

WHAT IS OUR VISION?

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- The title of this sermon is “What is our Vision?”
- Every once in a while it is important to give a “state of the church” talk. It’s important for the health of any organization to regularly ask, “What is our business, and how’s business?” Or to ask, “Where are we headed, and what do we need to do to get there?”
- Last week we talked about the mission of the church.
 - What is our mission? **We exist to help people far from God become fully devoted followers of Jesus Christ.**
 - That brings up two questions: What is a fully devoted follower of Jesus Christ? And how do we help people become fully devoted?
 - **Full devotion** means becoming like Christ, loving God and others more and more.
 - We help people become fully devoted by leading them through a discipleship process.
- Today I want to talk about vision. What is our vision?
- Vision is different than mission.
 - Mission is our purpose; it is the reason we exist. And we exist for the same reason as every other Biblical church, and that’s to glorify God by making disciples.
 - Vision is the unique problem we’re called to solve; or the unique contribution God wants us to make.

- Vision is the reason God called us to start a new church. When we started Church Acadiana, there were already some great churches in town. So why start a new church?
 - Well, there is unique problem that God wanted us to solve.
 - There is a unique contribution that God wanted us to make.
 - There was a need that God wanted us to meet; a need that was going unmet.

THE SYMPTOM

- To understand vision we have to begin with the symptom. We'll get to the problem later. **The church in America is losing the next generation.**
 - A 2013 study by Barna Research and the National Center for Family Integrated Churches found that 61 percent of 20-somethings who had been churched at one point during their teen years are now spiritually disengaged. That means they no longer attend church, pray or read their Bible.¹ Do you think that study might be a fluke?
 - Another study by the Southern Baptist Convention Executive Committee reported that 70 percent of teenagers involved in church youth groups stop attending church within two years of their high school graduation.² And still another report by Southern Baptist Council on Family Life reported that 88 percent of children in evangelical homes leave church at the age of 18.³
 - In still another study, Thom Rainer, the president of LifeWay Christian Resources, did a survey to tell if people understood the gospel.⁴ The following percentages of people answered the questions in a way that indicated that they were truly born again:
 - Born before 1946 – 65 percent
 - Born between 1946 and 1964 – 35 percent

¹ <http://www.charismanews.com/us/41465-youth-groups-driving-christian-teens-to-abandon-faith>

² *ibid.*

³ *ibid*, 325.

⁴ *Ibid.*

- Born between 1965 and 1976 – 15 percent
 - Born between 1976 and 1994 – 4 percent
- Let me put it this way. What the church is currently doing is not working. We are losing the next generation. Something has to change.
- Let me make this a little more personal. I grew up in a strong Christian home. Both of my parents are saved. They set a godly example for us. They brought us to church every week, several times a week. We even spent time in Christian schools. I have four brothers. Of the five of us, I am the only one serving God today. You see, these statistics might just be numbers to you, but they are much more than that to me. I've lived it.
- Not only that, but now I have a family of my own. I have six kids of my own. I don't want to lose my kids to the devil and the world. More than anything, I want my kids to grow up to become fully devoted followers of Jesus.
- But what's terrifying is that the church in America is doing a terrible job at reaching the next generation.
- The way that normal Christian parents are raising their kids, and the way that normal churches are discipling kids is not working.
- Think about it like this:
 - The mission of the church is to make disciples – to reach the lost and lead them to full devotion.
 - But the church in America is not even reaching its own kids.
 - The world is much better at reaching our kids than the church is at reaching the world.

- How can we reach the world if we're not even reaching our own children?
- As a church our mission is to reach the world for Christ.
 - Where should we start?
 - China? No. Here in America.
 - Should we focus on the north side of Lafayette Parish? No. We should start right here in the south side where we are located.
 - Should we start with our neighbors? No. We should start with our kids.
 - Our first mission field are our kids. Our first target audience are our kids.
 - Our priority must be reaching our children for Christ.
 - We have no business attempting to reach the community for Christ until we first ensure that we are doing whatever it takes to reach our kids.
- Something has to change.

THE PROBLEM

- So we began with the symptom. The fact that the church in America is losing the next generation is a symptom of a deeper problem. **The problem is disobedience to Scripture.** Let me explain.
 - The Bible commands parents to disciple their kids in the home,
 - but for the past couple of generations Christian parents have neglected home discipleship.

