

Growth, Governance, and the Glory of God – part 2

Acts 2:37-47

Mark Vroegop

37 Now when they heard this they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Brothers, what shall we do?" 38 And Peter said to them, "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. 39 For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself." 40 And with many other words he bore witness and continued to exhort them, saying, "Save yourselves from this crooked generation." 41 So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls.

42 And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. 43 And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. 44 And all who believed were together and had all things in common. 45 And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. 46 And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, 47 praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved (Acts 2:37-47)

Last week I introduced you to the concept of Semper Reformanda which means that healthy churches must be continually reforming, looking for better, more effective, and even more biblical ways of doing ministry. The forms of ministry come to us through culture, history, and the Bible. Forms are good, but we have to continually look at what we are doing. This is especially true during seasons of growth.

Tonight at 6:00 PM we will have congregational meeting to vote on a proposal that brings clarity to who is called a pastor at College Park. Secondly, we will identify some items in the constitution that we are working on in order to bring it up to date with our existing ministry and needs.

College Park is growing, and on top of our attendance pressures, we are in a very challenging and uncertain economic season. That makes our solutions a lot more complicated. I've had people say to me, "So you are thinking about building, right?" And I've had others say, "You're not thinking of building, right?"

Those two perspectives illustrate the tension that our Elders feel. It has been helpful to think of our situation in three different scenarios.

- No recession / Growth
- Recession / No growth

In those two scenarios, the decisions are fairly easy. But our present situation is far different:

- Recession and Growth

In this season our Elders are committed to three things: Stewardship, planning, communication. Why are we talking about these things? Why is it worth spending two Sundays on? Our Elders felt that it was wise and right to talk about this for the following reasons.

- 1) We are in a challenging season of recession and numerical growth
- 2) We want to communicate more clearly to everyone what we are thinking
- 3) We need your help

We looked at Acts 6 last week, and we discovered that growth in the church presented some challenges. The solution was: right priorities, right people, and flexible forms. The apostles had to find a new and better way to meet the needs of the people and central to the solution was getting the right people involved. That was last week.

This week I want to help us think carefully about the issue of priorities, particularly as it relates to growth. What I'm going to today is lay out a bit of a philosophy of ministry and a few key strategies.

Right Priorities in Acts 2 and at College Park

It is helpful to look at the book of Acts since it is a historical description of the dynamics surrounding the early church during a season of explosive growth. There were a number of bench-marks along that way that are really helpful for us to see.

Notice the following characteristics of the early church:

1. Preaching the crucified Jesus as Lord (2:36)

The broader context of Acts 2:37-47 is Peter's sermon at Pentecost (2:14-36), and his conclusion sounded like this: "36 Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified (Acts 2:36)." How's that for a conclusion! Jesus is Lord and Messiah. You killed him.

The preaching of the crucified Jesus as Lord is what our world needs to hear. There are two facts in life that everyone needs to know: Jesus is Lord and human beings are guilty. This is THE message of the Bible. And it is THE message that people need to hear.

This is what College Park has been about for years – keeping the Main One the main thing. In fact our first Core Value is the pre-eminence of Jesus. It is part of the DNA that has made College Park what it is today. And let me just assure you that the particular focus on Christ as Lord will not change.

After Easter we are going to begin our new series on Matthew, and the main reason I chose that book is because I want for all of us to walk along with Jesus—to hear what he says, to see what he does, and to bask in the beauty of who he is as Lord and Christ.

Some of you may see the growth of the church in last year as a concerning sign that we might somehow lose that particular focus. Let me assure you, that is not going to happen. I believe that the Lordship of Christ is as relevant today as it has ever been. Growth is not bad as long as it doesn't change how you present Christ.

2. God-given repentance leading to public baptism (2:37)

What a beautiful moment to see God give these people the gift of repentance (2 Tim 2:25) as they were broken over their sin. They were “cut to the heart,” which means they felt the full weight of their sin. They were motivated to do something – “what shall we do?” Peter’s answer is “repent and be baptized.”

