

Title: Endless Possibilities in 2024!

Text: Proverbs 29:18 and various

Zig Ziglar, the famous salesman, once said, "If you aim at nothing, you hit it every time."

Wayne Gretzky said, "You miss 100% of the shots you don't take."

In 1374, Chaucer said, "Nothing Ventured, Nothing Gained."

Two weeks ago, we had the opportunity to lay out and praise God for what he has done over the past year in 2023. I cataloged for you many things that God has done. We're just so encouraged by how God has moved in our midst over the past year. But I also told you that this week, we would be spending time looking toward the future. I can't see into the future; that's not my ability. But God does give us a vision. I want to talk to you about that today- a vision for the future.

Prophetic Vision

Proverbs 29:18 says, *"Where there is no prophetic vision the people cast off restraint, but blessed is he who keeps the law."*

The idea here for us is to recognize the necessity of having a vision. To look forward to what God is going to do...

Two weeks ago, we strategically looked back. We see God doing that all the time in the Bible, don't we? We see him looking back, and as we read the Scriptures, we can see promise after promise coming true. What does that do?

Gives us hope for the future. It helps us to trust that the God who fulfilled His promises in the past is the same God who will fulfill his promises in the future. This is my go-to verse for looking forward to the future.

I think it's very important that we look at this word "prophetic" vision. The ESV and the NASB both use that word. Prophetic means God speaking through a prophet. It's not just any vision that we have. Certainly, there were visions in the Old Testament that didn't stand up to God's standard.

They weren't from God, and they fell, and those who claimed their prophecies were from God and didn't come true were stoned! Prophetic vision is important, amen?

We want to do what God wants us to do, not just what Mark thinks is fancy or what the elders think is neat. We want to be very careful that it is a prophetic vision.

But without a word from God, according to this passage, restraint is cast off. It leads to rebellion. As believers in Jesus Christ, we want to avoid rebellion at all costs.

God Sees Clearly

Having said that, what does the future hold for us? The reality is that we see dimly. We cannot look into the future and see what is coming. Many people claim that they can see what is coming, but we don't know.

We might have some thoughts, but we don't know for sure. The God we serve sees clearly. We navigate through the fog. We can't see around the bend. None of us know what the rest of this day holds!

Some of us might see the Lord by the end of the day. Some of us in this year may contract cancer, and some of us may face financial ruin. Some may do fantastically in a business venture. We don't know. We can't see through the fog, but God sees clearly.

We have a God whose vision cuts through the fog. He has a firm grasp on the future because He's there!

He's the God not only of the past but of the present and the future. And for those of us who are Christians, that should give us some measure of Hope this morning.

While we dimly see what is coming in the future, we have a God who is sovereignly there; He is providentially working.

It is astounding to see God working to bring about His will. To do what He wills for His glory and for His children's good. **His prophetic vision is revealed to us in the Bible.**

Even though we see dimly, we have a God who has revealed to us His vision, and we are wise to soak our minds in the texts of Scripture so that we can, as best we can, see clearly into the future.

What Should We Pursue?

So what does the future hold? What does God want us, at Allendale Baptist Church, to pursue in the year 2024?

Should we pursue money? Should that be our driving force? If so, we will fall into pragmatism. And we will do whatever we need to do to raise money to maybe work on an extension to our new building.

We can shed off the prophetic vision for the pragmatic if we're not careful.

That will allow us to do whatever we need to do to get where we think we need to go. The ends justify the means. We must be very careful to stick to a **prophetic** vision, not a **pragmatic** one.

So, should we pursue money? Should we pursue more buildings? These are not bad things.

Should we pursue organization, administration, or perspiration? After all, hard work and perspiration are one of the things we value. We want to work hard for God's glory. Should we pursue these things? Are these things evil in and of themselves?

We can pursue these things, but we need to pursue So. Much. More.

Prophetic Vision = God's Word

What does God want us to pursue in 2024? He wants us to pursue a **prophetic** vision. He wants us to be faithfully obedient to what He has revealed to us in His word.

Prophetic vision- we don't have prophets coming around to us today saying, *"Thus sayeth the Lord"*. We don't have that, but what we do have is the prophetic Word of God.

Peter tells us that we have everything that pertains to life and godliness found right here in this text of Scripture. So that means we need to be diligent in studying to show ourselves approved, rightly dividing the word of truth.

