

Written By
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The framers of our church constitution exhibited wisdom when they said it is crucial for the Senior Pastor to pause at the beginning of a new year and tell the entire church body how we are doing from his perspective in relation to our church vision. When the church was much smaller, this was important to build and lead the body. Now that the church is much bigger it is even more important for it is difficult, especially as a parishioner, to get a firm handle on how a multitude of ministries are faring and how the church is doing from the perspective of the Senior Pastor, who typically sees things better from his vantage point. So day is the day we pause to see how we are doing at fulfilling our vision to Gather, Grow, and Go.

To accomplish our task, I invite you to consider two concepts. I'll call the first one . . .

The Flyover

I don't know if you watched the Georgia Bulldogs play the Oklahoma Sooners at the Rose Bowl on New Year's day. What a great game. I think it was eclipsed, however, by the final



playoff this week between the Bulldogs and the Crimson Tide of Alabama. Another awesome, breath-taking finish. In any event, before the Rose Bowl game started, a B-2 Stealth Bomber flew over the stadium as a tribute to the power and might of the U. S. military, which keeps all of us safe from our enemies. Mark Holtzman, an amateur photographer, took this picture of the bomber from his Cessna 206. Jaw-

dropping shot. From his vantage point, and that of the officer flying the bomber, you can see how well they could both see the entire oval-ish structure of the stadium. This is one of the values of a flyover. It gives you a quick, broad, and somewhat detailed view of what's going on down below.

Taking that motif and applying it to our multi-faceted ministry, we can quickly obtain a good understanding of how various sectors of our "stadium" are doing.

- **Section 1: Worship.** Pastor Darren and the entire worship team, including Will and the team he leads in our video venue site, are doing a great job each and every Sunday using contemporary worship to usher us into the presence of the living God. The quality of their music is excellent, the song selections and

graphics are most appropriate, and one realizes they are not here to entertain us but to escort us into God's throne room so we can glorify Him. If you have a gift in this area, I'm sure they would love for you to try out for the team. And if you have a desire to be in choir, there is a place on a riser for you. As far as our attendance, it is somewhat down over the last two years due to a variety of factors. You will remember we typically lose 20% of our membership per year because of government mandated moves of personnel. Also, with our –ever-darkening culture it will be increasingly difficult to grow as the culture calls for the Church to bend to its weak and vacuous worldviews. We will, however, continue to be the courageous and bright light of God to our culture (2 Timothy 4:2, “. . . *preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction*”).

- **Section 2: Adult Ministry.** This large area of our church continues to flourish. Life Groups, which is the way this large church seems like a small church, has 59 groups with 665 people participating. Our *Prayer Ministry* has 192 on our prayer chain, we have 39 prayer counselors, and we offer a variety of prayer venues. *Men's Ministry* averages 100 men for its weekly AM and PM Base Camps, the monthly Men's Breakfast has an average of 125 men, 150 men attended our Men's Retreat in 2017, and 588 men attended our various outreach events. If you are a man and you are looking for friends and fellowship, this is place for you. *Marriage Ministry* touched the lives of over 200 couples, 28 couples attended Bible Classes focused on marriage, and 14 couples were trained to prepare engaged couples for marriage. Young Adults have 50 people committed to learning about God and caring for each other. Our Women's Ministry had 488 women in our weekly Breakaway program, with 100 new people as well. Some 161 ladies attended our Mini May Bible Study Session, and 171 attended our Fall and Spring offering of WOW, with 87 committing to Oasis, our summer program. The point is, many women are committed to growing in their faith, and if you haven't plugged in yet, there is a place for you. Our *Northern Virginia Seniors* (NOVAS) program is touching a great need in our body. Their events are touching lives and bringing ministry to a key sector of our church body. Our Missions Ministry continues to bring the gospel to needy people both here and abroad. We partner with 15 key missionaries, and specialize in giving the gospel to people in Islamic lands. Our *Meal's Ministry* provided 696 meals to 116 families, and our *Care Ministry* provided 2,210 care actions for 512 people in our body. Our Discover Burke program, which is designed to acquaint new people with our purpose and vision as well as position them for church membership, saw 198 people take a Sunday afternoon to check this ministry out. Of those, 48% became members, 34% have remained in the body, and 18% felt led to move on. All the stats simply demonstrate that spiritually hungry people are finding God meeting their needs here, and they are wasting no time getting on board with what God is doing among us

