

Vision for 2012

Various Passages

January 1, 2012

Introduction

Once again we find ourselves at the start of a brand new year. Today is January 1 and for many of us that means we're leaving the past behind us and looking ahead to a new start. I imagine many of you have made some New Year's resolutions. The New Year is a great time for resetting our priorities, making new goals, and looking ahead to what is to come rather than dwelling on what we've left behind. So as has been my custom here at GBC at the beginning of the year, I want to start off the New Year by spending time looking ahead. Just as we individually make plans and set goals for the upcoming year, so also must we corporately as a church give some thought to the future and set some goals for our church family.

So this morning, I want to direct your eyes not to the past, but to what lies ahead for our church. In particular, I want to briefly discuss the immediate future and then spend the majority of our time presenting to you an exciting long-term vision for GBC. So let me begin first by talking about something I know we're all looking forward to this year which is being able to meet once again in our newly remodeled church building.

A New Building

I don't need to tell any of you that our church building has been undergoing some major remodeling over the past few months. We've been blessed by the Locke family in their willingness to allow us to meet in their facility while our church building has replaced the sounds of guitars and singing with the sound of drills and hammers, but as much as we appreciate being here during our sojourn, as Dorothy once said, "There's no place like home." We all look forward to getting back to our own building in a few months. And what's more, we'll be returning to a newly remodeled facility. Like you, I'm excited about the prospect of a larger, carpeted lobby area, remodeled nurseries for the kids, an elevator, and bathrooms that don't make me feel like I'm away at camp for the summer.

So 2012 is an exciting year in that our church building is going to get a much needed facelift. We're still not certain of when we will be back in – right now I think we're hoping for the beginning of March (but don't hold me to that!) – but I want to encourage you to be patient, continue to help with our set-up and tear down here each Sunday, and be eager to enjoy the blessing of a newly remodeled building. Also, I want to encourage you to use this as an opportunity to invite friends and family to come to church with you. Let your enthusiasm spill into your conversations and invite others to come and check things out. Obviously the church is far more than a building, but if the church building is a means by which we can draw people into becoming part of our church family, then by all means let's take advantage of this opportunity. Be sure to invite others you know to come to church with you to help us celebrate God's provision for our church.

But there is something else I need to encourage you in regarding our remodeling project that I think it's easy to forget about. Something inevitably comes along with a project like this that we're going to need to face as a church and I can sum up what that is with one very scary word – so brace yourself, because here it comes – the word “change.” With the remodeling of our church comes change for our church. The reality is some things will be different once we get back to our building. Not everything will be in the same place, not every picture or bulletin board will be hung up, not everything will be done in the same manner we've grown accustomed to doing it over the years. When we made the commitment to this building project, we also implicitly made a commitment to make changes. There will be changes as a result of this project and we need to be prepared to roll with those changes as they come.

Now I'm not sure what all those changes are going to be yet. Certainly at a minimum we're going to have to reconsider all sorts of decorations and wall hangings. Some things are going to have to be moved, others will be retired, and in some places we'll be seeing new things entirely. But I'm not here to categorize a list of changes for you: I'm here to say that change is on the horizon, and we need to respond appropriately to it. You all know the stories of church fights over trivial things like the color or the carpet; well, if that's going to happen at our church, it's going to take place this spring. So to be forewarned is to be prepared. Change is coming; that's an inescapable fact. The only question is: how are we going to respond to it?

So my encouragement to you all is this: handle change in a godly manner. For some of us who have been here only for a short time, this probably won't be too difficult. We don't have any sentimental attachment to anything particular in the church building so we won't miss it if it's gone. But for those of you who have been coming here for a long time, this will likely be more difficult for you. I'm old enough to know how certain things have sentimental value. I get that, I really do. But we all need to model maturity in how we handle change. It likely it won't be the younger folks who will object to any changes, so if there is going to be conflict about change, it will come from those who have been coming here not for years but for decades. So I'd encourage you, if you're mature in age, be mature in attitude. Let this be a joyful time of newness and freshness for our church, not a time of holding on to the way things were at all cost. Let's embrace the changes that are ahead for us not as a threat but an opportunity to do new things and turn a new page in the story of Grace Brethren Church.

