

The Year Ahead

Title: **“From Friendly to Focused”**

January 3, 2016

OBJECTIVE: To encourage the church to be focused on reaching people for Christ and helping believers grow in their faith.

Opening prayer

2015 has been a year of tremendous blessing for CDOBC. The most obvious blessing is the multi-million-dollar donation and the pledges you have given to build out our campus so we can have a great Gospel impact in NW Tucson and beyond.

But God has blessed in so many other ways also!

Salvations

Baptisms

Youth Ministry has brought the Gospel to Jr. High and Sr. High students and spiritual decisions have been made as a result of weekly ministry and various camps throughout the year and other trips. Their mission trip to Puerto Rico not only shared the Gospel with those in Puerto Rico, but also touched the lives of those who served on the trip.

Children’s Ministry has made a Gospel impact through weekly Sunday School and AWANA as God’s Word has been committed to memory by the kids and they’ve had a great time each Wednesday night.

VBS had another great year of fun and a focus on Christ. S.S. had another healthy year and our Small Groups have grown.

Sr. Adult Ministry had a great year as they have impacted people's lives through the Gospel.

As wonderful as 2015 has been, we cannot live looking back – we must look forward to the road ahead.

As good as 2015 has been – I'm not content with the impact and ministry of our church, because I'm confident God wants to use us in greater ways in this New Year and the years to come.

We must be ready to face the new opportunities God is bringing before us!

The blessings of God bring us more responsibility – more work – more opportunity to impact more people with the Gospel of Jesus Christ!

I want to commend you for something I hear often. I've been the pastor of this church for the past 15+ years – and for the past 15 years I've heard comments from people – mostly guests – who praise all of you for being very friendly and warm.

I think this is a wonderful reality. Being a friendly church speaks to a level of grace that is in operation here – and a

friendly church is certainly better than a church which is unfriendly!

However, here's my problem – my struggle with our friendliness. To be clear, my problem is not with our friendliness...but our friendliness seems to be prominent – and it seems to be the goal. My problem is Jesus calls the church to things which are so much more important than being friendly!

We must be friendly with a focus!

Of course, Jesus wants us to be friendly – but His *greater desire* is for us to be focused on the mission He gave us. To be sure, focus on the mission requires us to be genuinely friendly – but friendliness is not the mission!

What's the mission?

Matt. 28:19-20

“Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”

The Mission of CDOBC – a restatement of the Great Commission:

We are committed to reaching people for Christ and helping them grow in their faith.

So why is it so difficult to stay “on mission” and “on vision”?

Why are we so easily distracted from the mission – and so willing to busy ourselves with so many other “good” things – which don’t really contribute to our divinely-given mission? I’m not sure I can answer that question with a specific list of reasons.

But I do know this...organizations, groups – and the church is no exception to this:

We often make the *simple* things *complicated*.

For some reason, maybe it’s in part due to our sinful nature – but we gravitate toward complexity – *especially unnecessary complexity*.

This has always been the case. In Acts 15:19, we read of James telling the leaders of the early church:

“It is my judgment, therefore, that we should not make it difficult for the Gentiles who are turning to God.”

In the Church’s first years of existence, there was already a tendency to make things more difficult than they were supposed to be!

In the coming years, we will work at bringing more clarity to our ministry. I want all of you to be very clear on how we reach people for Christ and how we help them grow in their faith.

All of us need to know the purpose/mission, but also the process of how the mission is fulfilled.

Worship Services:

Our worship services are where people meet God. For some that means being introduced to Him for the very first time – for others, it’s meeting God as they have for decades. This is normally when we are able to reach someone with the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

S.S. and Small Groups:

S.S. and Small Groups allow people to connect with each other, and they are the best environment for spiritual growth to occur.

Spiritual life begins when a person puts their faith in Christ, but their spiritual growth occurs when they join other Christians in reading God’s Word.

Service / Ministry

Serving in a ministry is a vital part of the process of spiritual growth. Once someone is connected to a S.S. or Small Group, they will have opportunity to serve.

Serving others deepens your spiritual understanding – and allows you the opportunity to share Christ with unbelievers.

These 3 things: Worship Services / S.S. or Small Groups / Serving are the ways we: *Reach people for Christ and help them grow in their faith.*

Let’s make sure we keep things simple – clear – easy to understand.

Complexity makes the Gospel shrink as it gets lost in the mess and confusion of complexity. As James said, let's make sure we aren't making it difficult for people to know the Gospel and to put their faith in Christ.

We must resist complexity – especially unnecessary complexity.

This morning, I want to make sure the process is clear for everyone, but I also want to make sure we don't lose our focus on the mission.

I want us to strive and focus our hearts and minds on what Jesus has called us to: Proclaiming the Gospel to those we know (those in our circle) – and teaching the commands of Jesus so believers can grow in their faith.

Turn with me to **1 Corinthians 9:19-23**

In this passage, the Apostle Paul is sharing his strategy and motive for ministry.

1 Corinthians 9:19-23

“Though I am free and belong to no man, I make myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible. **20** To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law (*though I myself am not under the law*), so as to win those under the law. **21** To those not having the law I became like one not having the law (*though I am not free from God's law but am under Christ's law*), so as to win those not having the law. **22** To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some. **23** I do all this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings.”

Before we look at his strategy and motive for ministry, let's ask an important question:

Is Paul's strategy and motive – his focus on bringing the gospel to the unsaved unique for him – or is it something we should be doing?

He answers this question in the next chapter:

1 Corinthians 10:31-11:1

“So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God. 32 Do not cause anyone to stumble, whether Jews, Greeks or the church of God -- 33 even as I try to please everybody in every way. For I am not seeking my own good but the good of many, so that they may be saved.

1 Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ.”

Question: Is this just for Paul...or is it for us also?