- **Section 3: Youth Ministry.** Student Ministry continues to impact students for Christ. High School elements has 154 students on Sunday mornings, 7th-8th runs 76, and 5th-6th grades enjoy a sizeable group of 82. Mid-week the HS Mix runs 180 students in 19 life groups, while The Well has 90 students in 11 Life Groups, and Ignite has 120 students. God is blessing the fine work of Matt and Grant and their leadership teams. Summer ministries flourished with HS Camp Alpine hosting 143 students and adults, MS Camp Aline saw 84 students and adults, and Quest VBX had a sizeable group of 128. WVA missions saw 72 students and adults give of their time to the poor and needy, while NY Missions had a robust 59 students and adults. Our students are not just learning about God, they are learning how to serve Him and others. Amazingly, The Next Generation Ministry raised \$26,011.08 for One Child Matters New Life Home in Nairobi, Kenya, which cares for orphaned babies. This was an amazing achievement. Ten teens were also baptized in 2017.
- **Section 4: Children's Ministry.** God continues to bless our ministry with children, and we continue our commitment to introduce them to Jesus and learn how to live for Him. Our *Sunday Ministry* is hopping with an average of 425 children from birth through sixth grade. It takes 168 volunteers on a given Sunday to run this creative program, and there are also 69 volunteer substitutes. Thank you for your service, and for those who desire to make an impact on a young life for Christ, I'm sure our director, Tammy, would love to hear from you (Tammy@burkecommunity.com). Our *Vacation Bible School* was the largest ever with 762 children attending, and of these 311 do not attend BCC. Some 324 of you also served to make this powerful program a reality. Again, thank you for your impact. Because of you, 71 children trusted Christ as their Savior. The Fall Festival saw 1,520 in attendance, with 621 being completely new. Of these, 446 came because someone from BCC invited them. Also, 286 of you helped pull off these top-notch ministry offerings, and because of your presence and service the stage was set for 64 children to hear the gospel. My hat is off to the children's ministry. They are doing a bang up job in touching young lives for eternity. If you are new and your children are not yet part of this wonderful program, I'd say getting them into it is one of the best things you can do for them.
- **Section 5: Preaching/Teaching Ministry.** During 2017, we continued our commitment to teaching you the whole counsel of God, so you are properly equipped to walk with Him, to defend the faith, and to share your faith. We finished our exciting study of the book of Daniel, and the commentary will be forthcoming this summer. In this study, we learned how to live for God in a godless culture. We also learned how God is providentially setting up the world stage for the arrival of the Messiah and His glorious messianic kingdom. I taught you how to build a bridge to your non-Christian friends with a weekend seminar called *Tactical Talking*. During the summer and early fall, as part of my apologetics dissertation, we learned how to think logically,

philosophically, and biblically about the transgender issue. In the fall we also had our final capital campaign program (*Heading For Home*), which proved to be quite successful as you sacrificially placed us in a position to have the \$9 million needed for our new worship, staff, youth, and educational facilities. Way to go team. We rounded out the year by studying how various animals teach us much about the plan and purpose of the mission of our master, Jesus, the Christ. The rest of this year we will devote our time and attention to Paul's timely letter to the Romans. We will methodically work our way through this profound book, and I anticipate it will challenge we who know Christ to press on to greater maturity, and it will also, almost on a weekly basis, call non-Christ followers to come and follow Him. Be in prayer about how God will use this magnificent book. And read it, too . . . ten times would be great in order to get it in your heart and mind. I'll be offering various apologetic weekend seminars this year, starting with one called *Proofs of the Presence*. This will present four of the greatest arguments for the existence of a personal God, arguments which you can, and should, use when speaking with your unbelieving friends. I'll follow this seminar up with a study of Islam titled *The Cross and the Crescent*. From the information you will receive, you'll be equipped to speak to followers of Islam about why they should be worshipping Jesus as God. Later in the year, I'll offer a seminar titled *Countering The Cults*. The first one will deal with how to witness to Mormons. As you might expect, we remain steadfastly committed to preparing you to defend the Word and to share the gospel in an ever-increasing hostile environment.

