

This past Sunday night, Martha, the boys, and I gathered around our kitchen table for a family meeting. We spent time looking back to celebrate what had occurred in 2018, getting a clear sense of where we are today, and hoping for and dreaming about what's to come in 2019 and the impact our family could have. We decided on a 2019 theme of *intentional fun, faith, and friendship*. That we would make time to have fun and adventure with each other, that Jesus would be the center of all we do, and that we would be good neighbors. We left the table that night excited about the possibilities and united in our vision for 2019. I believe it's a good practice for any family to implement. That includes the family of God.

So, this morning, on the first Sunday of the new year, I want to do that together. I want to have a family meeting where we look back and celebrate some of the highlights of 2018, have an honest conversation about where we are today, and look forward to where God is leading us in 2019.

[Psalm 77:11-12] ¹¹ I will remember the deeds of the Lord; yes, I will remember your wonders of old. ¹² I will ponder all your work, and meditate on your mighty deeds.

We have a lot of reasons to celebrate what God did in and through us in 2018. I want to remember a few this morning. The first is that we faithfully navigated a year-long Lead Pastor transition. This is often a precarious time for churches, but for us, it went very well. In fact, I have had a number of leaders from other churches tell us how well we did it. And while that was expected, we also successfully navigated the unexpected Worship Pastor transition two weeks later. One of the highlights for me in 2018 is how our worship team has stepped up to lead the way on Sunday mornings. They continue to deserve our love and appreciation for their amazing work and leadership, and God deserves praise for giving us such gifted people.

494 new people came through our doors and inquired about how to get plugged in here. We had 58 people publicly declare their faith in Christ through baptism. Those Sundays are some of the most fulfilling to me. 534 of you are Serving your Church, City, and World. Nearly 700 are committed to doing life together with others in Life Group.

590 of us graduated from one of our Training Experiences, including 351 Fellowship Repurposed graduates. Additionally, 226 Repurposed grads outside of Fellowship, both in the states and globally! This is a picture of Cheryl Read teaching Repurposed in Nepal. She also led a class in India, and now they own it and are teaching it to others. I am so moved as more and more of us begin to learn, understand, and live out our God-given purpose in Christ.

Jeff Lowery interview.

One of the reasons you look back is to remind yourself of who God is and what he has done so you can look forward with hope. The first part of looking forward is knowing where we are right now.

We are currently searching for a new Worship Pastor and are excited about the candidates God has brought us so far. Starting next week, we'll begin to work in guest worship leaders. Some will be candidates, some will be friends willing to help. I won't tell you who is who. I ask that

you continue to pray for God to bring the right person to us in his timing and follow the lead of whoever is here on a Sunday. Our worship team will also continue to lead with excellence. Most of you have likely noticed we have fewer people attending and were behind on our giving budget. That may leave some of you wondering about it or having hushed conversations with other members. It's not something to avoid. It's good to talk about openly. The question at the root of any worry is "Are we ok?" Let me tell you with complete confidence and faith that we are just fine. God's got us! He has superintended all that we've experienced the last year and we can trust him to continue to lead us forward. He has something significant for us to do, and he is placing members in this body as he chooses to accomplish what he's calling us to.

All churches go through seasons, and a new season often begins with a lead pastor transition...especially one followed-up two weeks later with a worship pastor transition. The experts told us we could expect a 20% drop in attendance and giving, so we are not surprised by what is happening. But more importantly, I'm confident we are ok for a few reasons: 1) **The health of our transition.** God had his hands all over it, and you have been gracious to trust in the Lord and in the elders of the church. 2) **Your faithful response in December.** I am thrilled to report this morning, and to thank you, that you gave nearly \$900,000 last month. It is an act of worship and a commitment to the mission and vision of Fellowship, to our members, and our community. We are still a little behind budget, which is a good challenge for all of us, and we will make some adjustments because we want to steward our resources well. But I can't tell you how encouraged I was when I heard the news, and I come into this new year emboldened by your faithfulness and for where God is taking us. 3) **The spirit of our people.** This is more qualitative than quantitative, but the most encouraging thing I do these days is spend time with you. I hear stories about how you are growing in your faith, beginning to live out your God-given purpose, being set free from the bondage and baggage of your past, loving other members of our family, and expressing great enthusiasm for what God is doing in and through us.

So if you are here this morning and worried, I pray you trust in the Lord and can be free of that, because I want you to be able to look forward with hope to this new year. We are going to kick off the year with a series in the book of Nehemiah. I believe it mirrors some of what we are experiencing, and it gives us a picture of what God wants to do in our midst in 2019.

Now, a disclaimer. If you know the story of Nehemiah, you know part of the story is about building a wall around Jerusalem. This series is not a commentary on the current political debate going on. The wall is a picture of the spiritual brokenness of Israel and the wall's restoration is a picture of Israel's spiritual restoration and return to what God has called them to. The good news is that we are not in a place of spiritual brokenness like Israel was. But, in a lot of ways, we are in a rebuild or relaunch mode, and God is asking us to faithfully go forward to know him more fully and to live out what he is calling us to.