- Instead, they brought their kids to church so someone else can disciple them.
 - They dropped their kids off at Sunday school and at youth group and assumed that the job would get done.
 - And whether parents knew it or not, that is direct disobedience to Scripture.
- Let's look at Scripture, beginning with the Old Testament. **Deuteronomy 6:4-7** says, “4 “Listen, O Israel! The Lord is our God, the Lord alone. 5 And you must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your strength. 6 And you must commit yourselves wholeheartedly to these commands that I am giving you today. 7 Repeat them again and again to your children. Talk about them when you are at home and when you are on the road, when you are going to bed and when you are getting up.”⁵
 - And then the New Testament. **Ephesians 6:4** says, “Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger by the way you treat them. Rather, bring them up with the discipline and instruction that comes from the Lord.” Discipline means teaching them to behave like Christ; and instruction means teaching them what to believe about Christ.
 - Now both of these passages command parents to disciple their kids. They don't say, “Parents, make sure your kids get disciplined. It doesn't matter who does it. Just make sure it gets done.” The Bible is clear that parents are to do the discipling. **Parents are to sit in the driver's seat of discipleship.**
 - This brings us to a discussion as to the nature of parenting.
 - What is parenting? What is a parent to do? According to Scripture, a central and essential part of the task of parenting is discipleship. Discipling your kids – and specifically the father discipling the kids.

⁵ Unless otherwise noted, all scripture is quoted from the New Living Translation.

- And this is how the church in America has been disobedient. Instead of discipling their kids, parents have been delegating that task to Sunday school teachers and youth pastors.
- But there are some things in life that you just can't delegate.
 - I can't ask another man to date and romance my wife in my place.
 - I can't ask another man to have family dinner in my place.
 - I can't ask another man to provide for my family's needs in my place.
 - And I can't ask another man to disciple my kids in my place.
- The Bible says that discipleship is central to parenthood. That's something I, particularly as a father, ought to be doing.
- Now why would God want parents to disciple their kids, rather than delegate the task of discipleship?
 - **First of all, parents have more influence on their children than anyone else.** Think it through. Your child loves, trusts, and respects you more than anyone else in the whole world. And since you are the biggest influence in your kid's life, then you will be the most effective at teaching them to follow Christ. They are most likely to believe it, and value it, and adopt it if it is coming from you.
 - And second, I think **God wants parents to be the ones doing the discipleship because it grows the parents.** When parents have the task of teaching their kids the Bible, it helps parents grow. Your understanding of something deepens when you have to explain it. And the simpler you can break something down, the greater your understanding has to be. And for a dad and mom to be able to teach their little ones all of the doctrines of the faith, and answer all of their questions, their knowledge and understanding has to grow deeper and deeper. Not only that, but when you are teaching your kids to follow Jesus, it challenges you to practice what you preach, because you know your kids won't listen to a hypocrite. It's hard to teach your kids to

develop the virtue of gentleness and patience if you are always blowing your top.

- So it makes perfect sense why God would command parents to disciple their kids.
- Let me put it this way. **Something special happens when kids receive their spiritual instruction from their parents, and especially their father.**
- And that brings me to our vision at Church Acadiana. **We want to be a church where parents are passionate about discipling their kids at home.**
- At Church Acadiana we are all about the next generation.
 - Our mission as a church is to help people far from God become fully devoted followers of Jesus. We want to reach all of Acadiana.
 - But do you know who our mission starts with? Who is our first mission? Who are we trying to reach first? The people closest to us. And if you are a parent, who is closer to you than your children?
- At Church Acadiana, we want to put discipleship back into the hands of parents.
 - We believe in the power of parents.
 - We believe that God has called you to disciple your kids.
 - And we believe that you can disciple your kids better than anyone else.
 - This is why the church in America is losing the next generation. It has taken parents out of the discipleship equation.
 - At Church Acadiana, we want to reverse that trend. We want to put parents back into the driver's seat. Parents are the key to reaching the next generation.

OUR STRATEGY

- And so here's our strategy for becoming a church where parents are passionate about discipling their kids at home: **We exhort and equip parents**

for home discipleship, and enable them to do church with their kids as a shared experience. Let me explain.

- First, we exhort parents to disciple their kids at home.
 - Do you know what exhort means? It means to urge; to advise earnestly.
 - We want to teach parents that God has called them to disciple their kids.
 - Most parents have never even been taught that. Until they come to Church Acadiana it never crossed their mind. They think good parenthood means “going to the kid’s recitals and games and getting them into a good Sunday school or youth group.”⁶
 - So we want to teach Biblical parenthood.
 - We want to teach that God values parents much more highly than culture. Culture says, “You just feed their body, and then let the school and the church feed their soul.” No! God wants you to feed their soul. The church and the school can help, but you must be in the driver’s seat.

- Second, we want to equip parents. We want to teach them how to disciple their kids. We want to give them tools and resources. We want to direct them to the best books. We have an entire section on our website dedicated to “Equipping Parents.” It has articles, videos, sermons, book recommendations, and catechisms.

- Third, we want to enable parents to do church with their kids as a shared experience.
 - Now this is what really sets us apart from most churches.
 - Remember, something has to change. Normal isn’t working. The status quo is failing. We can’t do church as usual and hope to get unusual results. So we’re doing something different.
 - Instead of parents and kids dividing at church at Sunday school and youth group, we keep them together.

⁶ ibid, 324.

