

## ***Our Vision--Overview***

Various  
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This morning, and over the course of the next 4 weeks, I want to lay out for the Parkway family, what the elders have been working on in terms of crystalizing and clarifying the vision for Parkway Community Church. I don't particularly care for the word "vision", but it's the only word that captures what we're going to share with you. Today I'm going to share the four parts to the vision. Then in the weeks ahead, we'll break down the four parts and deal with them individually. Today we're going to look at the vision as a whole.

But before I do, let me do two things. Let me 1.) Ground it in grace and 2.) Provide a distinction between mission and vision so you can understand how things fit.

First, to ground it in grace I want to draw your attention to a prayer of Paul in 2 Thessalonians 1:11-12. There he writes, "<sup>11</sup> To this end we always pray for you, that our God may make you worthy of his calling and may fulfill every resolve for good and every work of faith by his power, <sup>12</sup> so that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you, and you in him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ" (2 Thess 1:11-12). In this prayer, the glory of Christ is the central aim. To that great end he prays that God may fulfill *every resolve for good and every work of faith...according to the grace of our God....*" God's people (us) are to resolve to do good and work for the glory of Christ. One of the things a vision statement is, is a resolve to do good—a resolve to work. But here's the thing. Only God can fulfill it. Only his power can accomplish it, which is why Paul prays. In short, what I'm about to share can only be fulfilled by God's power—which we must *pray* for.

Second, let me offer a brief explanation as to how vision fits in with our mission. Our mission statement is our ultimate goal—to *love, live and declare the supremacy of Jesus in all things to all people*. That's our ultimate goal. A vision statement, by contrast, expresses what we believe that *actually looks like*. To use a construction analogy, saying you want to build a beautiful house is like a mission statement. That's your mission—building a beautiful house. But having blueprints of what the house actually looks like—how many rooms etc.—is your vision. We've spent time praying, thinking and clarifying what a church that "loves, lives and declares the supremacy of Jesus looks like." We believe it consists of four things. First we want to....

### *1. Be a church that WORSHIPS God in Christ-centered, biblically informed ways,*

The Scripture speaks of worship in two senses. In one sense, worship encompasses all of life—"Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men" (Col 3:23). But there is another sense in which the Bible speaks of worship as a corporate activity. It's when believers gather together to remember and reflect back to God the worthiness of who he is and all that he's done for us in Christ and creation. We gather here this morning for the ultimate purpose of worship. It's what we gather to do. It's what we were ultimately made for.

The church in Acts gathered for worship. "<sup>2</sup> While they were worshipping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, 'Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them'" (Acts 13:2). The Spirit moved in their corporate worship together. Paul urged the community of believers gathered in Colossae to "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual

songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God.” (Col 3:16). That’s worship! The church is to be a place of bubbling over with praise, thanksgiving, and joy of Christ’s presence. It’s Christ-centered, Christ-saturated worship. It centers on what the cross has won for us, what the resurrection promises us, and all that Jesus is to us.

But it must be biblical worship. We want the Scripture to inform and reform what true worship is. For example, the Scripture tells us that when we worship God with our lips but hate another person, then our worship is empty and vain—a “clanging cymbal” Paul would say. Our ideas about what worship is (and is not) must be constantly tested with what Scripture says rather than cultural ideas about what “feels like worship.” So a Christ-filled biblical worship is what we envision for our church family.

The second part of the vision is to...

*2. Be a church that is EDUCATED in the content of the gospel.*

In that same verse of Colossians, Paul makes this clear, “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom” (Col 3:16). The gospel, the Word, the sound doctrine that the apostles have written for us must fill our hearts and minds. Throughout the book of Acts it’s the doctrines of the gospel that grow and expand the church. It’s what builds the church, grows the church and protects the church. We must know what we believe and why. Our roots must go deep into the biblical bedrock of truth. An uneducated church is an unrooted church that will blow over with the first stiff wind.

From the earliest centuries of the church, believers were catechized in the truths of the Bible. They were taught what they believed so they could not only grow but stand firm in a shifting, changing world. And given our shifting notions of right and wrong, truth and error, the issue of education is all the more pressing.

Can you imagine high school students heading off to the university fully educated in the content of their faith, the central tenets of the gospel, a solid Christian worldview, the ability to defend what they believe persuasively? That’d be amazing! And not simply with students but adults as well. We believe this is critical!

The elders believe there are areas of weakness in our education process at Parkway. Parts are good, and other parts are not so good. So we’re looking hard at better ways to educate our church family.