The Bible sees genuine repentance and baptism so closely linked that it combines them here saying, “repent and be baptized everyone of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins...” Peter is not suggesting that salvation comes through the act of baptism. Rather, he is saying that baptism and repentance go together like a hand in a glove. Repentance means to “change the mind” and part of that is giving public demonstration of your allegiance to Christ through baptism. It is a public way of identifying with Christ and his church.

There are not supposed to be secret Christians, and the real sign of growth is not just the numbers in the seats; it is people who publicly testify – “I believe in Jesus.” That was one of the reasons why we brought baptisms into the Sunday morning service. It is a very, very important part of being the body of Christ. It is the first outward sign of the inward change of heart. And that is why I'd like to lovingly challenge some of you who are still treating Christ like you are ashamed of him. I want to call you today to take the first step – acknowledging your allegiance to Christ, identify with him and his church.

Someone asked me the other day, “How do you know that this 25% growth rate is not just a lot of curious people?” That’s a good question. And at the end of the day I don’t. But what is

very encouraging to me is the number of people who are being baptized and who are joining the church, the number of people involved in our small groups, and the number of people who are engaged in ministry.

Our Elders do not want to be a big church just to be big. But we do think that there is something wonderful when, like in the book of Acts, a host of people get serious and say, "I believe in Jesus." We want more of that, and we are looking at how we could do that.

Therefore, we are revisiting our comprehensive master site plan and our long-term facility strategy. We're evaluating our needs and researching potential solutions. We've made no decisions other than 1) we need to examine long-term solutions, and 2) we need to communicate what we are doing.

Our goal is simply to be sure that we don't miss any opportunities that the Lord sends our way. We want to be good stewards of what God is sending us.

3. Continually committed to the basics (2:42)

I find it really interesting to note that Luke tells us what the early church devoted themselves to. I think that these are the core ingredients for any true, biblical church:

- **Teaching** – to learning and understanding the teachings of Jesus. For us that is the Scriptures
- **Fellowship** – to doing life together and to sharing life together
- **Breaking Bread** – to celebrating the Lord's table together
- **Prayer** – to spending time together before the Lord in prayer

This is the core recipe for the kind of church that God blesses. Each part is very important.

One of the reasons that we are working hard to make Worship2 a better environment is because we don't want people, especially new people, to miss the core ingredients of what makes church meaningful and powerful. Being a part of the main gathering of the church is really vital for your soul, and I don't want our attendance challenges to compromise other things that are more important.

I mentioned the experience in Worship2 already, let me mention another one: families worshipping together. I've picked up on something over the last year that concerns me. Not very many families worship together at College Park. I recently heard from Don Helton that

only 50% of our high school students attend a morning worship service. I suspect that part of this is from the space crunch, but part of it also has to be a priority issue.

Parents, I am concerned that this is a dangerous trend. Think of what will happen if a generation of kids grew up this way with the family never worshipping together. It is dangerous for your kids' view of church, their spiritual growth, and their long-term commitment to church ministry.

I want to call on some courageous Dads to say, "Okay, it's time we worshipped together. Therefore we are going to the 8:00 AM service or the 11:15 AM service." We're even going to add a full Children's ministry at 11:15 AM so that you've got another option.

The point is very simple: every follower of Jesus needs the basics, no matter how young or old.

4. Clear evidences of God's power (2:43)

Listen, God was there! The word "awe" means that there was a reverential fear of God in their midst. They saw God working miracles among them – "many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles."

There is nothing more beautiful than knowing that God is among you! There is nothing more wonderful than knowing, seeing, and experiencing that THIS IS THE REAL DEAL!

Do you remember the cardboard testimonies? Do you remember the sense of joy? That is powerful and attractive to people outside the ministry. It is appealing.