In addition to this much needed and helpful flyover, next I propose we come down from our viewpoint of 2,500 feet and enjoy what we can learn from what I'd call . . .

The Landing

Believe me, there are a multitude of things we could talk about regarding our needs, as a church body, for the new year. Since our time is limited, however, I propose we consider four key areas which are on my heart and mind. In order to introduce these areas, while also enabling you to hopefully remember them, I want to wed them to four distinct graphic images.



Image 1: The Wagon. Here is a picture of what growing churches used back in the 1800s



to transport their people facility when they ran out of room for them to park their horses and carriages. It probably wasn't the smoothest ride, but, hey, at least they had air conditioning and the "engines" weren't really contributing to global warming.

Today growing churches, like ours, have moved up to nice comfortable vans. We have four of them, along with nineteen volunteer drivers on Sunday mornings. Each van holds around fifteen worshippers from

ages eight and up (sorry, we don't have the capacity to transport little children who, by law, need seat belts). Why do we need these vans? Good question. As our church grew 280 percent over the last ten years, we lost our ability to have a parking space for each and every car. We added a new parking lot just next to the youth building and behind where our modular used to be; however, these sixty spots still were not enough. So, we purchased the vans and set up a shuttle service for the second and third services. Currently, we run three vans every Sunday from 7:30-1 p.m. and they pick worshippers up at the Park N Ride next to Shoppers and Marshalls on Old Keen Mill Road. Riders are dropped off right in front of the church, and, then, after worship they are picked up in our new area, replete with new stone benches, just to the left of the main entrance.

Why are we talking about our shuttle service? Because it is THE issue for 2018, especially in light of construction for the new facility which will begin in a couple of weeks. Look at it this way. In the next few weeks we are going to lose our new parking lot as it is fenced off for construction. This means we lose 60 prime parking stalls. Then in about another two months we will lose around 40 spots of our old lot located right next to this. Can you say, "Oh, no." I can. That is why we need to plan ahead by challenging you to start taking a shuttle to church. Sure it is a small inconvenience, but isn't cross bearing what Christianity is about? Indeed.

Pragmatically, what do we need? We need fifty people per the second and third services to sign up to ride the shuttle at least once per month. More specifically, we are going to need four hundred people total to commit to riding the shuttle because there will not be any space here for parking. We have sign-up sheets available in the foyer this morning, and I'd challenge many of you to put your name on a slot. We will send you out a notification letting you know which Sunday you signed up for so you will remember to go there on your assigned Sunday. Again, if Christianity is about anything it is about selfless sacrifice (Mark 10:45). Who among us will be the first to put their names on the list? In order for us to function over the next two years of construction, it is imperative we all change our mind-set about the parking lot. Yes, driving your own car and parking it on the church grounds is highly convenient; however, that approach to parking is just not going to work as we head into the building cycle. So, let's have an organized rush to the sign-up sheets when we close this service. Thanks.

Image 2: The Couple. I don't know if you have thought about it, but the impact of our church on this community and culture for Christ is directly related to the health and stability of our marriages. Health in these God-ordained relationships translates into health in the church, which, in turn, leads to God using us to bring the hope of the gospel to hungry and hurting people. Yes, when our marriages are strong, when they are built and governed on biblical principles, when



Jesus Christ is at the center of them (53% of very happy couples say that God is at the center of their marriages, while only 7% of unhappy couples say this), when there is lasting peace and joy at the center of these relationships is when the non-Christian followers of the world stop and say, “Hey, tell me what is really intrinsically different about your marriage. You seem to have such happiness and peace. How do you do that?” And when they ask that question is when you get the opportunity to tell them about the power of the gospel of Christ to change lives into His holy likeness.

But if your marriage looks more like you were married by the Secretary of War than a pastor of the flock, not only is your life not lived without the abundance Jesus promised (John 10:10), not only are you full of frustration, sadness, and depression, but your ability to be Christ’s witness is minimized (Acts 1:8), along with the witness of your church. Put differently, if non-Christians look at the married lives of Christians and see the same carnal issues plaguing them that they deal with in the world, they are going to say, “Why would I want to be a Christian? Why would I want God in the center of my marriage? What’s the value?” The late D. Martyn Lloyd Jones’s words are most applicable at this juncture, “When the Church is absolutely different from the world, she invariably attracts it. It is then that the world is made to listen to her message, though it may hate it at first.”¹ One major place where the world can, and should, see that we are radically different is in our marriages. They should reflect Christ in every way to give hope and light to the lost world around us.

