

A New Way Forward

John 11:25–27

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My enthusiasm is growing for the future of our congregation. Through the work of the Future Team we discussed lots of ideas, and put many things on the table. It has been an encouraging process as I look back on it. God has been revealing many things to each person on the team. We've been honest with one another. The conversation has been open. Ideas have been thoroughly discussed.

I want to thank each person on the team: Carolyn, Diane, Ron, Kyle, Keri, and Lonie. Thanks to each one of you. Thank you Lonie. She coordinated and lead the team. She has wonderful skills in fostering discussion and finding conclusions.

Through this process and even before the Future Team was formed I had been praying for God's power and wisdom to lead this congregation. We went through the season of the Covid Pandemic and I didn't know exactly what to do. That is now in our rearview mirror but many things in our culture, the mindset of people young and old, married and single, employed and unemployed has changed. The thinking in our world has changed dramatically.

I've prayed for God to give me a clear vision and mission to move forward. It has felt like forever, but it's only been a few years. Although, nothing is written in stone, there is a clear path for us to move forward. God is providing a new way forward. I'm going to share this new vision and mission with you. This will be setting the stage for the recommendations of the Future Team.

A new way forward is found in this Vision Statement: We are Bible Believing Disciples of Jesus Committed to Making More Disciples. A new way forward is seen in this Mission Statement. We will seek to make disciples of Jesus by: Being present at community events and activities; Praying for and getting to know our neighbors, inviting them to church, and introducing them to Jesus; Training one another to share the gospel and teaching one another how to pray and study the Bible.

It begins with a passage from a scene at a funeral. ***Jesus said to Martha, "I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?" She said to him, "Yes, Lord; I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who is coming into the world." John 11:25–27 (ESV)***

To live and never die everyone needs to believe in Jesus. The point has always been and always will be about believing in Jesus.

There were two sisters and a brother – Mary, Martha, and Lazarus. This family lived in Bethany not far from Jerusalem. It is believed that Jesus spent time with this family on numerous occasions. Lazarus was sick and Jesus was close enough to travel there and heal him. But, Jesus didn't because Lazarus' death would bring glory to God.

Four days after Lazarus died Jesus showed up. Martha meet Jesus and told Him that if He had been there Lazarus would be alive. This was not an accusation but a demonstration of her faith. Martha believed Jesus was the Messiah and had the power to heal.

Faith in Jesus is always about life over death. Nearly every human being wants life over death. Jesus is saying that death is literally dying and no longer living. He is also saying that death is being spiritually dead. That is being dead to God, separated from God, without a living relationship with God.

This spiritual death is drugs, alcohol, and any addiction. It is sexual sin, lying, stealing, being jealous, hatred, violence, and killing. Spiritual death is anything that is selfish, putting God second in our lives.

Jesus is life and the giver of life. Believing in Jesus is the only way to be spiritually alive, in a living relationship with God. Believing Jesus is the only way to have life after death in heaven for eternity.

Our vision and mission is grounded, it's foundation, it's only pillar is believing in Jesus. Then after belief comes everything else – love, hope, peace, compassion, kindness, and power. After belief comes making disciples who make disciples who make disciples.

Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age. Matthew 28:19–20 (NIV)

There are a variety things to study and discuss in this passage. It is Jesus' commission to every disciple, to His church. Let's focus on the word GO. The commission of Jesus is for His disciple to go to all the nations. It is not stay, or hibernate, or live in fear, or pretend that's for someone else. If you are taking these words personally and are offended hear this: We are empowered to GO. We are given the privilege of being called to GO. We are have the honor of being able to GO.

This commission to go is not a command, but its an opportunity to show respect to our Savior to share His grace, mercy, love, and salvation. This is the opportunity to help another person come to Jesus. We are given the opportunity to bring life to those who are dead in their sins. We are given the opportunity to offer a way out of eternal punishment and experience eternal life in heaven.

All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work. 2 Timothy 3:16–17 (NIV)

We are united by our sense of family and our belief in Jesus and His Word. We trust God and His word to have authority over our lives. Believing the Bible is God's authoritative Word for our lives is in our Christian DNA. It makes us unique in the world, sinners don't believe the Bible has authority over their lives. Even some Christians don't choose the Word of God to guide them through life.

Being Bible believing disciples of Jesus is more than just a way for us to identify ourselves. Bible believing disciples take seriously the words. So, we desire to read and study God's Word. We want God's Word to be firmly planted in our hearts and minds. We want to be strengthened and empowered by God's Word.

When we read God's Word and discover a sin that's in our lives, we confess the sin and repent of the sin. We turn away from the sin, we give it to Jesus, and accept His mercy, grace, and forgiveness. We ask for His power to overcome the sin. We want it to be as far away from us as the east is from the west.

