

Vision Sunday 2021 – An Ancient Vision

In order to become the church that Jesus wants us to be, we must adopt an ancient vision, and build off the sure foundation of God's Word, sincere fellowship, hospitality, and prayer.

Acts 2:42-47

PRAY FOR AFGHANISTAN

What we have going on in Afghanistan is a human rights tragedy. The way that our withdrawal has been handled is nothing short of horrific, and I believe there needs to be some accountability for those who responsible for the decisions that led to so many people being abandoned to an evil, demonic, governing authority.

- Our brothers and sisters in Christ are literally being hunted down. The Taliban will not allow anything contrary to their version of Islam to survive.
- Church in Afghanistan 2nd fastest growing church in the world.
- Hebrews – remember those in chains as though you were chained with them, for we are all one body.
- Pray for our administration and leaders.

INTRODUCTION

Good morning family!

I'm so thrilled to be here again with you this morning. It's a much-needed refreshment in the midst of such an upheaval going on in our world, to be among God's people, in God's presence, pursuing God's purposes together.

Next wee (I promise) we are diving into a study through the book of 2nd Thessalonians as we take an in-depth look at Biblical prophecy, the coming of Christ, and the days in which we are living. As we get there, I wanted to take one Sunday to share with you some vision for the future. I know typically the vision Sunday comes at the end of the year, but there's so much happening, I believe Jesus is coming back soon, and God is moving here and now to bring us into a new season of service and fruitfulness for His kingdom.

There's something I've learned (unfortunately, many times the hard way) about following the Lord's lead:

QUOTE

Don't ever hurry while waiting on the Lord, but don't ever hesitate when God speaks.

Josh,

APPLICATION

I believe the Lord has put some things on my heart that will continue to move our church, and us as individuals, along the path that God is laying before us.

- I'm convinced that there is too much kingdom work that needs to be done for churches to wander and wonder about who they are or what they should be doing. We need to be about our Father's business.
- Much of what I will share today will not be new, but mere reminders about what Jesus has already called the church to be; a call to renewal and recommitment to the calls of scripture on the church.
- ***So today we will move through a number of things including a modification made to our church name, some fresh vision and direction for ministry, and a time of recommitment as one body to the calling of Christ for Grace and what God wants to do in this city.***

VISION

First, let's hear a brief encouragement from our pastors here at Grace (**Play Video**).

I can't think of a better place to launch a vision for the future, than from a beautiful vision from the past. I like to call it, "***The Ancient Vision***" which is still as powerful and relevant today as it was back at the Genesis of the church of Jesus Christ.

Turn in your Bible to Acts 2.

BIBLE VERSE

[Act 2:41-47 NKJV] 41 Then those who gladly received his word were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls were added [to them]. 42 And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers. 43 Then fear came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were done through the apostles. 44 Now all who believed were together, and had all things in common, 45 and sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need. 46 So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart, 47 praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved.

INTRO

The story of the church is not of a business or organization run by professionals, but of a living organism; a body that receives its life, vitality, and direction from the head— Jesus. The church undoubtedly holds the most important responsibility on the earth; that of representing the love, power, and truth of Jesus Christ in a tangible way to a lost and broken world; equipping the saints for the work of the ministry.

- And, as it is with any living organism, the church can only be effective at accomplishing its God-given mission when it's healthy and spiritual empowered; when its heartbeat is strong, its vision is clear, its spirit is vibrant; when each member operates according to its intended function, and its mind is clear and sound.
- When it comes to the subject of church growth, we must understand that the church grows... not as an organization grows, through human prowess, creative and talented leaders, professional strategy, and entertainment-driven worship. As a body grows, so the church grows. Paul puts it like this in his letter to the Ephesians...

BIBLE VERSE

[Eph 4:15-16 NKJV] **15** but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ— **16** from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love.

APPLICATION

We certainly live in a church culture that has complicated ideas such a church growth. Paul pretty clearly tells us what causes the growth of the body. This is Christ's Church Growth strategy...