Such is not always the case. While we have many strong, godly, and stable marriages, we also have many which are weak and anemic. Of all the counseling your pastoral staff engages in here at BCC, we spend the majority of our time trying to bring health and wholeness to broken, complex, and sometimes shattered relationships. Believe me, there is nothing more exciting than seeing a couple get on their marital feet and start walking and loving each other in a God-honoring fashion. It is equally true there is nothing more taxing than seeing couples not find victory over old, lingering, and debilitating marital issue or issues. But we give it our best shot because we know the importance of building marriages to God’s glory.

While it is not my purpose today to give you the low-down on the ten steps to building a lasting marriage in God’s sight, neither is it within my purview to exegete all of the fine biblical texts which teach us how to build mature marriages despite what has occurred. My point with this graphic section is to merely say this: Why not make this year the year you do what you have to do get your marriage where God wants it to be? You might need to hear that again. Why not make this year the year you put down the verbal boxing gloves, when you put the skeletons back in the closet for good, when you humble yourself before your mate and say, “Honey, we need to stop this crazy, downward cycle, and I’m calling you to join me in building our marriage God’s way, not our way.” Why not make this year the year you admit there really is a problem, when you come clean from a sin which has eroded your marriage, and when you stop rationalizing your bad relational skills and start being open, honest, and transparent? Why not make this year the year you stop acting like opponents in a cage fight, and start seeing each other as team mates who are supposed to love each other as Christ has loved us? (Eph. 4:30-31).

¹Charles Swindoll, *The Church Awakening* (New York: Faith Words, 2010), front matter.

While you are probably sitting there thinking, “I don’t think things are that bad in our marriage,” so you won’t wind up in counseling, let’s tap into the 16 signs your marriage is in trouble. Here they are according to Hannah Rose from familyshare.com:

- You have the same arguments all the time.
- You have nothing nice to say to each other.
- You both won’t take responsibility in an argument.
- You view intimacy differently.
- You are constantly suspicious of each other.
- You no longer go on dates.
- You are happier being apart from one another.
- You or both of you lie about finances and hide money.
- You cannot create compromises.
- You don’t allow each other to spend time with friends and family.
- You or your spouse have considered being unfaithful.
- You or your spouse flirt with another person online.
- You only talk about superficial topics.
- You never feel good enough for your spouse.
- You shame each other.
- You feel lonely even with your spouse near.²

To these I would add:

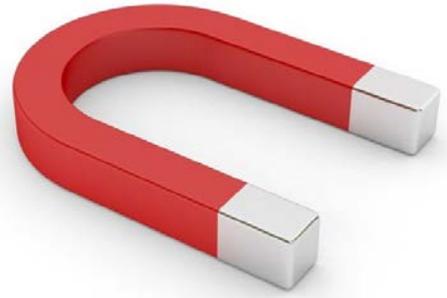
- You don’t go to church together.
- You don’t go to church consistently.
- You don’t pray and read the Bible together.
- You attend all the Christian marital workshops and seminars but you don’t apply what you learn to your marriage.
- One of you goes to counseling while the other stays home.

Sound familiar?

If so, I challenge you to do what you have to do this year to build a relationship on and around Jesus Christ. If you need pastoral help, we can assist. If you need professional assistance, we can assist. If you need people to pray for you, we can assist. If you need a marriage class to get you going, we can assist through our adult ministry. We are ready and willing to help you build a marriage which lasts, but you have to first be ready and willing to head in this direction. And just know, if it took sixteen or seventeen years to build a marriage which is not optimal, then realize we are with you for the long haul as you seek to head toward spiritual and marital health and wholeness.