Answer: It's for us also...

“...whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God” (vs. 31- Imperative)

“Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ.” (11:1- Imperative)

Clearly, Paul is commanding us to follow his example in ministry – because he is following the example of Christ.

Jesus said of His own ministry:

Luke 19:10

“For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost.”

John 3:17

“For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through Him.”

So...Paul is commanding us to follow his example of ministry – for he is following the example of Jesus' ministry.

So...let's go back to 1 Cor. 9 – and look at the strategy and motive of Paul.

What was Paul's strategy for sharing the Gospel of Jesus Christ?

Paul's strategy: be humble and serve others

"I make myself a slave to everyone" (vs. 19)

Way too often, we see churches...and Christians... expecting / demanding non-believers to change before they will accept them – minister to them.

This is not serving them; it is demanding they serve us first. It's demanding they accept our values and beliefs before they have believed in Jesus!

Paul starts off his list with one of the most difficult things – to serve those who are so different from yourself – to serve those who might be in opposition to your beliefs.

Paul's strategy: meet people where they are.

One commentator says Paul: "...is a veritable spiritual chameleon. Paul's versatility in seeking to win men of all backgrounds to Christ challenges us to cross the culture-gap between the Christian sub-culture of cozy meetings and holy talk and the pagan culture of our local community."

(The Message of 1 Corinthians, by David Prior, edited by John R. W. Stott, p. 162)

He was willing to set aside his own personal preferences and his knowledge of the truth in order to make connections and build bridges with unbelievers.

“To the Jews I became like a Jew...” (vs. 20a)

To those who were ethnically proud and even prejudice toward others, he would come alongside them – and instead of telling them where they were wrong as his first order of business, he would get to know them first.

“To those under the law I became like one under the law” (vs. 20b)

This covers those who were still in full obedience to Mosaic Law. This group would be very devout and even legalistic in their beliefs. Paul participated in their rigid practices. He would worship with them in the Temple or Synagogue, observe special holy days with them and avoid work on the Sabbath. All these things were no longer necessary under Christ, but Paul did them in order to gain a hearing with the devout Jews in his life. Paul would abide by their practices because if he rejected them as his first order of business, he would never have a chance to talk with them about Jesus and how Jesus fulfilled the Law in its entirety – making the religious and ceremonial Law of Moses obsolete.

He includes a disclaimer to avoid offending those in the church at Corinth who rejected any sense of the Law – so he adds: (though I myself am not under the law)

The next group are most likely Gentiles who were never raised with the O.T. Law of Moses – those who didn't have any moral or ethical laws in their life.

“To those not having the law I became like one not having the law” (vs. 21a)

Paul was prepared to ignore religious traditions and practices. This seems pretty extreme to some, but here's the deal: unbelievers don't live with Christian traditions or church lingo. They are *“beyond the pale of religious traditions, establishments and religious orthodoxy.”*

(The Message of 1 Corinthians, by David Prior, edited by John R. W. Stott, p. 161)

To expect pagans to submit themselves to religious traditions and orthodoxy so we can share Christ with them is not only ignorant, but it's the height of arrogance!

It's the equivalent of thinking we can serve as a missionary in a foreign country – refusing to adapt to the culture, and expecting those in that culture to become “Americanized” so we can share Christ with them.

Paul understood the realities at play in the lives of people. In order to earn the chance to talk with them and teach them about Christ, he needed to meet them where they were at – on “their turf” (so to speak).

He includes another disclaimer here, to calm the fears of those in the Corinthian church who thought Paul was going to excuse sin in the course of sharing Christ.

(though I am not free from God's law but am under Christ's law)

“To the weak I became weak...” (vs. 22a)

To those who were spiritually weak, he mirrors their weakness. In **1 Corinthians 8** the weak are defined as those who are afraid of Christian liberty (8:9). The strong are those with a biblically informed conscience and they trust the Holy Spirit’s leading in the gray areas of life. But the weak are those who live according to a set of rules – many times extra-biblical rules which govern their behavior and their choices. Paul doesn’t begin conversations by confronting the spiritually weak person, but he comes alongside their way of thinking and earns a hearing.

“I have become all things to all men...” (vs. 22b)

This is the summary statement – the principle of Paul’s evangelism strategy.

He will do whatever he can to earn a hearing with a non-believer.

This does not mean he will participate in sinful activities, for he is still under the law of Christ.

But he won’t allow religious traditions and practices of believers to interfere with his evangelistic efforts.

Paul’s motive: reach as many as possible for Christ.

He is very clear as to his motive:

“to win as many as possible” (vs. 19b, 20, 21, 22)

In fact, 5x in this section he uses the word “win” – and then in vs. 22, he uses the word “save”.

He couldn't be more clear about his motive!

But his strategy is not always very comfortable, is it.

But we must remember, he is driven by the reality of sharing spiritual truth about Jesus, with those who don't know about or care about Jesus.

So, you have a choice. Paul has given 2 clear commands that we are to follow his example in these matters (1 Cor. 10:31-11:1).

So, will you share Christ only with those who will tolerate your religious traditions and orthodoxy before they even come to faith in Christ?

Or, will you meet the unbeliever where he or she is at – and love them where they are at in life, and when God gives the opportunity to talk about spiritual things, share the Gospel with them?

I'm afraid that some Christians have grown to love their traditions and practices more than the people Jesus has commissioned us to share the Gospel with.

Apply it...

Theme for 2016: “Other's First”

Galatians 5:13

“You, my brothers, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature; rather, serve one another in love.”

Friendly with a focus

Reach people for Christ...

Help them grow in their faith.

Share in the blessings of the Gospel – be part of the process as God changes lives...

Nothing can be more exciting – more energizing – than having a front-row seat as God’s grace and truth transform people for all eternity!