

Vision Sunday – slide1

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I've heard it said that the last words of a dying church are "we've never done it that way before". I for one am in favour of saying that the only constant around here is Change.

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For a church to survive and grow and reproduce, five things need to be present.

- An environment where things can grow
- The ability to adapt to changes around us
- Spontaneous reproduction
- A nurturing instinct
- A life cycle for everything.

So this year there will be changes.

Scientists have also talked about something they call the Butterfly Effect. If a butterfly flaps its wings in South America, it could cause an avalanche in Antarctica. Once a fruit was picked from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, and brought famines and plague and pestilence and sin and evil and destruction onto the world.

In a period in history called the Dark Ages, there was a complete breakdown of law and order, as well as culture and civilisation. This was largely because there was no Holy Roman Emperor to protect civilisation. The Church lost its voice and retreated to monasteries but it did protect many Christian writings and literature until the reformation hit in the 1500's. People held onto a primitive faith and rare teachings they were able to hear. The church did not grow! We do not live in the Dark Ages. We have the Bible available to us in print, on our phones, on our tablets and on our hearts.

When we hear the word disciple, a number of thoughts can come to mind. But because it seems spiritual we seem to avoid the idea of needing to be one. The definition of the word disciple is

One who accepts and assists in spreading the doctrines of another: as
a : one of the twelve in the inner circle of Christ's followers according to the Gospel accounts

b : a convinced adherent of a school or individual

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This year we'd love every person at Kingdom People Church to become a true disciple of Jesus Christ, not just an adherent... which someone who just hangs around because it's a nice place. We want to facilitate growth in every person here. This may be through courses, events, life groups or prayer meetings. Our aim is to see each one of you become confident

in what you believe, to become sure of what to say to people when defending your faith and to bring others to the knowledge of Christ and to have them planted into this local church.

To do this, we will once again run the Crossroads Bible Study Program. This runs once a week for all 3 entire school terms and gives you an accredited certificate to hang on your wall. We are also going to work with our life groups to make them all pull in the same direction. The object of life groups is to provide fellowship and teaching with discussion. So, you can meet and mix with people who live near to you, get some teaching and have an opportunity to ask questions and to discuss that teaching. One of the finest ways of gaining confidence in who you are as a believer is to ask questions and to allow others to give you answers. Not everyone has all the truth else they'd be God.

We will also start some one on one mentoring. There are quite a good number of you who have been through Crossroads and are feeling the desire to lead others... this is your chance.

We are planning on running an alpha course. You can invite someone to dinner and they can hear basic yet sound teaching on issues about the Christian faith.

We'd like to get an apologist in too an academic, to hold an event at UZ with students and present the intellectual side of the gospel. Have Q&A sessions. We probably get that ball rolling with some Q&A sessions of our own in a panel format, and try and do 2-4 this year.

We'd also like to encourage every single person to attend at least one prayer meeting this year. We will once again have out month of prayer and fasting in April, we will encourage prayer at life groups and we still have prayer before church on Sundays and with the Elders on Tuesdays. The only way to learn to pray is to pray with others. It's easy to learn about prayer, but we need to learn to pray.

Our last thing is to complete our building at 111 The Chase. We hope to move there in April, but we still need a floor and a ceiling... we're believing God to provide us with the funds to do this. Once we're able to use the building properly, all of our meetings will have a home.

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We're also changing the structure of or leadership, we believe to be more Biblical. We have for just over a year had a council of 12 men. This will reduce to 3 older men who feel that they should not be elders, plus the existing elders. We will also try to increase our elders and we hope to do this in the last quarter of the year, and use the first part of the year to build a working relationship with them.

In the book of timothy, Paul also talks of Deacons. And so we hope to appoint deacons this year by May. In order to achieve this, we will be streamlining the go-teams into divisions that will be headed by deacons. This is a work in progress.

We also feel that we need to get our life groups on the same page and put more energy into developing leaders here. We did have our first training with life group leader last week and there will be more to come. A life group leader is not merely a facilitator, but also the first person responsible for pastoral matters in the church. Many issues do not need to come to elders, but can be dealt with by our peers in life groups.

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Something that is alive reproduces after itself. God had designed life that way. If babies are not born, the race will die. If we as a church are not reproducing, we will die. There is always a danger that we get comfortable with the crowd that we're in, and this can become a club. It's nice to talk sport or shopping but Jesus said. "I have come that you might have life, and that life more abundantly." I had a conversation with a family member a few years back about the church they were attending and I said "you need to go to church where you get life, not just give it. If it doesn't give you life, you're going to die." And that is true of this church. Yes, you do need to bring your life to give this church life, but you should also gain life. And if that is true, should you not be bringing others to this well to drink of the water of life too? So we'd like to ensure that you're getting life because then other see it and want it too. We're going to continue trying to improve on everything we do, especially in the area of worship, preaching, life groups, and other weekly activities, so that there will be things available that will offer life to those who need it. You and any colleagues you may choose to invite. But if everyone here brought one friend in a year, we would double in size.