- *When the truth is spoken*
- *When love is preeminent*
- *When Christ is the head*
- *When every person fulfills their role*

SLIDE-03

This is where I have derived four core elements that serve as a foundation for the kind of church we want to strive to become.

In being a church that exists to awaken people to the truth, love, and power of God...

1. **We are anchored in Jesus** – Jesus is the way to a wandering world, the truth in a maze of deception, and the life in a place where death reigns. We exist so that our communities, local and abroad, can experience the life-changing gospel of Jesus and God's transforming power.
2. **We are built on God's Word** – We exist to be a voice of truth as we teach and live out God's Word in a culture that is steeped in fear and deception. God's Word is truth, and we will always hold the Bible as our final authority on all things relating to God, people, and life.
3. **We are empowered by the Spirit for service** – We exist to see a movement of biblically grounded, Spirit-empowered people spread throughout the midwest and beyond. Because the Spirit enables us, we are not spectators, but active participants in God's kingdom plans.
4. **Rooted in Love** – We exist to be a pipeline of gospel-centered provision and generosity to those in need of God's love. We believe the Love of God transforms us to see and care for others as God does.

APPLICATION

Thankfully, scripture doesn't just give us this as a concept. We have the perfect blueprint and example of this in the New Testament church.

- Was the NT church perfect? Nope! There has not ever been a perfect church from its founding, because people are always involved.
 - If you find the perfect church, leave because you'll mess it up.
 - **JOKE**: man on a deserted island with three huts. (apparently, he offended himself)
- The early church dealt with the same issues we deal with today: carnality, divisions, false doctrine, pride, immaturity, and the rest.
- BUT, we also see a church that was arguably the most effective and powerful to date; A church that under the leadership of the original apostles and the empowerment of the Holy Spirit was healthy, generous, impactful, unified, and effective.
- In Acts 2 we have a glimpse into their story and the work that God did. There was no great human strategy employed when the first church exploded in growth and effectiveness. Yes, there was organization and wisdom, but those were only to manage the genuine work of the Holy Spirit, not to try and create or manufacture a work of the Holy Spirit.

In Acts 2, we see a beautiful progression with the early church that stands as a model for us today.

- **A strong foundation**
- **A sacrificial generosity**
- **A solid reputation**
- **A Salvation Opportunity.**

1

A Strong Foundation

BIBLE VERSE

The birth of the church begins with supernatural power being generously given to the church by the triune God in the person of the Holy Spirit.

You could sum it up like this:

“Before God sent the church into the world, he sent the Spirit of God into the church.”

– And in my opinion, if the apostles and the first church needed the power and baptism of the Spirit in order to effectively fulfill Christ’s great commission, then we even more! As one author put it...

QUOTE

“The Spirit of God, His presence, and His gifts are not simply desirable in our congregations; they are absolutely imperative!”

AW Tozer,

APPLICATION

Well, as the story goes, the Holy Spirit fills each of these first disciples on the day of Pentecost (not the title of a church movement, but simply meaning the 50th day. The feast of weeks. The day celebrating the giving of the law on Mt. Sinai.) and accomplishes His first act of power in and through the body of Christ resulting in 3000 new converts in one day.

- Talk about a logistical nightmare for the leaders of this new movement! 3000 baby Christians who were all radically and instantaneously transformed by the living Jesus through the gospel. None of them even want to leave this newfound family. There is no central building, only 12 leaders with 3 years of training (granted their teacher was Jesus), no systems, plans...
- A strong foundation was certainly needed, and so one was laid. We find it in verse 42.

BIBLE VERSE

[Act 2:42-43 NKJV] 42 And they continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers. 43 Then fear came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were done through the apostles.

FOUNDATION

Continued steadfastly – there was a long-term resolution to four things... the most important things that long-term spiritual health and growth flow out of.