As an aside, I know that the word “education” is a rather cold and impersonal term—reminding us of endless hours of algebra and English composition. But education in the gospel is not algebra or statistics. Gospel education is fundamentally personal. It’s great subject matter is Christ, his amazing work and who we are now because of him.

Having said that, education itself is not enough. It is crucial but insufficient for a thriving church that’s advancing the cause of Christ in the world. We also want to...

*3. Be a church that actively ENGAGES in deepening relationships through mutual service in love and gifts (community).*

The very definition of the word “church” is communal. It means “assembly.” The other metaphors of the New Testament are also communal—the body of Christ, the bride of Christ, the temple of God, are singular words that identify a *group*. God didn’t just save me as a *me*, he saved us as a *we*!

A big part of God’s great vision for his church is that they become one—reflecting the unity of God himself (John 17:22). His vision for the church is a people that love and serve one

another as God in Christ loved and served us—each using what he’s been given for the good of the whole.

Honestly, this is the hard part. You’ve probably heard it said at some point that ministry would be great if it weren’t for the people. That joke exists because learning to love as fallen sinful beings that gather together as a family is not easy--learning patience, forgiveness, forbearance, humility, serving with endurance. But the rewards are awesome! And Christ is glorified when we work hard at loving community. It takes stick-to-it-iveness!

Years ago I heard a preacher draw a comparison between what he called cardio Christians versus adrenal Christians. Adrenal Christians are those who have short bursts of energy and then wear out—just like a rush of adrenalin. It’s great for a moment, but then it peters out. A cardio Christian is like the heart. It just keeps pumping over and over and over again and never gives out. That’s what loving, biblical, serving Christian community requires, people to continue to be faithful in serving, loving and using their unique giftedness to build up the whole.

Admittedly, this is an area of weakness at Parkway. The main reason we’ve shifted one of our staff members (Justin) to community life is because we believe this whole area is that important. It’s easy when you’re a small church of 100 to be communal. But when you’re a midsize church like ours with two services and limited facilities, it’s more of a challenge. It takes more organization, structure, creativity and lots of prayer.

But it takes the entire church family to make community life vibrant. And if your particular passion and giftedness is hospitality, hosting, building community, then we need you. Last but not least, we want to...

*4. Be a church that is ADVANCING the gospel in the community and world in holistic, gospel-centered ways.*

The church is to be a light in darkness. We are called to let our light shine before men that they may see our good works and glorify the One who is the source of the light (Matt 5:16). The light must not be hidden. Our mandate is to make disciples (Matt 28). I think most of us are aware that throughout the New Testament Christians we are called to engage the world with the gospel message and gospel work.

Some of our biggest steps forward have been made in this last (but certainly not least) part of the vision. For years we’ve been praying and looking for ways to actively engage in our community not just in word but also in deed—hence the word holistic in the statement...tutoring, cleaning, serving the needs of our city. But it must be coupled with a commitment to testify to the world-changing work of Jesus Christ. Our desire is to continue in this direction in our praying, our strategizing, our training and our organizing.

Now step back for a moment and imagine a church that is fearless in its worship of Christ. Imagine a church thoroughly committed to training and educating its people so their roots go deep. Imagine a church that actually serves, actually loves and actually enjoys each another. And imagine that that same church is selflessly devoted to changing its community. That church is force to be reckoned with. But it won’t happen without the whole family owning their respective parts. The vision will remain a wish not a reality. So if there’s a part of this vision that your life, passions and giftedness fits into, it’s time to move.

It reminds me of the heroic story that we heard about this last week. A terrorist gets up on a train with an AK-47 and a handgun intending on doing some massive damage in Europe. Three Americans (an Air Force guy, a soldier and one other) decide to act. They took him to the ground and saved lots of lives. (You Air Force guys have to be proud.) The sad part of the story

(expressed in the New York Times) was the way the train crew responded. They all ran away from the terrorists leaving the passengers in harm's way. We don't want to be a church abandons our community to the enemy. We want to be the kind of church that's decisive and ready to get into the fight! Only a thriving church can do that—a church that worships, educates, loves and engages.

Let's conclude where I started—back on the foundation of grace. This is our resolve for good. This is our work of faith. But only One can fulfill it. As Paul wrote, "To this end we always pray for you, that our God may make you worthy of his calling and may *fulfill every resolve for good and every work of faith by his power*,<sup>12</sup> so that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you, and you in him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ" (2 Thess 1:11-12). At this point, let's pray this prayer over our church—that God would fulfill every resolve for good.