So that's the immediate future on our horizon: in a few months we'll return to our newly remodeled building and this building project which has been in the works for a couple of years now will finally be done. So then the question is: what's next? After we move back in, then what? Should we simply sit and soak and enjoy our new surroundings? Have we “arrived” as it were and now we can just establish the status quo for the next few decades and kick back and relax? Or should we perhaps set out eyes further down the road and imagine doing something together far more significant than a remodeling project of our church facility? Perhaps God has something more for Grace Brethren Church than simply having new carpets and an elevator, as enjoyable as they might be. I believe he does and I want to share that with you this morning.

A New Church

I would like to present to you what we are calling “2020 Vision” which is simply this: let us set a goal of planting a new church by the end of the decade. My vision is not only that we have a remodeled church building, but rather that our remodeled church building becomes the birthing place for a new church plant by the year 2020.

In regards to this vision of planting a church, let me answer two questions: why and how. First, in regarding to why, I will simply point you first and foremost to the book of Acts. In Acts the church grows numerically as the Lord adds to their numbers. And as the gospel is proclaimed by Paul and the other apostles, churches are planted throughout the world. With church growth comes church planting. We should have a vision for church planting because that’s the kind of vision we see in the New Testament.

Second, church planting is one of the main areas of emphasis for our Fellowship. All the pastors at the National Conference this year were presented with three “Commitments to Common Ministry” which were Church Planting, Leadership Development, and Integrated Ministries. As a church that is a part of the Fellowship of Grace Brethren Churches, I want us to join them in seeking to make that vision a reality.

Third, I personally have a heart for church planting. I served for over eight years at a church in the Chicago area that was began as a church plant and always had a vision to plant more churches, so church planting has gotten into my ministry blood, so to say.

Fourth and finally, I think we need it. We need a challenge. Yes, there was a financial challenge that we had with funding our remodeling project, but we need a challenge that involves something greater than simply paying for new carpets and an elevator. Let’s dream big. Let’s dream of advancing the kingdom of God by multiplying our ministry. Let’s set our sights on doing something more than just improving the aesthetics of our church building: let’s plant a whole new church. I don’t want to return to our church building and just admire the walls for the next twenty years. Let’s think outside of our walls and set a goal of planting a new church by the year 2020.

But besides the reasons why I think we should have a vision to plant a new church by the end of the decade, I want to spend the rest of the time this morning answering the how question. I imagine some of you are thinking to yourself, “How can we even think about planting a church? We’ve lost numbers over the past ten years and we’ve just committed ourselves to a long-term loan for the church remodeling. Pastor Rob, this is hardly the time to be talking about planting a church.” True, we are not in a position today to set out and plant a church. We don’t have the people, the resources, or the leadership in place currently to make that happen. But vision is not about what we can do right now but rather what we hope to do in the future. Vision is about imagining what can be and not being handcuffed by our present limitations. I believe that planting a new church is an achievable goal within the next eight years: the question isn’t whether we can but whether we will. Are we each willing to do what it takes to make this vision a reality? I firmly believe we can do this: the real question is do you believe it?

But since by my own admission I acknowledge that we aren't currently in a position to plant a church, what needs to take place so that by 2020 Grace Brethren Church is giving birth to a new church plant? How do we get to there from here? I want to present to you a four-step plan that I believe is necessary if we are going to reach our goal of planting a church by the end of the decade.

The first step is **being**. Before anything else happens, we need to be committed to being the kind of church God has called us to be. We need to be living Christ-centered lives of obedient faith. What that looks like specifically is spelled out in our Purpose Statement. Can anyone here remind me of what our Purpose Statement is? *Grace Brethren Church exists to glorify God through worship, discipleship, service, and mission.* Everyone who calls GBC their church home should be striving in their lives to bring God glory through each of these four biblical means.