But I think it is absolutely important first to realise that each one of us is significant, and can be significant in the lives of others.

G K Chesterton one said "I had always felt life first as a story – and if there is a story, there is a story teller"

Life for most us, and I include church life, feels like a movie we've arrived to forty minutes late. It's like there something going on, but we're not sure what it is, and we're not sure what our role is. We feel like we're in it, but not part of it.

For the last 20 years or so, I have had a deep personal desire to be significant. That doesn't mean famous. I want to know that my life has counted in the lives of many others. I realised that if I could influence one person each year, and they in turn could influence one other, in just a few years, I could have had an influence on many. Today, we think things are worse for us that they have ever been in the history of the world... well they're not, but if we keep focussing on the things we need to do in order to get by, to make it from one meal to the next, we will miss out on the great things that God has in store for us.

What many of us will never be aware of is the significance each one of us will ever be in God's grander scale of things. The big picture.

Here's a story about someone's significance

It actually is a series of events that has been traced over the years and starts out with one volunteer Sunday school teacher.

"You can count the apples on the tree, but who can count the apples in a seed?" goes the old aphorism.

So it is with the influence of a single person.

Take Edward Kimball, for an example. Never heard of him? You're not unique in that sense. Most people have never heard of him.

Kimball was a Sunday school teacher who not only prayed for the often rowdy boys in his class but also sought to win each one to the Lord. If Kimball ever felt like giving up, he never talked about it. If you have ever taught the Bible to young boys, you know that the experience can often be like herding cats.

One young man, in particular, didn't seem to understand what the gospel was about so Kimball went to the shoe store where he was stocking shelves and confronted him in the stock room with the importance of a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. That young man was Dwight L. Moody. In the stockroom on that Saturday, he received Jesus Christ as his Saviour. In his lifetime, Moody touched two continents for God, with untold thousands coming to faith in Jesus Christ.

But the story doesn't end there. Actually that's where it begins. Under Moody, another man's heart was touched for God, Wilbur Chapman. Chapman became the evangelist who preached to thousands. One day, a professional baseball player had a day off and attended one of Chapman's meetings, and thus, Billy Sunday was converted.

Sunday quit baseball and became part of Chapman's team. Then, Chapman accepted the pastorate of a large church and Billy Sunday began his own evangelistic crusades. Another young man was converted whose name was Mordecai Ham. He was a scholarly, dignified gentleman who wasn't above renting a hearse and parading it through the streets advertising his meetings.

When Ham came to Charlotte, North Carolina, a sandy-haired, lanky young man, then in high school, vowed that he wouldn't go hear him preach, but Billy Frank, as he was called by his family, did eventually go. Ham announced that he knew for a fact that a house of ill repute was located across the street from the local high school and that male students were skipping lunch to visit the house across the street. When students decided to go to interrupt the meetings of Mordecai Ham, Billy Frank decided to go see what would happen.

That night Billy Frank went and was intrigued by what he heard. Returning another night, he responded to the invitation and was converted. Billy Frank eventually became known as Billy Graham, the evangelist who preached to more people than any other person who ever lived, including the Apostle Paul.

This fascinating chain of events was triggered by a Sunday school teacher's concern for his boys. If you are like most people, you have served in some capacity and wondered at times if you were making a real difference or not. Maybe you've thought about quitting because you didn't think you were making any difference.

Next time you are tempted to give up, please remember Edward Kimball, whose persistence and faithfulness was tremendously honoured by the Lord. The story would have looked very differently if Edward Kimball did not take his Saturday to seek out young Dwight Moody.

You can count the apples on a tree, but only God knows how many apples are in a single seed.

If we start getting all of our training programs and life groups operating correctly, this next step should come naturally. If our life groups have something to offer, people will come. If we can make a sacrifice for a year to attend crossroads, we will be better equipped for life and for ministry. It should be our desire to see other Christians strengthened and encouraged and so we can help them by mentoring them.

Our desire is to do Sunday evening worship sessions, not every week, but frequently... And these will be a place for people to come and encounter God and receive ministry in a non-threatening way.

Out of the overflow of our relationship with God, corporate prayer will come more easily.

I do believe this year, many of us will have to step out in faith, for everything, and especially with our giving, and I believe God will show His promises true by not allowing us to lack any good thing that we need.

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The one thing we must always keep in mind is that nothing lives forever. At the inception of everything are the seeds of its own destruction. Things have a life cycle. What works today may not work tomorrow. Conversely, what we need for tomorrow may not even exist today and so we have to be constantly on the lookout for things we can use to help us keep on the edge.

Like I said in the beginning, the last words of a dying church are "we've never done it that way before". We don't want to die, so we must constantly be available for the Holy Spirit to lead us into new areas for ministry. At the same time, we hold fast to what is true and we will not follow after vain things that just glitter. As Shakespeare said, all that glitters is not gold. False teachers and false teachings will come so we trust that God will help us to be discerning so that we can protect our sheep.