

## Vision Sunday

### Planning, Providence, and Passion: Discovering Where God is at Work

Revelation 3:15-20, Hebrews 3:12-14, Isaiah 1:12-17

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Henry Blackaby says that discerning God's will means that you discover where God is working and join Him. I love that definition because it assumes that God is working in the world, which he is, and it is an invitation to get connected with what God is doing rather than asking God to bless our plans. Find out where God is working and join him – that's a compelling thought.

College Park, today Vision Sunday, a day that our elders set aside for me to articulate our direction for 2009. In other words, this is a day for us to ask ourselves, "Where is God at work, and how can we join Him."

November marks the eighth month of ministry for our family at College Park, and I just have to tell you how much we love serving Jesus together with you. The reason that we came here is because we sensed that God was at work here, and we felt Him calling us to join you. I just want you to know from the depth of my soul that our family loves doing ministry here; this has become home very quickly, and I thank God every day for his wise mercy in sending us here. God is at work here; we love what God is doing here!

God has exceeded our expectations in every way. I still look around the ministry and pray, "Mark, just don't mess it up." God's hand has been upon this church from its start in 1985 in the Holiday Inn, through meteoric growth, and through the challenges of a Lead Pastor search. I am reminded of the passage in Job that says, "But he knows the way that I take; when he has tried me, I shall come out as gold" (Job 23:10)

I see the beautiful gold all the time. I see the gold of a tested and tried people – a people who remained faithful to Jesus and His Word. I see the beautiful gold of a church staff filled with gifted, godly, and ready to see where God is leading us. I see the beautiful gold of Elders who have been through difficult days that produced humility, a passion for prayer, and deep personal renewal. And I just want you to always remember that it was God who is responsible for all of that. As you look around at what God is doing here and as we look to the future, we've got to remember that at the end of the day we had nothing to do with it.

I trust that you realize that with testing and blessing come responsibility. That is what today is all about, a stewardship for our future. This Sunday is important because we have both

responsibility and opportunity before us. Clear vision is about stewardship, a commitment that we need to not waste the lessons of the past or open doors in front of us. Vision is something that combines planning, providence, and passion. And today I want to lay before you our Vision for 2009 so that you can be a part of where we believe God is leading us.

## **Our Mission, Values and Strategy**

Let me quickly rehearse for you the singular statement that unites every area of ministry at College Park. We define our **mission** as *igniting a passion to follow Jesus*. So if you want to know what every program is about and what every staff member does—there it is. I love that mission statement because it is so Jesus-centered, discipleship focused, and because it aims for heart.

Additionally, our elders took the Historic and Cultural Principles that have been around here for years, and we summarized them into six **CORE values**. They represent the flavor of how we do ministry:

- Pre-eminence of Jesus – Jesus is central
- Authority of the Word – the Bible is sufficient, our guide, and our hope
- Redemptive Community – the church is filled with broken people who've met Jesus
- Biblical Unity in Diversity – we think that a diverse church says something beautiful
- Extravagant Grace – we want to be as gracious as God has been
- The Call to Go! – ministry is not about us

These values are not new to College Park. In fact this is what God has blessed for so many years.

Mission and values identify our target and our key commitments, but that has to translate into a **strategy** for discipleship. What does this mean? A ministry strategy is simply the way that you accomplish your mission. The Bible is filled with examples of key strategy decisions that were really important (see Acts 6:1-7; Exodus 18; Titus 1:5; Luke 10:1). A strategy is simply a way to prioritize (what is most important?), synthesize (how does it all fit together?), and analyze (is it working?). So it is a tool that brings missional clarity at multiple levels.

Unfortunately, this is where many churches struggle or fail. Their mission may be important, biblical, and compelling, but if there isn't a clear connection to how it is accomplished, the mission will fail. Every Sunday as I am preparing my sermon I keep this question in my head: "Why does this matter?" And every ministry that we do at College Park needs to ask the same question.