- We should regularly participate in *worship* as a church family. It should be your habit to gather together each Sunday for worshipping God through prayer, song, giving of tithes, the preaching of God's Word, and to enjoy the fellowship of other Christians. Furthermore, we should be participating in our quarterly communion services. Taking the Lord's Supper is not an optional part of the Christian life that you can neglect if you don't feel like coming. All Christians of every tradition for nearly 2000 years have unanimously agreed that the Lord Supper is an essential part of the faith. Being a God-glorifying Christian means you regularly attend times of worship with your church family.
- Also, we should be involved in opportunities to grow deeper in our understanding of God's Word and bring our lives into submission to it. That's what we mean by the term *discipleship* in our Purpose Statement. Find a small group or an Adult Discipleship class or get into a mentoring relationship and dig deeper in your faith. A pond that doesn't receive fresh water eventually grows stale. Avail yourself to the discipleship opportunities we offer here so you don't grow stale as a believer. In our combined Adult Discipleship class we're learning about the sovereign grace of God in salvation; if you aren't coming, you're really missing out on deep and rich biblical teaching that has the potential to challenge you and increase your love and appreciation for God's grace in our salvation. Be intentional about growing as a disciple by availing yourself to classes and groups we have here.
- Next, we glorify God through *service*. I just preached on 1 Corinthians 12 not too long back so I don't need to reiterate much of what you've already heard. If you have gifts – and you all do – then use them to serve. Sitting on a pew for an hour each Sunday is not a spiritual gift. Everyone who calls GBC their church home should be serving in this church with their gifts and talents.
- Finally, we need to be who God has called us to be by being on *mission*. I'm glad we support missionaries overseas, but the real concern I have is, "Are we being missionaries here in the Cedar Valley?" As far as I'm aware, we have not had any kind of conversion growth here at GBC this year. So the good news is we've

haven't gotten worse: we had 0 people come to Christ in 2010 and had 0 people come to Christ in 2011. But the bad news is we've had 0 people come to Christ past year; so are you doing it? Have you identified three unbelievers you have regular contact with and you are regularly praying for, initiating conversations with them, inviting into your home, and proclaiming the good news of the gospel to them? If we aren't proactive about being *Salt & Light*, then 2012 will look the same as 2011 and 2010. We need to be on mission if we are going to bring God the glory he seeks to receive through Grace Brethren Church.

So then our first step towards planting a church by the end of the decade simply involves us **being** the kind of Christians God has called us to be. We need to bring him glory through worship, discipleship, service, and mission. If we aren't living according to our calling, I don't see how we can expect that God will bless us in a manner that will allow us to plant a church. But if we are being a God-glorify church that is joyfully worshipping him, is growing as disciples, is serving with our gifts and talents, and reaching the lost with the gospel of Christ, then I think it will inevitably lead to our second step which is **growing**.

A healthy church is a growing church. A community of people who are passionate about Christ, living transformational lives while eagerly proclaiming the gospel to other, will attract others. Committed Christians are contagious Christians – people are drawn like moths to a flame by those who are passionate about God. And if you are being *Salt & Light* God will bless your labors to work the harvest fields and add to our numbers those who are being saved. **Being** leads to **growing**.