1 - SOUND TEACHING (THE APOSTLE'S DOCTRINE)

Remember, the first church had no canonized New Testament Bible. They had the Old Testament scriptures coupled with the apostles' unique authority to learn the things of Christ and Christian living.

Imagine those poor apostles! No wonder they had to find other guys to serve the people while they devoted themselves to prayer and doctrine. They were in the process of writing the NT! There were thousands of people, a newfound faith, and no one knows what to do so everyone looks at the apostles. They must have hit their pillows hard at night!

BIBLE: Our Bible contains the entirety of the inspired OT scriptures, then we have all of the apostle's doctrine, written by their hands, in the NT. And just as they did back then, we must stay committed to it.

They CONTINUED: The Greek tense here actually means, **"They continually continued. Past present and future."**

NOTICE: The church that has the power of the Holy Spirit freely reigning was also the church that was steadfastly committed to continuing in the authoritative word of God.

APPLICATION

APPLICATION: As a pastor, there can often be a temptation to preach the latest trends or fads in evangelical circles, repeat the current cultural narratives of the world to gain popularity, or merely copy the most popular Facebook and youtube pastoral sensations. Whenever I as a human am tempted to move toward the latest fad, I am reminded of Paul's exhortation to Timothy:

BIBLE VERSE

[2TI 4:2 NKJV] 2 PREACH THE WORD! BE READY IN SEASON AND OUT OF SEASON. CONVINCe, REBUKE, EXHORT, WITH ALL LONGSUFFERING AND TEACHING.

We have the best material in existence! Instead of trying to determine on my own what is relevant, I can let God's word set the tone, convict hearts, and instruct. That is what we all need! As Paul told the Ephesians elders...

[Act 20:27 NKJV] 27 "For I have not shunned to declare to you the whole counsel of God."

VISION SLIDE

This is what I desire Grace to be committed to and known for.

- We want to bring a biblical worldview and perspective on everything. In a day in age when the church is getting a commentary on life from the local news, entertainment, or political system, our imperative as Christians is to let God's world shape our perspective on everything.
- 1. Starting January of next year, we will encourage our entire church to travel together through the one-year Bible to make it part of our daily reading habits.
- 2. **Men's Ministry** – I will be giving direction to our men's ministry team to launch a new men's discipleship based study where our older men will teach our younger men and we will develop an avenue for men to meet together monthly, study the word, and be exhorted in their leadership at home, in the church, and in their world.
- 3. **Women's Ministry** – Likewise, our women's ministry will continue to invest in cross-generational ministry and a deeper level of discipleship while providing true fellowship opportunities for relationship building. My wife and Dyann will briefly share the heart of this upcoming women's retreat.
- 4. **Children's and youth ministries** – incorporating more curriculum in the days to come that help children and young adults develop a biblical worldview, memorize scripture, and experience the power of God's word as it is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword.

2 - FELLOWSHIP (KOINONIA - TO HAVE ALL THINGS IN COMMON)

Despite the fact that we are all uniquely different, our differences become subservient to what we commonly share in Christ. Together, we are the redeemed family of God.

- The first church spent time with each other that was intentionally centered around spiritually edifying and serving one another.
- Christian fellowship is not just being together. It's being together for the very purpose of seeing Christ formed in us as we share our lives with each other.

[HEB 10:25 NKJV] 25 NOT FORSAKING THE ASSEMBLING OF OURSELVES TOGETHER, AS IS THE MANNER OF SOME, BUT EXHORTING ONE ANOTHER, AND SO MUCH THE MORE AS YOU SEE THE DAY APPROACHING.

In order for the church to be strong and healthy, it **MUST** corporately gather. You will not grow as you should if you don't spend time worshipping with, learning with, and serving with other Christians.

VISION

- **G3 groups** – will continue to dig deeper into the things we study together on Sunday mornings, gaining a greater understanding and application of the word of God.