Our strategy for discipleship at College Park is summarized by three key words: **Christ, Community, and Calling**. We want every person at College Park to do three things:

- **Exalting Christ:** worshipping with God's people on Sunday
- **Experiencing Community:** find a place to connect with other believers
- **Embracing your Calling:** discover how to use your God-given gifts

This strategy is a clear way of communicating that College Park is not a "come-and-see" church. In other words we are not focused on being big and having lots of people. In fact for me the definition of success is not our Sunday morning attendance but rather the percentage of people who come on Sunday who are experiencing community and embracing their calling. And the reason that the strategy is important is because we do not believe that you follow Jesus well or grow effectively by simply coming on Sunday with no other connection.

Our strategy is simply a way for us to take our biblical mission and develop an over-arching plan to make it practical and personal. We are so committed to you becoming a passionate follower of Jesus that we want to be intentional in everything we do.

With that overview of our mission, values, and strategy, let me identify for you some specific things on our hearts for 2009.

### **Exalting Christ**

15 "I know your works: you are neither cold nor hot. Would that you were either cold or hot! 16 So, because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of my mouth. 17 For you say, I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing, not realizing that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked. 18 I counsel you to buy from me gold refined by fire, so that you may be rich, and white garments so that you may clothe yourself and the shame of your nakedness may not be seen, and salve to anoint your eyes, so that you may see. 19 Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline, so be zealous and repent. 20 Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me (Rev 3:15-20).

Notice the following about this passage:

1. The church wasn't useful to Christ; they were neither cold nor hot (v 15)
2. They were spiritually deceived, thinking that they were rich when they were really wretched, poor, blind, and naked (v 17)
3. Jesus had what they needed (v 18)
4. Jesus was outside of the church; he wasn't central (v 20)

Exalting Christ is important when he becomes central, everything else falls in line. People who worship Jesus, live for Jesus. People who exalt Jesus understand that he has everything they

need, and they see themselves for who they really are. Finally, they are useful to him. So everything is connected to the centrality of Christ. He's the core!

The main way (not the only way) that we exalt Christ is through our Sunday morning worship. As you know, we are drawing the study of Colossians to a close in November. Here's what is coming next:

- The first week of January we will begin the year with a week-long focus on prayer.
- After prayer week, we will embark on a seven week study of the book of Job entitled "I Choose to Bless: Suffering, Sovereignty, and a man named Job."
- In mid-March we will host a conference on theology that will become an annual event. It will be called THINK09, and Dr. Bruce Ware from Southern Seminary will be with us all weekend giving us practical teaching on the important subject of the Trinity.
- After that, we will launch into a lengthy study of the Gospel of Matthew.

And through all of this we are going to find new and creative ways to exalt Jesus.

At the same time, our staff and elders will be praying through our growth strategy as a church. As I shared with you in the letter, our attendance right now is up by 28% from a year ago, and two of three services are consistently full or over capacity. Additionally, we have space challenges in nearly every area of the church ministry especially children's ministry.

I am not one who gets real excited about building projects. I've done them before, and I know what they take. But I also know that our facility is really hindering our mission at multiple levels. So our elders are going to prayerfully examine the following:

- What is our interim growth strategy?
- What needs to change from the former site plan?
- What kind of future building gives us room for growth while not changing the DNA of College Park?

As you can imagine, these are weighty matters. Your role is to pray, and continue to invite unchurched people to come with you. We will find a way to make room. We have to. Exalting Christ together is that compelling and that important.

## **Experiencing Community**

12 Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God. 13 But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called "today," that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. 14 For we share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original confidence firm to the end (Heb 3:12-14)

This is a stunning passage. This should motivate you every Sunday to get here, find some people, and get in their life. This passage is really important. Let me show you why:

1. It is a reminder that perseverance is a community project (v 14). We are command to help each other make it.
2. It warns us about developing an evil, unbelieving (v 12), and hardened heart by the deceitfulness of sin (v 13b).
3. It remedies that problem by a command to exhort one another every day (v 13a)

This verse calls us to do life with other people. If we don't the heart will grow hard, and, in some cases, some might prove that their conversion never really happened. So what does this means for us? It means that we have to constantly work really hard at connecting people into relationships and smaller groups where they can experience a Christ centered, intentionally intrusive, group of Christ followers living life together redemptively.