In the context of a series introduction, I want to look at three things that were true of Israel that I pray will be true of us as we look back over 2019 this time next year. I see 2019 as a year of growth, but not the growth that may immediately come to mind. We could fill this place back up, be packed on Sunday mornings, growing in number, but not growing in our relationship with Jesus or in the purpose he has called us to. **We were made for more than our ability to fill up a room.** For the last 2,000 years, the Church has been God's instrument to change the world, to

bless its people, and to declare and expand the work of the Gospel. That means we were made for impact. I believe if these three things are true about us, and it's evident that Fellowship Dallas is making a difference, people will come.

Fellowship will grow in clarity. My prayer is that each of us would end 2019 with a greater understanding of who God is, who we are in him, and what he's created us to do.

[Nehemiah 1:2-4] ² Hanani, one of my brothers, came with certain men from Judah. And I asked them concerning the Jews who escaped, who had survived the exile, and concerning Jerusalem. ³ And they said to me, "The remnant there in the province who had survived the exile is in great trouble and shame. The wall of Jerusalem is broken down, and its gates are destroyed by fire." ⁴ As soon as I heard these words I sat down and wept and mourned for days, and I continued fasting and praying before the God of heaven.

Nehemiah is currently exiled in Babylon and cupbearer to the king. But he receives a report on the status of Jerusalem and is devastated by the news. It doesn't end there, though. Nehemiah's heart is stirred and he goes to God with it for days. In that time he will come to know God in a new way and understand what he is calling him to do. This clarity will cause him to move. He will ask to leave his prestigious position as cupbearer to go to Israel and rebuild the wall. Clarity leads to confidence and confidence leads to conviction.

I don't know what stirs your heart, but my prayer is that you would discover that in 2019. Maybe it won't result in you weeping on your knees for days, but it may keep you awake at night. Jeff's heart was stirred through the painful circumstances of a health scare, but God is using that stirring to call and activate Jeff into the purpose he has for him. We can all have that experience.

If you haven't been through Repurposed, can I challenge you to make that one of your intentional commitments in 2019? **Believe God when he says he has something significant for you to do.** And understand it's about more than just completing a task. It's about answering a call and encountering the one who calls us in a new way. Give God a chance to show you something about himself and something about yourself that you've never seen before.

Fellowship will grow in unity. Not only does God have something for each of us individually, he has something for us collectively. But it will require a devotion to one another and a refusal to do life alone.

[Nehemiah 4:6] ⁶ So we built the wall. And all the wall was joined together to half its height, for the people had a mind to work.

One of the most inspiring parts of the book of Nehemiah is the way virtually the entire nation rallies to work together and accomplish what God is calling them to. They were unified in their mission, unified in their effort, and unified in their love and care for one another. Everyone played their part, and the result was the fulfillment of their calling. Nehemiah could have kept the work for himself or for a chosen few, but he didn't. He gave it away to everyone who was eager to get involved. They rallied around a common purpose and the fruit of their work was a reestablished Jerusalem for generations.

For the past 18 months, our staff has heard me encourage them to “be with our people”. The idea is that we don’t get so busy running programs that we fail to actually engage our church. 2019 will be a time of intentional investment, where we begin to change our schedules to create more space to spend more time with our church family. The purpose will be to build stronger relationships, execute more 1-on-1 discipleship, and begin to give away the ministry to those of you who are eager to join in. The more of us who join in, the greater the impact Fellowship will have. And just like those in Nehemiah’s day, the impact we can have has the potential to be felt for years. It can be exponential. What you do in 2019 could resonate to 2059. If you have been hanging around Fellowship for a while but staying on the outside, let 2019 be the year you lean in, say “these are my people, this is my church.” And if you are new to Fellowship, we invite you to join our family and be a part of what God is calling us to.

Fellowship will grow in intimacy and dependency. My prayer is that you will live with God at the center of your life more in 2019 than you ever have before.

[Nehemiah 8:5-6] ⁵ And Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people, for he was above all the people, and as he opened it all the people stood. ⁶ And Ezra blessed the LORD, the great God, and all the people answered, “Amen, Amen,” lifting up their hands. And they bowed their heads and worshipped the LORD with their faces to the ground.

The last third of the book of Nehemiah is not about walls being rebuilt, it’s about souls being restored. A people who were unfaithful to the point of judgment by exile return to the Lord and are reestablished spiritually. It’s interesting that it happens at the end of the story, but I believe there are two great lessons there for us.

If we try to build anything on something other than the foundation of Jesus, it will be worthless and fail. Jesus said, “apart from me you can do nothing.” We are utterly dependent on God’s grace to accomplish anything. What will you finally turn over to God in 2019?

We can also get so busy doing for God that we fail to know him. This is, very likely, my greatest struggle as a follower of Christ. God didn’t save us to make us doers, he saved us to make us worshippers, and to have a relationship with us forever. You know what stirs my heart? Witnessing someone with a stagnant faith fall in the love with the Lord and say, “I never knew it could be this way.”

[Nehemiah 12:43] ⁴³ And they offered great sacrifices that day and rejoiced, for God had made them rejoice with great joy; the women and children also rejoiced. And the joy of Jerusalem was heard far away.

When you give yourself completely to the Lord, joy follows. And if Fellowship is a house of joy and a people of joy, we will be irresistible.

So as we close, my question for you to ponder and pray about this week is: What do you hope God does in you and through you in the new year?

Made for More
2019 Vision

Psalm 77:11-12

Kurt Pressler
January 6, 2019

Communion