

I was in the worship center a few months ago and picked up a piece of paper lying on one of the shelves near the entrance. I discovered it was the Order of Service for our March 8 worship service. We sang Your Great Name, Who You Say I Am, Reckless Love, and Way Maker, and looked at Isaiah 39-40. What we didn't talk about was how, three days later, the CDC would categorize Covid-19 as a pandemic, two days after that the elders would decide to move to online only for our March 15 service, and for the next six months we'd meet that way only. I honestly thought it was only going to last for a few weeks. Whoops! Our lives individually and collectively were turned upside down. This seismic disruption led to all of us feeling some combination of grief, loss, fear, isolation, instability, and asking "Where do we go from here?"

We processed that question through things like our *New Normal* series, but the question needed to also be asked of our church in general. "Where do we go from here?" All churches had to evaluate what they were doing and ask God what came next. Fellowship was no exception. But in the midst of all this uncertainty and lack of clarity, God made something clear to us. The mission he called us to four years ago is the same mission that sustained and guided us these last six months and is the same mission he's calling us to live out now as we make our way out of this mess. Covid did not catch God off guard, and the mission of *calling each other to live out our God given purpose in Christ every day* is as essential today as it was in 2016. Our forward-thinking God set us up to not only persevere through this calamity, but to be galvanized around what he continues to call us to. Our challenge now is to finish the work.

In June, I sent all of you a letter that said we had let our mission guide us these last few years, impacting the way we do ministry and many lives in our church. But that mission, by itself, has taken us only so far because we've lived it out only so much. Our mission is only part of the story. It has always been accompanied by a vision of what happens if we successfully live out our mission, but we haven't talked about it much over the years. That's what I want to do this morning, because our vision tells the story of what can be at Fellowship, and it paints the picture of what God wants to do in and through us. Take a look at this.

I love our vision because it declares who Fellowship can become and what impact we can have. It answers three questions: What does God want to solve through us? How does he want us to go about it? What will the results be? I want to talk through those answers because they'll begin to show you where the elders and I believe God wants us to go.

**This city is made up of distracted, discontented and detached people looking for purpose, hope and happiness. Many are living "lives of quiet desperation" unaware of the joy and fulfilment available through Jesus Christ.**

There are so many people in our metroplex who are chasing the trappings of the "perfect life". That includes believers. They drift from one thing to the next in the search of fulfilment and significance, but all find the hole in their hearts just can't seem to get filled. That may describe you, and this pandemic has only intensified those longings. But this is nothing new. Scripture is full of people living this kind of life, distracted by false gods, looking for contentment in things that can't fulfill, and separated from the life-giving presence and plan of God. It is a hopelessness that has resounded throughout humanity since the moment Adam and Eve disobeyed God and ate of the forbidden fruit.

I know this feeling personally. A couple of years after I got out of college, living out what I had considered the pathway to prosperity and fulfillment, I remember asking “Is this it? Is this all life is about?” And what followed was a time of depression and hopelessness because I feared there was no alternative. Thankfully, God showed me I was wrong.

That’s why the Gospel is such good news. When we talk about the Gospel, we often go to the eternal life it promises. And we should, because it’s glorious. **But the Gospel is more than a ticket to heaven. The Gospel is also an invitation to a completely new way of living now.** It declares we can have a life of purpose, significance, and impact. Next week we begin a series in Luke and will spend the rest of the year going through it. He opens his gospel by focusing on someone who personifies what I’m talking about: John the Baptist.

**[Luke 1:15-17, 76-77] <sup>15</sup> For he will be great before the Lord. And he must not drink wine or strong drink, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother’s womb. <sup>16</sup> And he will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God, <sup>17</sup> and he will go before him in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready for the Lord a people prepared.”... <sup>76</sup> And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High; for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways, <sup>77</sup> to give knowledge of salvation to his people in the forgiveness of their sins.**

Before and when he was born, John’s God given purpose was declared, and it was anything but distracted, detached, or desperate. John was to pave the way for the one who is the Way. As a Prophet, he was to proclaim God’s message for repentance and life change, the knowledge of salvation, and the forgiveness of sins. He was given the general call of all believers to point others to God and the unique call of doing so as a prophet of God who lived in the wilderness, ate locusts, and was the forerunner to Jesus.

This is something we have to get straight right up front. Do you believe God has a declared purpose for you? Maybe not by an angel before you were born or by your dad when you were born, but that God has determined a specific calling for your life? Well, he has.

**[Ephesians 2:10]<sup>10</sup> For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.**

**You are God’s work of art and he created you and saved you to walk in good works he will accomplish through you.** We call this our God-given purpose, and for those of you who have started down that path, you know that gets distilled into our two words. John the Baptist’s might be something like Announcing Fulfillment, Calling Back, or Turning Hearts. Mine are Mobilizing Delight, partly because I’m called to work with guys similar to me who are listless, passionless, eking out an existence, even though they may be killing it in their job, whose success has been defined by stuff and going to bed each night without too many people mad at them by helping them delight in the Lord. These words are a recognition and acceptance of God’s declaration over each of us that we were made on purpose for a purpose, and that our lives have God-given potential if we will just turn it over to him and let him go to work.