We were created with a God-given longing for community which reflects the community of the triune God. Now that looks different from generation to generation and even person to person, but the reality is that we all have a longing for relationships. It means we have to realize that every Sunday morning there are new people here, hurting people here, lost people here, and we need to be clear about how they can get help. In September Doug Pabody put together a team of counselors who are available every Sunday to help people. That's important because College Park needs to be a place that is a hospital for hurting people.

It also means that we need to clearly identify and to develop the various connecting points for people. We need to work on our "hand-offs"- transferring people from parking lot, to visitor desk, to the Coffee talk room, to a membership class, to an Adult Sunday school or a small group.

I recently read a blog entry that illustrates this so well:

I've been going back to College Park Church on Sunday mornings pretty regularly. I have always liked the worship,... and I've been convicted nearly every Sunday. GOD has been revealing so much to me through those services.

**BUT**...I am still missing that sense of community and being involved in the body. I want to be active and involved in ministry and community, and this is where I got stuck last time when I attended College Park regularly. I don't want church to just be a Sunday morning experience for me. Throughout the week, I am working on my relationship with my LORD and SAVIOR, and GOD has been so faithful and patient with me in that regard, but there is still something missing.

I'm missing that kindred fellowship with other believers. I'm missing interaction with other members of the body in their own unique ways. I'm missing people. In short, I'm wanting to be part of a team again. I'm missing having people involved in my life and me being involved in theirs--calling each other out when we need it, encouraging each other to keep on, building one

another up in Christ, assisting each other when there is a need (physical, emotional, etc.), praying for one another, counseling one another, meeting the other where they are in the midst of their struggles and pain, serving alongside one another, etc.

A few weeks later this person got plugged into a membership class, and she is well on her way to connecting. College Park, I want you to help us make a big church feel small. Help us connect people. Help us create an environment that is more than a “come and see” experience. Help us make this place feel safe for hurting people. Look for new people. Look for hurting people, and become part of the solution.

And if you are one of those people who just come on Sundays I want you to know that I’m so glad that you are coming – don’t stop. But I also want you to know that you are missing a key part of the spiritual growth process. I want to encourage you – even challenge you – to take a step toward community.

For years College Park has been known for its solid expositional teaching. That’s not going to change. Our vision for 2009 is to see us grow deep, adding a new resolve to do life together – to find a place to experience community.

### **Embracing Your Calling**

When I candidated here I walked you through Ephesians 4:8-11, and I identified for you that I believe that every person who knows Jesus is gifted for some kind of ministry and that these gifts are the spoils of Christ’s victory. Therefore the gifts should not lie dormant. You see, I believe that within this body of believers we have been given every gift that we need to do what God wants us to do.

So I think that every believer has a God-given calling on their life based upon the gifting of God. It is my belief that every believer is called to use his or her gifts. And I think that it is sinful to not use your gifts for the glory of God. Now that happens inside the church and outside the church, but I do believe that if this is the body of Christ that you’re committed to, then serving in the context here should be a personal priority.

Embracing your calling means two things: 1) discovering what God wants you to do and 2) doing it. I use the words embracing your calling intentionally because I want you to see that this is about what God wants, and because I know that people who seeing their calling as from God are passionate servants. When you are called, you are committed.

Therefore, I want to call you today to discover what your God-given calling is. There are hundreds of areas of ministry for you to serve in at College Park, and the key is for you to discover what God wants you to do.

One area of major focus for us in 2009 is what we are calling the Brookside Initiative. Next year we will launch a long-term and holistic ministry where we will partner with other ministries and existing partners to redeem a neighborhood called Brookside on the Near East side.<sup>1</sup>

About 10 years ago some people from College Park started a ministry in that area called Kids Church. The idea was to minister to kids and their families. A few years ago, we brought Cory Johnson on staff to lead Kids Church, and now we are ready to expand the scope of the ministry.