Do not be ashamed! Applying that prophetic vision from the Word of God to our lives individually and corporately is crucial. We need to be careful about that. That application requires faithful obedience.

We need to be faithfully obedient to what God has revealed in His Word. We see this throughout the Scriptures, throughout the whole Bible.

Deuteronomy 28:2 says, *"All these blessings shall come upon you and overtake you, if you obey the voice of the Lord your God."*

Have you ever been overwhelmed by the blessings of God? You will be if you obey the voice of the Lord your God. This is a theme all the way back to the beginning of the Scriptures.

Psalm 1:1-2 *"Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers; but his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law he meditates day and night"*

The promise is that he will succeed. It's a marvelous promise of God.

John 14:23 says that if we love Jesus, we will keep His word. We will be faithfully obedient to His Word. Jesus' brother James says, **"But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving**

yourselves” (James 1:22). We don’t just hear the word but are faithfully obedient to do what He says.

If God has taken the time over some 1500 years to pen His Scriptures and preserve His word in marvelous, mind-boggling, and breathtaking ways, how dare we have apathy to our time in the Word of God? We need to saturate our minds in His truth, not just as individuals but corporately.

We need to be doers of the Word and not hearers only. We need to do what it says. We need to be very careful.

In *2 Timothy 4:3* there is a prophecy about what will take place in the end times. It says, *“For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions”*.

As a preacher of the Word of God, can I tell you? In my flesh it is very tempting to preach what you want to hear. It is very tempting to stand before you and say things that will make us all feel warm and fuzzy, so that you’ll like me more. I struggle with that, quite frankly. But I don’t want to be named among those people that itch your ears!

We need to preach what the Word of God says! We need to be very, very careful to pursue a prophetic vision. He does not want our focus on having our ears scratched. Telling us, *“All is well, don’t worry, live however you want to live, and all is well”*. No, we need to preach the truth, and we need to be faithfully obedient to the truth, even when it’s a challenge. It will be hard. It will be tremendously hard.

But the promise is that if we faithfully obey His Word, we will be blessed! Just by doing what God tells us to do.

We are protected. We grow.

Now, It’s not a guarantee that we won’t fall into trials, but God’s Word addresses even that! *James 1:2-3* says, *“Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness”*. God’s Word challenges us to obey, but He gives us the mandate to be obedient for our good. Just like you as a parent, if you are a parent, give mandates to your children for their good.

2023 Vision “Look What God Has Done”

In 2023 we focused on Prayer – *“A Praying Church is a Powerful Church.”* Now, I don’t want you to get the idea that now we move onto the next portion of our vision and forget about prayer. We don’t want to do that. We stack these up over the years.

So this past year, we've seen evidence of people stepping up to the plate of prayer. We've seen it specifically in our Connection Group Ministry, where people always pray for one another! That's what needs to happen. We need to Pray for one another like it is second nature.

We also saw it take place through our DFH initiative. Give examples...

That was our focus last year. But what about this year?

2024 Holds A Three-Fold Vision

In 2024, what should our focus be? Well, if it's a prophetic vision, then we'd better get it from the Word of God, and not Mark's brain, right?

There are three areas of focus we need to press ahead in. These are based on our values as a church community.

Worship (First Half of 2024)

Goal: Develop A Heart That Longs for God - Deepen the congregation's understanding and practice of worship.

1. **Humility:** Humility is fundamental in worship, as it acknowledges God's supreme authority and our dependency on Him. It involves recognizing our limitations and faults, and understanding our need for God's grace. A humble approach to worship allows believers to fully appreciate the greatness of God and their own need for His guidance and mercy.
 - **Philippians 2:3:** *"Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility, value others above yourselves."*
 - **James 4:6:** *"But He gives more grace. Therefore it says, 'God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble.'"*
2. **Reverence:** This is a deep respect and awe for God. Worship should be approached with an attitude that honors God's holiness and majesty. Reverence involves recognizing God's place as the creator and sustainer of all things and responding to Him with the respect He deserves. This attitude helps maintain the sanctity of the worship experience, ensuring it is not treated casually or disrespectfully.
 - **Hebrews 12:28-29:** *"Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe, for our 'God is a consuming fire.'"*