3 - HOSPITALITY AND FOOD

Breaking of bread – there are some who imply that this is directly related to communion or the Lord's supper. While this is certainly part of it, partaking together of the love feast (the Lord's supper), it's not the sole of it. In fact, verse 46 defines that the breaking of bread as actually people going to each other's homes and sharing in a meal with gladness and simplicity of heart!

- The Bible teaches us that there is a special fellowship that is built when I'm sharing food with others.
- People opened their homes, resources, and lives to one another.

4 - PRAYERS

The early church was committed to worshipping and praying together.

PRAYERS – probably actually written prayers that they would recite much like written songs that we sing.

- Some of our songs are prayers, others are declarations, others are praises. They are all good and should be a regular part of our corporate gatherings.

COL 3:16 NKJV – LET THE WORD OF CHRIST DWELL IN YOU RICHLY IN ALL WISDOM, TEACHING AND ADMONISHING ONE ANOTHER IN PSALMS AND HYMNS AND SPIRITUAL SONGS, SINGING WITH GRACE IN YOUR HEARTS TO THE LORD.

Consistent prayer, both personally and corporately, is necessary to a healthy and growing church.

VISION

This is where our **Second Sundays and Early morning prayer groups** come in.

- We will continue to meet every second Sunday, both in this building and around our community to bring the power of God through prayer into our city, church, homes, and personal lives.
- Every Friday morning at 6:00 AM, there is a group that meets here for prayer.
- And my long-term vision for Grace is that we have groups praying during every service, and eventually as we grow in this community, prayer teams every night, and prayer warriors who can commit to praying with people on the phone that call in.

Worship and Praise:

- I believe the Lord wants to further develop our worship ministry here to write songs of praise, like the sons of Asaph or King David in the OT, and use them to lead the body of Christ in the praise of God.
- There are so many worship movements out there that are such a blessing to the larger body of Christ by giving us songs to sing, but sadly, there are many that are going theologically off course as well. I believe it's fundamentally essential to have worship songs that trace back to solid biblical teaching.
- We are opening our doors to those who have been gifted creatively to sing, play, write, and produce music. We want to develop our youth that have been gifted in this area.
- I believe that God is going to continue to bring people who are called to this church and believe in our vision to continue to take our worship ministries to new levels. We are going to do nights of worship and develop a culture that adores, reverences, and longs for the person and presence of God.

APPLICATION

And really, we have a very uncomplicated formula, from the first church, of what we should seek to build upon. If you are having trouble gaining a good vision for your church then simplify it!

Write these 4 things down in a place that you will always see and be reminded:

1. ***Keep our lives rooted in God's Word***
2. ***Continue to invest in relationships and fellowship with other believers***
3. ***Express and receive hospitality and you invite people into your homes and lives.***

4. *Commit yourselves to public and private prayer and worship.*

2

A Sacrificial Generosity

BIBLE VERSE

Acts 2:44 Now all who believed were together, and had all things in common, **45** and sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need. **46** So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart,

CUSTOM BLOCK

Notice the genuine generosity that flowed out of a solid foundation. Some read this and go, “Wow, a little extreme!”

- Yes, it was. Apparently, the first church actually thought that sacrificially expressing the love of Christ to people in need really mattered. The attitude wasn't, ***“What can I get out of Jesus”*** or, ***“What can the church do for me”***, but rather, ***“How can I give on my time, treasures, and talents for Jesus and His church.”***
- Today, many people seem to go to church or identify with Jesus based on what they can get out of it, or at least, discover the methods to obtain a materially blessed life.
- But the first church reflected the servant, giving attitude of Christ. Christ gave himself for us and he blesses us in order that we might be a blessing.

NOTICE THE WORD: as anyone had need (verse 45)

- There's no doubt that the first to receive help were those in the church, but I think this also implies that the church was generous to the needs of those outside their four walls as well.

[GAL 6:10 NKJV] 10 THEREFORE, AS WE HAVE OPPORTUNITY, LET US DO GOOD TO ALL, ESPECIALLY TO THOSE WHO ARE OF THE HOUSEHOLD OF FAITH.

