Introduction

Turn with me in your Bibles to Matthew 28:18-20.

It has been said that if you aim for nothing, you will hit nothing. My biggest problem when I am shooting a gun is that I close my eyes as I pull the trigger. Not the smartest thing to do when you’re aiming for the center of a target or for a clay target. If it is so important to be focused and keep your eyes open when shooting a gun at a target, then it is all the more imperative to aim for a target, a goal, in our church. Churches without a vision for the future, a goal to work toward, are unhealthy. They are apathetic and they do not fulfill the Great Commission.

This church will not be one of those churches. Today, we want to focus in on what God is calling us as a specific local body of believers to do for His Kingdom in the coming year. This will give us a goal to shoot for, a mission to define our service in His Kingdom. It will require each of us carrying out that vision personally and corporately. We are all part of the vision. This is not just something I came up with as the pastor. This is something I believe God has been working in your hearts as well as mine. And I believe God will give us the ability to accomplish His vision for this church in this coming year.


Transition: I felt that we needed to deal specifically with two areas as a body of believers. I want us to look at the strengths of our congregation, the things the Bible commands us to do that we do well. Then I want to suggest a couple areas of weakness that I would like us to grow in this year. There are certain earmarks of our church that I would like to develop. They would be our DNA, if you will, what makes us different from other churches and the things people who visit our church would remember about us. Of course, this does not mean we will not do the other things commanded by Christ, but that these things will be hallmarks of our church.

Look with me at 1 Corinthians 12:11-13. Paul has just given a list of giftings that come from the same God, the same Holy Spirit. Then he presents this image of the body and its members. Read passage. Here we see that each individual member has a niche, a calling to a specific purpose within the whole congregation. So also, congregations are individual members of the whole body of worldwide believers, so churches can have individual personalities and strengths and callings as well.

I. Looking Through the Microscope
   A. Our strengths and weaknesses.
      1. Scientists use microscopes to look at life on its smallest levels, such as cellular structures.
         a. Microscopes have helped us to understand the building blocks of life, from cells to DNA to other small parts.
         b. If we looked at this church through a microscope, what DNA would we find. What makes New Life Assembly the way it is?
2. Some of the strengths of our church lie in our abilities to fellowship together and to disciple people.
   a. This is a church where visitors feel welcome! When I candidated in January, you were all so very kind to me and my parents.
   b. We had a couple of visitors Wednesday night, and I watched at least three of you go and greet them.
   c. Fellowship is usually one of the hardest parts for a church to work on because it requires us being genuine and caring about one another and letting others into our lives.
   d. But I believe this church is naturally a fellowshipping church.
   e. I also believe that we know God well enough to lead others into the Spirit-filled life. I have seen deep and loving relationships with God in these past three weeks.
   f. We have many Christians here who have been walking with God for some time. But I believe we have some younger Christians who are encouraged by the older Christians. That is what the Bible calls for, for the older generations of Christians to teach the younger.
   g. I want to work in these two areas and strengthen what is already strong.

3. Some of our weaknesses are in evangelism and service outside the four walls of our church.
   a. One of the hardest things to do as a Christian is obey God as He matures you in your faith and walk with Him. But another hard thing to do is obey Him in His leading when He commands you to speak out as a fool for Him.
   b. But as we have read the Great Commission, this is precisely what God has called us to do. We are to go and in our going, preach the gospel. You can preach through words. You can preach through images. You can preach through action. But you must preach!
   c. This is not just a job for the pastor, although I need to be doing it as well. This is something every Christian is commanded to do. We do well with the teaching part of this, but in our going, are we preaching?
   d. We need to figure out how to proclaim Christ the way He proclaimed Himself. In the Gospels, we see Him having compassion for the people just as much as we see Him preaching. As we go, we need to do both. We need to preach and we need to show compassion. The two go hand in hand.

B. The DNA of Prayer
   1. What is prayer?
      a. Prayer is talking to God, communing and communicating with Him. It is not a one-way monologue of a person’s needs.
      b. Prayer flows out of a living and active relationship with God. God speaks to us in many ways. We speak to God in many ways.
      c. All prayer prayed by a child of God is heard by God and God answers all prayers. He may say yes, no, or not yet.
d. Prayer is sometimes more about lining up with God’s agenda and God’s will. It is not about asking Him for stuff, although He tells us that we can ask.

e. Throughout Scripture there are different types of prayers. There are prayers for guidance, prayers of thanksgiving, prayers for salvation and repentance and contrition, prayers for God’s will to happen, and so many more.

f. Along with our prayers come our thoughts and our desires, our motives, and our attitude. All of these are visible to God in our prayer time with Him.