- **Psalm 96:9:** *"Worship the Lord in the splendor of holiness; tremble before Him, all the earth."*
3. **Expectancy and Openness:** Entering worship with an expectant heart and an open mind is vital. This means being receptive to what God might communicate during worship, whether through scripture, music, prayer, or preaching. Expectancy is linked to faith and hope – believing that God is present and active, and anticipating that worship will be a transformative experience. Openness allows individuals to be sensitive to the Holy Spirit's guidance, to embrace new insights, and to be willing to change according to God's will.
- **Jeremiah 29:13:** *"You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart."*
 - **Matthew 7:7:** *"Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened to you."*

These attitudes are integral to creating a worship environment where individuals can genuinely connect with God, grow in their faith, and be part of a community that seeks to honor God in thought, word, and deed.

Our earnest hope as elders is that you will DRIVE WORSHIP HOME.

In other words, this room isn't the only place you will worship. You will worship in your home, at your table, and throughout everything you do!

As the temple of the Holy Spirit, you will be walking, breathing, living worshipers. And you will train the next generation to do the same.

Missions (Second Half of 2024)

Goal: Making Missions Family Friendly - Cultivate a heart for missions within the congregation.

I'd invite you to turn to Acts 16, because this particular chapter has spoken to me and I want to share this with you as we look to the vision of 2023.

So in Acts 16, and our focus is really on verses 9-10,

Acts 16:9–10 (ESV)

⁹And a vision appeared to Paul in the night: a man of Macedonia was standing there, urging him and saying, "Come over to Macedonia and help us." ¹⁰And 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.

There are some observations I'd like you to notice.

First of all, Paul received a vision from the Lord. He was the passive recipient of a vision from the Lord. This was the same type of situation that we see in the penning of Scriptures. 1 Peter says that holy men of God were carried along by the Holy Spirit as they wrote the Scriptures.

The vision was a redirection of place, but not of purpose. God said, *"I want you to go here"*. Paul had something else in mind, but God said, *"I want you to go here."* His purpose did not change.

This was the second missionary journey. Paul was intending to go to Galatia, but God forbade him to go there. He was speaking to Paul in a vision through the man of Macedonia. He was to go to Troas, over to Neopolus, and over to Philippi.

The vision was a redirection. The text says that the man was urging him and saying, *"Come to Macedonia and help us."* That's an interesting phrase. I'd encourage you to underline the words, "Help us" in your text. For the reader, this really begs the question, what kind of help was the man asking for? What did he want?

When I come to you and say, "I need your help", typically there's some sort of service involved. *"Hey Dave VanEnk, (Dave's a carpenter) can you help me build a wall?" "Hey so-and-so, my tire is flat. Can you help me?" or "I'm out of food, can you help me?"* There's this idea of service involved with the word help. I think it's very interesting that we need to ask this question, "What does he mean by help?"

You see, God was leading Paul, through this vision, to help (to save) the people of Macedonia. God is the great missionary. Paul is not the great missionary. Peter wasn't the great missionary. You and I aren't the great missionaries.

The Power Behind Missions - God is the Great Missionary

Have you thought about that? God is on a mission to save people. And He is choosing to use His church to accomplish that mission. He wants to use his people as tools in His sovereign hand to reach people for Jesus Christ.

John 6:44. Who is the active agent here? God the Father. God is the active agent. Acts 13:48 says that those who come to know Christ have been appointed to eternal life by God. He is the active agent. God is the great missionary. God desires for people to come to know Him. God was preparing people to be saved, and he was leading the one carrying the message. The

Apostle Paul was being led by God. And God is still doing this today, folks. He's not out of business.

Sometimes, when we look around and see the terrible things happening in our world, we think, "Well, where is God in all of this?" He's quietly being the great missionary that He is. Leading people to Jesus Christ.

We heard not too long ago the scores of thousands of Muslims coming to faith in Jesus Christ. We don't hear that in the news, but it's happening. God is the great missionary. He is working quietly behind the scenes using His people to lead countless to salvation.

"This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth" (1 Timothy 2:3-4).

God isn't playing a shell game with people. He's not messing with people. "I'm gonna fake you out!" No! According to this passage, He desires all people to know his truth.