Christians are known to ask, “If you were to die today, do you know where you’d go?” And that’s a good question. But I want us to also be known to ask, “If you live today, do you know what you’re made to do?” What did God have in mind when he created you? What is it that he has for your life since he kept you breathing for another day? **We believe this is knowable and when you know it it has the power to change your life!** It will change your relationship with God, change the way you view others, and change the way you invest your resources. The Gospel says you were made for more! It’s true for you and true for all those living lives of quiet desperation. So, then, how does God want us to make this a reality?

**At Fellowship Dallas, we believe our first calling is life transformation through a relationship with Jesus Christ.**

This is a God-centered solution that starts with, and is rooted in, a God-centered life, not an internally focused journey of self-actualization. Everything we do must flow from a saving relationship with Jesus Christ and be empowered by the Holy Spirit. That means this can’t be achieved by a mere strategy or program. It is a work of God based on our relationship with God, both individually and collectively.

Before the angel Gabriel ever said what John would do, he first said he would be filled with the Holy Spirit, because for John to do what God was calling John to do, it would only happen if God was in the middle of it. It’s the same for us, which is why Ephesians 2:8-9 come before v10.

**[Ephesians 2:8-9] 8 For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, 9 not a result of works, so that no one may boast.**

Ephesians says we were dead in our sin but because of the grace of God poured out through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, we can have life, and walk in the purpose God has for it. If you’ve never put your faith in Jesus for salvation, that’s your place to start and I invite you to do that right now. When you do, you will be made right with God, given his Spirit, and empowered to fulfill what he has for you. But the story doesn’t end there because this isn’t just about us.

In Luke 7 we find that John the Baptist has disciples. He has walked in the works God prepared for him and that work involved reproducing himself in others in and giving away his ministry to his successors. That’s the way God’s people have done it since the beginning.

**Our aim is to awaken people to the purpose of God, to reimagine our church as a starting place and coaching ground for followers of Jesus to discover their unique calling and then lead others on a similar journey. We believe that success is ultimately measured by successors.**

The success of living out your God given purpose will ultimately be measured by your successors, those you’ve poured yourself into in order to help them discover and live out their God-given purpose. **And let me be clear, God has someone in mind for all of us.** If this sounds like discipleship, it is! This vision is how we live out the Great Commission, the work of making disciples to which Jesus called all churches for all times. And this is the area we have the most room to grow.

Ministry programs must be a vehicle, not a destination. Our two words must be a starting line and not a finish line. Sundays must be looked at not as the end of the week but as the beginning, a time to gather together to worship the Lord and be filled by his presence, be equipped and encouraged by one another, and be sent out for the next six days with a passion and commitment to faithfully pass on what has been given to us. Our study of the Gospel of Luke between now and the end of the year will show us how Jesus prepared and equipped his disciples to minister in his absence and create successors of the faith.

Can you see it? What happens if we are successful? What impact will we have? Luke 3 gives a subtle report on John by saying “After all the people were baptized...” Whoa. Hold on. All the people? The impact of John’s ministry was substantial. While we know not everyone was baptized, a large number were. Many lives of quiet desperation were turned around by responding to John’s call to baptism and repentance. Many hearts were prepared to receive their Messiah, and their life and eternity were changed forever. John faithfully lived out his God-given purpose and at the end of his ministry he told his disciples, “This joy of mine is now complete.” The same can be true of you and true of us.

**It will be inescapable for anyone attending Fellowship Dallas to be invited to experience the daily adventure of discovering and living out their God-given purpose...we will be full of joy, contagiously attractive to others and influential for the Kingdom.**

Imagine being part of a faith family where that is true, a people defined by joy, attractive to a broken world, and taking ground for the Kingdom. That’s a church I want to be a part of. Just yesterday I heard about a wonderful woman from our church who thrived as a CASA volunteer the last few years. That role combined her interests, abilities, and passions and through it she had a significant impact and tremendous fulfillment. **The person said it was like she was made to do this.** That’s what happens when someone lives out their God given purpose, and that’s the opportunity we have today not only for ourselves but for so many in our city.

**The answer to a distracted, discontented, detached person is to become part of a people who are anything but.** Covid has disrupted all of our lives and people are evaluating and saying, “I don’t want to go back to the way things used to be. There has to be something more.” We can show them there is, the alternative of a meaningful and impactful life where distracted becomes focused, discontented becomes joyful and fulfilled, and detached becomes engaged.

So, what do we do with this? Our vision answered three questions, but there’s two more to answer. The first is do you want the phrase “full of joy, contagiously attractive to others, and influential for the Kingdom” to be true of you? The second is “What is it going to take to get there?” Only you can answer the first one. God will show us the answer to the second over the next several weeks. The time is now. The path is clear. Let’s follow him and trust that he will do it.