VISION

We too want to be known as a people of radical generosity; that the needs of our fellow brothers and sisters, and of those neighbors around us are equally, if not even more important, than our own desires.

- Jesus said that the world will know that we are his disciples by the love that we display to one another. They should be moved with jealousy when they see Christians caring for each other, not out of obligation, but out of genuine love and desire.

Hands of Grace – With the hands of Grace, we are going to continue to press into our community, and sacrificially show them the love of Christ by partnering together to extend the reach of the gospel into people’s lives.

- You also need to know that the pastors, elders, and deacons of this church take the stewardship of what you and I give very seriously. The early church had wealthy landowners that sold some of their property and entrusted the proceeds to the apostles. The apostles then distributed those resources as led by the Spirit to the various needs that existed.

[1Jo 3:18 NKJV] 18 My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth.

Pro-life – as those who seek to love our unborn neighbors, we will increase our partnership with organizations like LoveLife, 40 days of life, and our local PRC in order to become a more active part in bringing hope to women who are afraid and end the tragic practice of abortion.

3

A Solid Reputation

BIBLE VERSE

47 (they were) praising God and having favor with all the people.

APPLICATION

We see that those in the early church were not trouble makers for the sake of making trouble. They weren’t hated by the surrounding population because they were bigots, or self-righteous.

The power, love, and truth that came from the church caused them to have a level of respect within their community.

We must not take this to mean that the goal of the early church was to get everyone in the unbelieving world to like them. That should never be the goal of the church:

- Let's sugarcoat the truth so no one gets offended. NOPE.
- Let's avoid teaching what God says about controversial issues so we don't make and waves. NOPE.

“Controversy for the sake of controversy is sin. Controversy for the sake of truth is a divine command. -Walter Martin

In fact, Jesus said, “Beware if all men speak well of you,” and, “You will be hated by all nations for my name's sake.

- Later in the book of Acts we read, “[Act 5:12-14 NKJV] **12 And through the hands of the apostles many signs and wonders were done among the people. And they were all with one accord in Solomon's Porch. 13 Yet none of the rest dared join them, but the people esteemed them highly. 14 And believers were increasingly added to the Lord, multitudes of both men and women...**”
- But here's what I've learned about a church that is unashamed of Jesus and uncompromising in the truth: even though the darkness will hate them, and the world will persecute them, at the same time, God will show them supernatural favor within their communities.

VISION

Christians & Culture: Granted, I don't deny that some of these topics I am covering are controversial within our society, but I also believe that as we continue to speak God's truth into the issues of our day, the people around us will start to take notice. To some, we will be the fragrance of death leading to death, but to others, we will be the fragrance of life leading to life.

4

A Salvation Opportunity

BIBLE VERSE

47b – And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved.

APPLICATION

I've seen many churches and met many pastors who approach winning souls in different ways, but I've never met a church that hasn't hoped for this outcome... ***that the church was growing daily due to people coming to Christ.***

EXAMPLE: Imagine for a moment you are hiring a nanny to watch your kids on a regular basis. Would you be pretty thorough?

- A lady comes in wearing a **“World’s best nanny” t-shirt [image]**. You're hopeful. She hands you her resume and you begin to read...
 - Never had any children, but how hard can it really be?
 - No criminal records except for those three counts of child endangerment.
 - Was fired from 3 nanny jobs, but only because parents had unrealistic expectations about their child's safety and well-being.
 - Can drive your kids anywhere, if you can overlook the suspended license due to last week's DUI.

VISION

WELL, I think God has some standards too. I think he wants to add daily to the church... the question I ask myself, “Does this church have the environment that the Lord feels safe sending his new kids to?” I long for the answer to be yes, and I want it to start with me.

