our vision of Jesus. That's what I mean about growing in our understanding of the gospel. It's about a growing understanding of what Jesus has done for you personally. How He cares for you personally. How He wants to carry your burdens so you don't have to. How***

***He wants you to understand He loves you as much in times of trouble as in times of happiness. How He wants to bind up your wounds and heal your broken heart. When you believe in that Jesus and experience that Jesus, you can't help but give yourself to the mission He's given the church.***

### **The Grand Vision of Small Goals**

Our immediate goals are to win 32 people to Christ in the next five years and plant our first church within our first five years.

**So, far God has used us to win four people to Christ. One moved away, so I'm not counting her. We have won 3 people to Christ, but only 2 have been baptized. My hope and prayer is the 3rd one will be baptized, because that is the first step in a life of following Jesus.**

Why 32 people? And in five years? That's not really a grand vision is it? There's no inspirational book in those numbers.

Well, I beg to differ.

### **How Statistics Changed My Life**

Lifeway research did a study into church size and effectiveness. One of the studies

reported, "The stats tell us that ten smaller churches of 100 people will accomplish much more than one church of 1000."

#### **• Leaving for the better youth group**

The study went on to say that our soil as a smaller church is actually more fertile for planting another church. What's even more incredible is what the studies say about our potential for reaching people for Christ.

"Churches in the smallest size category (under 100 in attendance) had won an average of 32 new people over the past five years; churches with 100-200 in worship also won 32; churches between 200-300 average 39 new individuals; churches between 300-400 won 25. So a 'small' church wins just as many people for Christ as a 'large' one, and what's more, two churches with 200 in worship on Sunday will win twice as many new people as one church with 400 in attendance."

To me, that's even more motivation to plant another church. I always thought we had to grow larger than 60 to 70 people before we could start talking about planting another

church. Not anymore. Hats off to the statisticians.

### **The Effective Small Church**

Ultimately, God will determine how large we grow. The point is that we don't have to wait until we're a large church to be an effective church. We can be an effective church now. We don't have to dream about the glory days of the future because we are in the midst of our glory days right now.

Christian Schwarz did a study that “found that the average growth rate in smaller churches was 13% (over five years), whereas in larger churches it was a mere 3%.” God is using smaller churches right now as much as He is using larger churches. But this isn't the prevailing mindset in broad evangelicalism because it's not an attractive marketing pitch. Small means small sales. Big means big sales. Big sells better. Is that too crass a way of putting it? Maybe. But is there no truth to it?

Look at these stats: “A small church in the NCD sample with an average attendance of fifty-one typically converted thirty-two persons in five years; megachurches in the NCD sample averaged 2,856 in attendance

but converted only 112 new persons in five years.”

It's not that the Lord doesn't use large churches, but He uses small churches just as mightily. He Himself tells us that “by the power that is working within us” He is “able to do far beyond all that we ask or think.”

Far beyond **all** that we ask or think.

- **The ultimate goal is 10 churches of 100 people**

### **How to be Content with Your Church Now**

The point of all of this is that we are a significant church right now because the gospel is always significant. The significance of the gospel doesn't increase or decrease based upon church size.

## **Acts 16:14**

**14** One who heard us was a woman named Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple goods, who was a worshiper of God. The Lord opened her heart to pay attention to what was said by Paul.

**They immediately spoke about the gospel. There is no “win respect then share” strategy**

here (i.e., “relational evangelism”). They sowed widely. Lydia happened to respond and showed that God was working in her. So they followed up with her.

Don't wait for people to like you before you start demonstrating and declaring the gospel to them. We're simply looking for people who are open to the gospel and the only way we find out if there open to the gospel is by bringing the gospel up.

Sow widely, then focus on the responsive people.

- Invite Your One - this strategy is simply about demonstrating visually that inviting people to church works.

## **Philippians 4:15-17**

15 And you Philippians yourselves know that in the beginning of the gospel, when I left Macedonia, no church entered into partnership with me in giving and receiving, except you only.

As Paul was going around starting churches and training disciples, they supported Paul financially along with some of these other churches. Today, this would be equivalent to

having a church planting fund where we support other new churches.

Since missions is dear to the heart of God, God will surely bless those churches which actively help plant more churches (Philippians 4:19).

Paul understood that, most importantly, planting churches means reaching people.