There's one last thing I want you to see in this passage. We've already alluded to it. In verse 9, the man is asking for help. In verse 10, we see the kind of help that they need. *"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" (Acts 16:10).*

You see, the gospel is why Paul was sent to help those in Macedonia. He wasn't sent to change their tire, he wasn't sent to feed them, or to do any of that. He was sent for a very specific help, and that help was the gospel. He was to preach the gospel to those in Macedonia. And that was exactly what he did.

A Powerful Example of Missions

Paul is a marvelous example for us, of tenacious, dogged determinism. He cannot be stopped. He is the energizer bunny of the apostles. If we're not careful, we can be tempted to think, *"Oh, I could never be like him."* But with the power of the Holy Spirit coursing through us, we can be faithfully obedient, just like the Apostle Paul was. Sensitive to the prophetic word that God has given us. That was exactly what he did.

If you look at the text, I want to go a little bit farther with you in the chapter. *"One who heard us was a woman named Lydia, from 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" (Acts 16:14).*

The Lord opened Lydia's heart. I think that's a verse you should underline in your Bible. I think that verse should give you some encouragement on a couple different fronts. Who opened Lydia's heart? Did she open her heart? The Lord opened her heart. The text of Scripture says

that the Lord opened her heart and she was receptive to the message of the gospel. Who spoke the message? Paul. The Apostle Paul. He was faithful and obedient to the vision, the prophetic vision from the Lord, and instead of going to Asia and the places that he thought he should go, he went, and followed the vision from the Lord, and obeyed, and ended up in Philippi, and ran into Lydia. God opened up her heart, because the Apostle Paul proclaimed the message.

Do you see the divine-human cooperative here, folks? Did God need to work with the Apostle Paul? If God wants to save Lydia, does he need to use the Apostle Paul? The answer is, “No.” But He chose to use the obedience of the Apostle Paul, through the message of the gospel, to open the heart of Lydia. The divine-human cooperative.

And so, in the second half of the year, we plan to focus on Missions. We want to DRIVE a MISSIONAL FAITH HOME!

We want the families of our church to think, pray, understand and live out MISSIONS!

What if a family adopted a missionary and prayed for them and wrote to them regularly?

What if families from our church, instead of going to Disney, went on a missions trip to visit one of our missionaries to help them in their work?

What if we as a church got even better at supporting and encouraging our missionaries? Not simply financially, but relationally?

We see ourselves becoming a church that engages in Faith Promise Giving – Stay tuned!

That is just a portion of our home and vision for missions.

Discipleship (Throughout 2024)

The 3rd component of the vision for this year is unleashing Pastor Larry to do what he does best. Train us on how best to make disciples who, in turn, make disciples.

Simply stated, we must be excellent at this. All of us! Each one! No exceptions. If you name Christ as your savior, you are, by default, a disciple, and a disciple-maker. Period.

After all, making disciples is at the top of God’s priority list.

Matthew 28:18–20 (ESV)

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.”*

God has brought Pastor Larry to us to help train us in this important task.

He has been doing this effectively for the last 35 years. We are so blessed to have someone of his experience and caliber join our staff.

Of course, there are many ways discipleship can be accomplished. One of Pastor Larry's main focuses for this year is building on our already established small group ministry. We call these Connection Groups. Pastor Larry plans to start more groups and hone in on encouraging groups to be excellent at the "One Another's" and Disciple-Making.

He calls it "**Prayer, Care, and Share.**" I'm very excited to see this ministry propel us from being a church that does small groups to a church OF small groups. Like cells make up a body, so small groups will make up this local body of Christ.

Of course, Pastor Larry will be working on other things as well, but I see him making great strides forward in this area in 2024.

Remember what I have been preaching to you for the last 10 years?

Ephesians 4:11–16 (ESV)

¹¹ And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, ¹² to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, ¹³ until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, ¹⁴ so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. ¹⁵ Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, ¹⁶ from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.

Throughout this coming year, our vision, our hope, is that these three areas – Worship, Missions, and Discipleship will permeate our thinking and transform our hearts and lives.

I see great things ahead for ABC. I see God moving in astonishing ways over the course of 2024.

But it will require your participation.

Will you purpose in growing in...

WORSHIP?

MISSIONS?

DISCIPLESHIP?

I wonder what God might do with a congregation committed to growing in these three areas.

I suspect a great deal! More than we can think or imagine!

Let's pray that he does!

Because the POSSIBILITIES WITH GOD ARE ENDLESS!