- **New Believers:** I am committed to continuing to preach the gospel and invite people to know Jesus.
- This fall we will be starting a new believer's course with pastor Rick. If you've recently received Christ, we want to help you get grounded in the foundational elements of your faith and spiritual disciplines so that you can grow in the Lord.
- Not only that, but I believe we will see an increase in the days to come of us learning how to better evangelize than lost in our community by going out on the streets and sharing the gospel.

Missions: I am blown away at the faithfulness of our church in supporting the work of the gospel abroad. your faithful giving has enabled so many to continue their missions work. We will be highlighting a missionary every month so that we can keep visibility on how we ought to be praying and supporting those that we partner with in the world

VISION

I recently was convicted by the Holy Spirit to explore and pray through various areas of Saint Joe. I went through neighborhoods I'd never seen. I saw some incredibly beautiful places I never knew existed here, and I saw some poverty that shocked me.

Core Campuses: This is when the Lord laid it on my heart to bring the gospel and build the church in every area of saint Joseph: poor and rich, black and white, city and suburbs.

- I hope to see this accomplished in the years to come by raising up and training pastoral leaders to plant small core campuses throughout Saint Joe. These will be in homes, shopping centers, and industrial buildings. They will be designed to reach and involve people who wouldn't naturally come here to our main campus.
- We won't be going for size, although if God added size, we praise Him. We will be going for quality and true discipleship. I want to see core groups of passionate, sold-out disciples engaging every area of this community.

APPLICATION

If we start here, with these foundational truths, over time the church will become a healthy place that God will send His children to. But we have to be committed! We must have long-term resolve. We will need to continue in these things even when we don't see immediate results. We will have to resist the temptation to bypass these core values and do a work in the flesh, but in the end, work in the flesh holds no eternal value.

CALVARY CHAPEL

I must say that I love the church. Not just this church, the entire church.

- When I see genuine CHrist followers who are preaching the gospel and living for Jesus, I don't care if they share the same denominational title as me, stylistic preferences, or specific

emphasis and priorities. The church is a bit like a multi-lane highway. We are all going in the same direction, but we are in different lanes, driving different cars, at different speeds. As long as someone doesn't turn around and go the other way, cut another person off, or get road rage, we should all be ok!

- But I am also glad that God has given me, as a pastor, a specific lane and vehicle. For me, that lane has been a movement called Calvary Chapel. Honestly, the principles I laid out from Acts chapter 2 I never even heard preach in a church until I came to Calvary Chapel. Calvary Chapel modeled to me how to strive for biblical Christianity, a balanced approach to ministry, dependency on the Holy Spirit's power, healthy church life, and strong leadership.
 - Like any model, Calvary Chapel isn't the perfect one. Over the years, Calvary has gone through its own shifts, changes, and is still developing today.
 - Grace has actually been affiliated with Calvary Chapel for a number of years now. I believe the Lord recently spoke to my heart that Grace needs to be a larger part of what Calvary Chapel is developing into. We need to model Calvary Chapel in the midwest, both what it has been historically, and what it needs to remain in the future.
 - This is the reason why our elders under my suggestion and direction have prayerfully agreed to add Calvary Chapel into our name. We will still be Grace, for that is what we are about, and reminiscent of all the amazing things God has done here over 37 years. But we will also be proud of our identity as a Calvary Chapel as we seek to carry on that legacy into the future.

CLOSING CORPORATE PRAYER

I realize this vision may not resonate with everyone, and that is why we have a variety of local churches that each have a different flavor, each have their strengths and weaknesses, and each have different people that God is calling to be part of them. But if God is calling you to be a part of Grace, I want to ask you to stand with me today and pray a prayer of commitment to these causes that the Lord has called us to pursue.

Would you pray with me today, **“Lord, let us lay a good foundation of biblical truth, relationship, and worship. Let us be fruitful in every good work that you have prepared for us to walk in, both inside and outside of the church. Give us favor with those around us that the name of Jesus would be magnified because of our generosity. Because of these things, may we have an open door to present the saving knowledge of Jesus Christ that many might be saved.”**



In Jesus name... AMEN!