- We don't want you to just disciple your kids at home. We want you to continue the discipleship process at church. And to do that, we want your kids to sit right next to you at church. We want them to sit next to you in Sunday worship, in Home Group, and when you volunteer.
- This is called family-integration. We are a family-integrated church.
- The first question that always comes up in this discussion is why can't you do both. Why can't you have classes for kids at church and have parents disciple their kids at home? Churches have tried that, but it doesn't work. As churches do more and more to disciple parents for parents, home-discipleship decreases. It just doesn't happen. The natural mindset is that "if the church is discipling my kids, then I just need to get them to church. There's no need for me to teach them if it's already getting done."
- You see, in the traditional church model, what is a parent's role in the discipleship of their children? (DRAW A DIAGRAM). **Transportation.** They are nothing more than a chauffeur. For years churches have said, "Parents, just get them here and we'll take over; we've got it covered. Just leave it to the hired professionals." But that hasn't worked. In fact, just recently I checked out the website of one of the largest churches in America. Huge church! I read about their children's ministry and youth ministry. Do you know what it said about parents? Nothing. It was simply, We exist to disciple kids." It said nothing about parents.
- Now let's look at the role of the parent in the family-integrated model.
 - First and foremost, it begins with **instruction.** One, two, five days a week Dad is sitting down with his kids, teaching them about God.
 - Second, **exemplification.** By doing church with your kids, you get to set an example for them. You get to model the faith for them. You get to show them your passion for God and church, and how to do church.
 - And third, **observation.** By doing church with your kids, you not only instruct them, you not only set an example, but you get to observe their faith. You get to see how they are doing spiritually. Are they paying

- attention? Are they taking notes? Are they singing? Are they behaving? Are they participating?
- And because you are observing them, you are in a much better position to know what they need as you instruct them.
 - As a result, what you get is an inter-generational church.
 - Kids aren't put away and told, "You're the church of tomorrow." Instead, kids are included in the church of today. They attend with us. Worship with us. Serve with us. Participate with us.
 - When you treat kids like the church of the future, they will wait until the future to start living for Christ.
 - But at Church Acadiana we treat kids like the church today, and so our kids are empowered to live for God right now.
 - At Church Acadiana we don't put kids in a room full of immature people and hope they will learn maturity. That doesn't make sense. Instead, we think the best way to disciple kids is to let them sit right next to their parents in a room full of mature Christians.
 - And it's like sports. You play up to your competition. If you play against people that are better than you, you always play better.
 - And when kids are put in an environment filled with parents and mature believers, they will rise to maturity.
 - So what's our vision?
 - **We want to be a church where parents are passionate about discipling their kids at home.**
 - This doesn't mean you have to be a parent to go to Church Acadiana. We have many people here who are not parents; some who are grandparents. It just means that this is our vision. This is the future we are trying to create together. This is the unique problem we are here to solve.

- Now try to imaging that future with me for a moment.
 - Our church is relatively small. But let's say that every parent in this room got passionate about home discipleship.
 - Let's say that every daddy in our church started having Bible Time five, six, seven days a week, for 18 years.
 - Imagine the spiritual impact we could make on the next generation.
 - Now imagine if our kids all grew up and they got passionate about discipling their kids.
 - And imagine if our church grew in number. Imagine if we could become a church of 100, or 200, or 300, or maybe even 1,000 people, and the whole church is passionate about parents discipling their kids; about equipping the next generation. Imagine the impact we could make on our community; on our world.

- Folks, if you want a vision to get fired up about, it's not a vision of a new building. It's not a vision of buying a nice piece of property. I'm sure those things will come eventually.

- The vision of our church is not out there, it's right here. It's the little ones among us. It's the kids living right under your roof.

- And so I exhort you today. I urge you. I strongly advise you.
 - Will you join me in getting passionate, getting fired up about being a family-integrated church?
 - Will you join me in getting fired up about discipling your kids at home and reaching the next generation?

- When we first started the church, I had a woman from another church in town get mad at me. She felt like our church was competing with her church. She thought we started Church Acadiana to steal members from other churches. She said, "Why did you start your church? We already have churches in Lafayette."
 - Well, I'll tell you. There is a movement growing all across America today. It is the family-integrated church movement. Pastors and

- churches all across America are hearing and responding to the Holy Spirit to return to the Bible's methods for reaching the next generation. And they are putting discipleship back into the hands of parents. And they are keeping families together in church.
- But that movement hadn't made it yet to South Louisiana. Until now. Until Church Acadiana. And I believe God has raised us up for such a time as this.
 - We are not called to copy. We are not called to imitate. We are not called to follow the norm. We are called to follow the Holy Spirit and lead the way. I believe God wants to use our church to impact all of Acadiana with this vision.

CONCLUSION

- So what's the problem? Disobedience. Parents aren't discipling their kids.
- What's the symptom? The church in America is losing the next generation.
- What's the solution? Let's be a church where parents are passionate about discipling the next generation. Let's exhort and equip parents for home discipleship, and enable them to do church with their kids as a shared experience.