We read God's Word and we find in those words the promises of God. We stand on those promises in every circumstance and situation. We trust the Lord to keep His promises. We keep our faith in God even when we don't see His promises come true. We share God's Word with one another. We give it away as comfort. We hand it off to help correct others. We offer the Word of God so others will believe in Jesus.

Let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching. Hebrews 10:24–25 (NIV)

Not everyone feels equipped to have spiritual conversations. Not everyone feels they can take the Bible and talk with others about it. Not everyone feels they can take what they've learned in the Bible and give it away to family, a friend, or a co-worker.

The Holy Spirit God of has put it on my heart to lead a series of studies starting in January. How to pray for unsaved people. Jesus hears our prayers and answers our prayers. If we expect people to become disciples of Jesus, turning away from their sin, we need to be praying for them. These are bold prayers because we are asking God to do something bold. I will also lead a Bible Study on How to start Spiritual Conversations. Nearly every person in this room can start a conversation. We can talk about the weather, or sports, or our pets, or our families. We've got complaining and whining down. But in any of these conversations can we turn the direction to spiritual matters. I'll lead a Bible Study on How to talk to people about being saved. Can you explain what it means to be saved? Can you express the difference between being unsaved and saved? We'll have a Bible Study on How to led someone to Jesus. Each Study will be a few weeks long. I will make the study available to everyone, but encourage all of us to be in a group studying together. One group study will be on Tuesday's from 4-5 pm. I would like to start another study at a time for those can't make Tuesdays. I need your help finding that day and time. We need to spur one another along.

For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. Romans 6:23 (NIV)

You've been saved by Jesus, but what about your neighbors? The gift of forgiveness and life is free through faith. That is our testimony. We didn't do anything to be forgiven. Jesus came to earth from His throne in heaven. He died on the cross as our sin. He rose from the dead to give us new life. Do your neighbors know this? Do your co-workers know this? Do your family members know this? Do they believe in Jesus? Are you praying for them?

I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God. Ephesians 3:16–19 (NIV)

May this become our prayer for our neighbors. Let me introduce to you Bless Every Home. This is a ministry which empowers any person with a physical address to pray for their neighbors. This is a map of my neighborhood. Through public records nearly every human being can be identified. Everyday I can pray by name for all of these people. I can focus on the people who are beside me and across the street.

Bless Every Home guides me through the Word BLESS. Begin with prayer. Listen to your neighbors. Eat together if the opportunity arises. Share about your life with Jesus. Tell the Story of Jesus.

By January it would be ideal to have everyone signed up with Bless Every Home. I will put the details in the December newsletter. Part of our mission is to be committed to praying for our neighbors and helping them meet Jesus. We can pray for our neighbors for as long as we they are neighbors.

Romans 1:14–17 (NIV)

I am obligated both to Greeks and non-Greeks, both to the wise and the foolish. That is why I am so eager to preach the gospel also to you who are at Rome. I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile. For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: “The righteous will live by faith.”

We need to pray and go to our neighbors and our community. We can fulfill our obligation as disciple makers who make disciples who make disciples. We do this because we believe in Jesus and we believe His Word. Jesus and His Word have authority over our lives. Jesus has authority over our lives not busyness or any other person. Jesus’ Word has authority over our lives not our selfish ideas.

Since we believe in Jesus and His Word we are committed to making disciples. Now if you don’t believe that Jesus commissioned you to make disciples take it up with Jesus. His Word does not lie. If we are not committed to making disciples, then we need to ask Jesus why? Jesus called His disciples to drop what they were doing to go and make disciples. Jesus provided them what they needed for everyday of life.

You and I have the opportunity everyday to believe and be faithful to Jesus. We get to be in prayer for the people we meet and those we have not yet met. We get to share the grace of God with others. We get to give the love of God to those in need. We get to tell others that they can be forgiven.

For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God Ephesians 2:8 (NIV)

People will suffer for eternity in hell forever if they don’t know Jesus. If we believe that we have been commissioned by Jesus to make disciples and we don’t, there will be hell to pay. You’re saved. You won’t be paying hell. But the people who don’t know Jesus will be paying hell. They will be paying for all of eternity. I’ve never used such strong words with you. I’ve been more gentle in my expressions. The Holy Spirit of God is compelling me to encourage you, to challenge you; all of us. We can no longer be satisfied to stay within these four walls. We must be committed to making disciples. We must be committed to offering the free grace of God. We must be committed to giving Jesus away.

Everyone person young and old, male and female, white and every color, from every culture needs Jesus. They need to be forgiven of their sins. They need to be snatched away from the jaws of death and given life. They need the life Jesus gives now. They need the eternal life in heaven that only comes by believing in Jesus.

Are you committed to the Bible? Are you committed to Jesus?