Our plan is to partner with Shepherd Community Church, Crossroads Bible College, The Midwest Food Bank, Child Evangelism Fellowship, The Life Center of Indianapolis, Heart Change, the Neighborhood Christian Legal Clinic, and other churches to bring the gospel to a needy part of our city. We want to build platforms upon which to preach the gospel.

We have an amazing tradition here at College Park called the Christmas offering, a special offering that we take at the end of the year to be given for a strategic ministry purpose. Two years ago College Park gave over \$550,000 to fund an anti-human trafficking initiative in Cambodia. Last year you gave \$446,000 and funded scholarship designed to reach the Yadvav people through a seminary in India.

This year our Christmas offering will be used to fund between 7-10 strategic initiatives in the Brookside area. We've contacted our ministry partners, and they submitted proposals for how they could help us reach Brookside. You'll hear more specifics about this in the weeks to come, but it includes everything from funding for Kid's church outreach initiatives to the renovation of a donated ministry center in the heart of Brookside. Further, we have proposals for CEF Bible Clubs in the schools, literacy programs, tripling the amount food donations to the neighborhood, and scholarships for Crossroads Bible College students who will complete an Urban internship in Brookside. This project is the start of a long-term commitment to really make a difference.

Imagine with me a neighborhood that right now is called "The Swamp" being transformed. Imagine neighborhoods restored, families kept together, kids with constructive activities after school, and high school graduation rates dramatically improved. Imagine churches in that neighborhood filled with people who hear the gospel because they've seen the gospel lived out.

Now you need to know that the Brookside Initiative will probably not result in more people coming to our facility on 96<sup>th</sup> and Towne. That is not the goal. Our goal is to not turn our hearts toward the needs of our city, and while we can't make a difference everywhere – we can

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<sup>1</sup> Here are a few stats from the area: 1) total population has declined 19% since 1980, 2) Ethnically the area is comprised of 69% white, 23% African-American, and 14% Latino, 3) local graduation rates hover at 33%, and 4) 20% of all IMPD incidents are on the Near Eastside.

make a difference. College Park, listen to me, we can literally change the culture of a neighborhood and give some people some hope. I believe that this is just right.

For too long the evangelical church ignored the social justice issues in our country. In fact, social justice issues were primarily the concern of liberal churches while fundamentalist and evangelical churches were content to just preach. And while we are never going to stop preaching Christ, we must consider building bridges of grace that can bear the weight of truth.

Further, there is a text in Isaiah 1 that gets me on my face before the Lord.

"When you come to appear before me, who has required of you this trampling of my courts? 13 Bring no more vain offerings; incense is an abomination to me. New moon and Sabbath And the calling of convocations—I cannot endure iniquity and solemn assembly. 14 Your new moons and your appointed feasts my soul hates; they have become a burden to me; I am weary of bearing them. 15 When you spread out your hands, I will hide my eyes from you; even though you make many prayers, I will not listen; your hands are full of blood. 16 Wash yourselves; make yourselves clean; remove the evil of your deeds from before my eyes; cease to do evil, 17 learn to do good; seek justice, correct oppression; bring justice to the fatherless, plead the widow's cause (Isa 1:12-18)

God is not interested in religious people who are busy worshipping him and who are not concerned for the needs of the oppressed people in their own backyard. So while there are many ways for us to embrace our calling, 2009 will be a year focusing our sights on one very needy area.

These are exciting days at College Park, and we need you to make our vision a reality! As we move into 2009, please join us in our strategy of Exalting Christ, Experiencing Community, and Embracing a Calling. I really do believe that there is nothing but blue skies ahead for us as a church. God has been very good to us, College Park. His hand has been upon this place for years. We ought to never take it for granted. And we ought to continually look around at where God is working and join him!

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