2. The Bible holds prayer as one of the most important tasks of believers.

a. The early church devoted itself to prayer. Look at Acts 1:14. When faced with fulfilling the 12th apostle’s position of leadership, the church devoted itself to prayer and asked God to fill the position.

b. In Acts 2:42, the early church had a DNA of fellowship, discipleship, and prayer. It is through prayer that God acts on behalf of His people.

c. Once again in Acts 6:4, the apostles make a board of trustees so that they can continue to devote themselves to prayer and to the teaching of God’s Word.


3. Challenges for the goal of praying.

a. People are challenged by prayer to God for several reasons. First, prayer is a discipline, something that is done over and over on a regular basis. We tend to not be very disciplined.

b. **Illustration:** Discipline is much like a snowball effect. The snowball starts small at the top of the mountain, but as it gains momentum, it gets bigger and bigger. Many people today turn to prayer only in crisis, but they don’t realize that this discipline is meant to strengthen our everyday walk with God so that when crises come, we turn first to Him. For many of them, praying to God is a last resort.

c. Prayer is also challenging because it is a conversation with a Person we cannot see or feel or hear. We have to learn how to listen for His voice. Elijah in the Old Testament waited to hear God’s voice on a mountain (1 Kings 19:9-18). But it surprisingly was not in the wind or the earthquake, but in the still, small voice. Jesus tells us in the book of John that His sheep hear His voice above all the other voices in this world (John 10:1-18).

d. **Application:** In our world today, there are so many voices! There’s your parents, your children, the voices on the TV, newscasters, politicians, economists, military generals, and so on. It seems like everyone wants to have a voice, but no one wants to
listen! My mom used to tell me that when my mouth is open, my ears are closed. When you’re praying, give God some time to speak to you. Be still and know that I am the Lord! Waiting upon God means shutting up and letting Him speak to you in whatever way He desires.

e. I have found that when you pray more regularly and more often, and have a method to your prayer, and change up the focus of your prayer every day, you run out of the designated time to pray! Prayer is like a drug. You get hooked on it and wonder how you lived without it.

f. It’s so easy to tell God we are too busy to pray today, but Jonathan Edwards once told someone that he is so busy that he has to pray to get everything accomplished. This was a man who would pray for 6 hours a day as he rode his horse between revival meetings!

C. The DNA of Mission

1. What is mission?
   a. When I speak of mission, I’m not talking about missions, like US missions, foreign missions, and that kind of area.
   b. I’m talking about having a goal, a mission, such as the military would use the term. We have a mission from God. We have read it today. It is the Great Commission.

2. The Bible gives each of us a mission to fulfill as individuals, and as a church.
   a. Individually, we are given a mission from God, a calling. Every believer has a calling! Not just pastors and church leaders. We are all called to the Spirit-led Christian walk in which we are first saved and then we become a disciple of Jesus, which is a lifetime journey of learning, relating, and doing.
   b. But along with this requirement in the Christian life and calling is a special calling to fulfill your God given calling using your talents and giftings for Him. God prepares every single one of us to do a mission for Him!
   c. Your individual giftings and calling merge into God’s calling for this church corporately. We fulfill the great commission in many ways, such as through compassion ministry, through direct evangelism, through prophetic ministry, and other ministries. We look like Jesus to this world that is so hungry for Him!

3. Challenges for the goal of being mission-minded.
   a. We make it so easy to forget what we are called here to do. We gather together and can get distracted by the administration of the church or by the distraction of our day to day lives, going to work and doing something else all week.
   b. We neglect to integrate God’s mission into our everyday happenings. We leave it by the wayside because we are afraid to reach out, afraid of rejection. We are too busy with those other distractions and we hope God will understand.
c. Another challenge to being mission-minded is not knowing what your individual giftings and talents are. How can you use your talents for God if you don’t know what those talents are?

d. Application: How can you fulfill God’s mission if you don’t know what He wants you to do. We must pray and search the heart and mind of God through the Spirit to know our place in His plan. Find out God’s mission for your life and find out your giftings and talents. Get involved in ministries in this church and through trial and error, come to find your fit in God’s mission.

Transition: After seeing the DNA of our church, those things we want to be experts at, like prayer and mission, we must also look down the road, looking to the future of our church to see what God sees our church doing for His kingdom.

II. Looking Through the Telescope
   A. Looking Toward the Goal.

   1. Scientists also use telescopes to see things that the naked eye cannot pick up.

a. They use telescopes to see very far away things at a much closer range.

b. Illustration: Take for instance this picture of a galaxy far, far away. We cannot see this if we look up at the sky at night. We need a telescope to see this far away.