The bottom line is we cannot plant a church with our current attendance level. We can neither afford to lose the people nor the finances. To try to do something like this right now would jeopardize our currently ministry. So we need to grow to a level of attendance that can sustain the needs to our current congregation as well as the needs of a new church plant. But in order for growth to happen, we need to be the kind of church that has a reason to grow. Step one in the process is essential to be able to move on to step two. If we are unhealthy as a church body because we are neglecting the gathering together for the preaching of God's Word and partaking in the Lord's Supper, if we are unhealthy because we're stagnant in our growth as disciples, if we are unhealthy because we refuse to use our spiritual gifts to serve here in the church, if we are unhealthy because we make little to no effect to reach out to the lost that God has placed in our life... if all of that is true of us, then we can have no expectation to grow as a church. Instead of remodeling the house of God on the corner of Williston and Minnesota, we instead are quite frankly remodeling our own coffin. If we refuse to be who God has called us to be, then our church building is nothing more than a glorified mausoleum masquerading as a church. Eventually we will wither and die as a congregation and be no more because God does not bless churches that are indifferent and lukewarm about Christ. If we refuse to be what God has called us to be in step one, we forfeit our rights to be a church, much less a growing one that plants new churches. **Growing** is contingent upon **being**.

Now understand that I'm not interested in growth for growth sake. I have no interest in being the largest church in Waterloo. Church growth is not the end; it's the means for something greater. My vision for this church does not stop with step 2 in the hopes that I can be the pastor of a church of thousands in a huge facility that has multiples sites in the area where my big bald head is beamed onto some oversized video screen so I can preach to people whom I'm not even in the same building with. I'm not that kind of pastor. I want to grow the church so we can multiply the church, not make a bigger name for me or for this congregation.

So that then brings us to the third step we need to take in accomplishing our vision which is **developing**. Provided we are **being** the kind of church God's has called us to be and are **growing** as a church body, we can then work on developing the leadership necessary to plant a church. The goal at this stage would be to identify a church planter who could lead up the church planting team and serve as the pastor of the new congregation. Ideally I would like that to be someone from within our church, but we could look outside to seminary grads as well. In addition, we would need to raise up lay elders who could serve on the elder board as well as gathering together a group of members would be willing to take up the challenge of being sent off to become part of the new church. As Oliver Edwards up at Grasslands Church in Medicine Hat, Canada can tell you, it takes a lot of work to develop leaders and plant a church, so this stage of the process is important if we're going to be successful in planting a new church.

But once we've identified leaders and developed a core group who are willing to start a new church (as well as found a location to meet), then we will have reached the fourth and final step of the process, which is **sending**. Ultimately we want to get to the point where we can joyfully send off a group of people and support them as they get the new church off the ground. While on the one hand it is sad to have your friends in the church move on, there is also much joy in it because you know that they are going to multiply the ministry in a new location.

So this is the vision I want to present to you: let's make it our goal to plant a new church by the year 2020. Let's have a vision larger than simply having a remodeled building that we can enjoy for years to come; let's look at our church building as a newly remodeled base for planting new church in the future. Let's dream big as a church. I firmly believe this is possible for us to do within eight years; we just have to commit ourselves to do it. Are you willing to join me and the elders in making this vision a reality by the end of the decade?

Conclusion

To that end, I want to close this morning by asking each of you commit yourself to the task that is before us. We can't start **sending** people off to plant a church until we've **developed** a team of leaders, but we're not going to be ready to do that unless our church is **growing**, and we can expect to grow unless we start **being** God-glorifying Christians through worship, discipleship, service, and mission. First things first and

that means we need to commit ourselves to **being** the kind of God-glorifying people he has called us to be. Every step is dependent upon the one previous, so if we are going to get to step two (much less step four), we need to get step one right. Let's grow as a church because we are people so in love with Christ and so willing to live our lives according to his purposes that the lost are saved and people can't help but want to be part of what God is doing here at Grace Brethren Church.

I cannot do this alone. The elders cannot do this alone. We all must do this if we are to make this vision into a reality. We can grow as a church and develop new leaders and send them off one day to plant a church – we can do this – but that future goal begins with the present reality of what we do here and now. Let's be who we've been called to be. Let's dedicate ourselves to living out our purpose as Christians here at Grace Brethren Church.

Please join me in bowing your head as I close our time together by asking God to help us in this task. Let's pray.

**This sermon was addressed originally to the people at Grace Brethren Church of Waterloo, IA by
Pastor Rob Borkowitz. Copyright 2012.**