5. An other-centered culture (2:44-45)

The early church made the connection between God's graciousness to them and their graciousness to others. There was a sweet sense of being part of a community, and when one member was struggling the others found ways to help. They held their possessions loosely, seeing their resources as the means of meeting other people's needs.

One of the signs of a healthy church is a level of concern for others. Philippians 2:4-5 tells us: "Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. 5 Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus..." A healthy church is concerned about others.

There are a number of applications of this concept that I want you to consider in light of where we are at right now as a church and in our culture:

- Keep looking for ways to express joyful generosity; share your M&M's!

- Remember that full hallways and competitive seating is familiar to you but it is not to a new person.
- Right now our services are not balanced in attendance. Would you consider moving into Worship2 or the 8:00 AM service in order to give us more room?
- As I mentioned last week, please consider parking further away and moving over in the auditorium so that we can seat people.

Generosity goes way beyond money. It is a view of life where we are truly concerned about others. We need you to be aware of the needs of others, and consider making some changes in the services that you come to.

6. They met in large meetings and small meetings (2:46)

Being a part of this body was more than just a casual event. The text indicates that they were getting together regularly (“day by day”), they were meeting together in the temple, and they were meeting together in each other’s homes. So notice that there were two kinds of meetings – large gatherings and small gatherings.

I don’t think that there were a lot of people who said, “Well, I just attend services with those people.” That’s not normal church. Church is supposed to be something that is a part of your life.

One of the reasons that we have small groups that meet in homes and large groups that meet at church is because we believe in the concept of community. We want to continually work at making a big church small because being a follower of Jesus is means so much more than attending.

So for some of you, the action point from today’s message would be making the decision that you need to move into a small group or one of Adult Bible Fellowship classes.

7. There was expanding favor and ministry (2:47-48)

When you combine committed, enthusiastic, joyful people with the Word of God, changed lives, and generosity – it develops a reputation. And that is what happened here. The church had favor with all the people. In other words, the word got out! We saw last week (in Acts 6:7) that they were even able to reach Jewish priests. Their influence and favor in the community were growing.

I said this when I candidated here but I believe that College Park has the potential to make a significant difference in the kingdom of Christ. We’re seeing an even greater impact in the

Brookside Neighborhood with renovations at the Beach House and a Kids Church with even more opportunities. We launched an after school Bible Study with CEF this week, and we have many volunteers involved in an after-school mentoring program and Heart-Change, a discipleship program for the Moms of Kids Church. Our relationships with churches and ministry partners in Brookside are growing. We are still in the seed-planting phase, but we are already seeing some wonderful early fruit.

On top of all this, God gave them more people to minister to. "And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved." God, in his sovereign power, was adding to their church. God expanded their ministry, but there were some key ingredients that were undergirding their church. And these are the things that we are committed to at College Park.

Next Steps

As you can imagine, I've been thinking and praying a lot about all of this. Recently I shared with our Elders the following principles for our next steps. This is how we are applying the principles that I just shared with you. Here is how we are thinking:

- 1) Stewardship of the present** – we need to be the best stewards of the people, ministries, and resources God has given us. More people don't make a church more effective.
- 2) Make a big church small** – we need to continually work at connecting people from a crowd to a community.
- 3) Preserve Core DNA** – we need to protect the unique and helpful dynamics that make College Park was it is today.
- 4) Maximize our property** – we need to fully utilize the property and facilities that we've been given.
- 5) Flexibility in our future** – we need to plan and think in such a way that we allow God to define our future.
- 6) Expanded influence** – we need to position College Park for greater influence in our city, nation, and world.

That is how we are thinking, and it is important for you to know what we thinking. It is healthy sign that we can talk about these things and that we are talking about these things. And the purpose of our time today is simply to help bring the entire church along because we need your help.

In two weeks we get to put this into practice at a whole new level. We've put an invitation card in the bulletin, and I want you to use this card to invite someone to join you on Easter. I want you to worship together as a family. I want you to come early, sit close, and park far.

I want you to help us glorify God in new ways as we grow.

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