   2. Just like scientists use telescopes to see far away planets, stars, and galaxies, we use the Bible, prayer, and the DNA, the makeup of our church, to see where God is leading us.

a. The Bible shows us the goals that God has for us individually and corporately.

   i. God has made the church for the purpose of reaching the world with the Gospel of Jesus Christ (Matt 28:18-20).

   ii. We are called to reach out to our community with the message of God’s grace and judgment – Grace in the sense of God’s loving desire to save people out of their situations and into the Kingdom. Judgment for those who choose to reject Him.

   iii. We cannot just gather in this building. Are presence in this neighborhood does not constitute evangelism or preaching the gospel to them!

   iv. We need to actively reach out. Now, we have had visitors from the community come without reaching out. But I believe God will bless this church with more people when we prepare to bring them in and disciple them! We must make a concerted effort. That is what God is calling us specifically to, individually and corporately. How can they hear if no one preaches to them?
b. In our times of prayer, God gives us His mission and goal for our specific area.
c. Our DNA as a gathered body of believers gives us insight for future goals.

B. Pressing on Toward the Goal
1. Paul talked about pressing on toward the goal individually.
   a. Philippians 3:8-14 tells us that Paul counted all former gains and former life as garbage compared to the current goal in his life to know Jesus Christ.
   b. That is the goal for this church, to know Jesus Christ in His fullness, to preach His gospel in its fullness, and to lead others to Christ.
   c. Just as Jesus came and pointed to God the Father, and just as the Holy Spirit glorifies the Son of God, Jesus Christ, so also, our church exists for the mission of proclaiming Christ crucified and resurrected to the glory of the Father so that we too can share in eternal life!

2. As a church, we need to fulfill our mission because purpose gives us passion.
   a. Illustration: In the concentration camps of the Nazis, Jews were tested and they tried to take God away from the Jews. Here’s how they attempted it as an experiment to the ideas in their classrooms. They would make the Jews dig a hole on one side of the camp and they would rush them with the dirt in the shovels across the camp and make them dig a hole over there as well. Transplanting dirt from one hole to the other until the people would cry out and say, “There is no God, for He has left us without a purpose.”
   b. When we do not have any meaning in life, any goal to set our sights on, we will soon perish. The Bible even tells us that without a vision, the people will perish (Prov. 29:18). We need meaning in life, a purpose, because that purpose gives us passion and a goal to accomplish.

C. Seeing What God Sees
1. Adding up all of the witness from Scripture, prayer, and our DNA, we will find a path to follow for this next year.
   a. This church will be a place of opportunities to actively pursue a prayer life that keeps you continually connected to God, where you learn to hear His voice in your life and learn how to respond. I want to have an environment here that fosters prayer as the most precious gem in all this church. If we cannot pray, then we cannot change our world.
   b. This church will actively evangelize this community and neighborhood and city. I want to see us reaching out to others in every possible way. I don’t want people to think that we keep to ourselves. I don’t want people to think that we are monks that hide from the community.
c. We must reach out and help this community, just like Jesus would. When people get saved, this church needs to be a safe place for them to come and grow in Christ without hindrances! We need to tolerate sinners coming in here because that’s where Jesus hung out. We need to help them see Jesus in us and treat them as Jesus treated sinners. He accepted them as people, but He also forgave their sins and healed them and told them, “Go and sin no more.”

d. We need to become a balanced church that focuses on helping others get to know our awesome and amazing God. We need to fulfill the Great Commission.

2. As we become the church that prays and is mission-minded, we will see what God sees for our city and see our place in His plan for the city.

a. The mission is big! It is not something we can do ourselves. If our vision for the church were something we could do ourselves, it would only be OUR vision. God’s vision requires His supernatural help! Look at Gideon, whose army dwindled from 32,000 to 300 so that everyone would know God did the mission, not Gideon (Judges 7).

b. The mission is impossible! We cannot do it in and of ourselves. WE need help. We are weak and we don’t know how to do what God is telling us to do, but neither did almost everyone God called on in Scripture. Paul talks about God ministering in strength out of our weakness (1 Cor 1:27-29).

Conclusion

I don’t know about you, but I’m excited about where God wants to take us as a group of believers, and also as individuals. Tonight, I want to begin by giving us steps that we can take daily to move toward these goals. We’re going to talk about how to pray tonight and how to do God’s mission in our community.

But today, we need to make a commitment to actively pursue this goal and have the same unified mind of Christ as we continue to be a great church that serves and loves the Lord. Are you committed to seeing God powerfully move among us and in our community, in our homes, in our families? God has set our course and we must accept. If you feel called to take on this mission, this goal for our church, please stand with me as we pray.