²Hannah Rose, “16 Signs Your Marriage Is In Serious Trouble,” *Family Share*, accessed January 1, 2018, <https://familyshare.com/25424/16-signs-your-marriage-is-in-serious-trouble>

Image 3: The Magnet. What does this signify? Glad you asked. The magnet represents the second most thing we as our pastors address in our body. It's called *addiction*. You know, it is the forbidden thing you just cannot, or will not, resist. It's the sinful proclivity which trips you up just when you thought you were back on your spiritual feet. It's that action which leaves you full of guilt and shame, which causes you to be unduly lonely and distant, which causes you great frustration because you can't seem to break free from its powerful attraction, which leaves you feeling defeated and hopeless as a Christian. It's that activity which is destroying your personal life, your dating life, your work life, and probably even your marriage. Yeah, you just might know a whole lot about this menacing magnet.



This powerful magnet has many names, doesn't it? For some, it is on-line poker in the privacy of their homes as they gamble their extra monies away. For others, it is the Virginia Lottery machine they just can't seem to pass up at they leave a local grocery store (as a young mother did this week as I shopped). For some it is prescription drugs they use to just make it through a day, while for others it is food or liquor they hide all over the house to make those they love think they've got this magnet under control. But they don't. It's all a ruse, a game, so they can be overcome by the magnetic and sometimes hypnotic draw of their particular sin.

If you are a believer of the Lord Jesus Christ, such is not to be your life. Christ died and rose again to free you from the power and domination of sin. We will eventually get to Paul's insightful and instructive words in Romans 6, but they are definitely worth repeating right now:

¹⁰ For the death that He died, He died to sin, once for all; but the life that He lives, He lives to God. ¹¹ Even so consider yourselves to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus. ¹² Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body that you should obey its lusts, ¹³ and do not go on presenting the members of your body to sin as instruments of unrighteousness; but present yourselves to God as those alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God. ¹⁴ For sin shall not be master over you, for you are not under law, but under grace (Rom. 6).

What hope these words give us. When we become followers of Christ, our identity with Him frees us from the power of the menacing magnet. For the first time in our lives, we have the ability, by the presence of the Spirit of God in our lives (Eph. 1:13-14; 4:25-30), to live in complete, persistent victory. Obviously, the Roman Christians struggled intently like a number of you do with the pull of various forms of lust, and like you they succumbed far often. This is why Paul says what he says here. Victory starts when you first realize who you are and what Christ's life and death and resurrection gives you as His spiritual son or daughter. He gives you the power to break free from the sins which so easily trip you up and draw you to the menacing magnet.

Let this be the year where you are not consumed by *addiction*, but you are consumed with *adoration* of the power of God to help you break free from the chains you've been bound by for far too long. I'm praying for you. No, make that we are all praying for you. Victory is in sight. May

it be yours this year. And if we can assist you, we are right here. Our men's and women's ministries are also there to help you break free and live free. Why not avail yourself of them?

Image 4: The Book. What do I mean by “the book”? By the book I mean the Bible, but more specifically I mean two key facets of the Bible: Apologetics and Evangelism. No doubt, we like the ancient Bereans of Paul's day, are people of the book. We study it. We dissect it. We memorize it. We love it because it is God's inerrant and inspired word to mankind (2 Tim. 3:16-17).



Here at BCC we are deeply committed, as I have said, to the exposition and exegesis of God's Word, coupled with its application to daily living so we can all grow up into the likeness of Christ. Along these lines, we are also deeply committed to learning how to use a variety of apologetic methods to defend God's existence and His Word so we can reach our lost world for Him.

After ten years of building this church around the Word so we can know how to live for God and so we can know how to impact our godless culture for Him, I do have one salient observation. We must never forget there is a distinct difference between apologetics and evangelism. Let me say that again because it is so important. *We must never forget there is a distinct difference between apologetics and evangelism.* What is apologetics? Apologetics, as my former professor Dr. Frederic Howe used to say, “involves the *clarification* of the entire Christian position on which the gospel rests.”³ Apologetics is the discipline whereby we learn how to answer the questions the lost pose in order to guide their thinking toward God. “Evangelism” on the other hand “is primarily the *communication* of the gospel of Jesus Christ.”⁴

We are commanded to learn how to use apologetics. Jude 3 says this much:

³ Beloved, while I was making every effort to write you about our common salvation, I felt the necessity to write to you appealing that you contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints (Jude 1).

Peter echoes this sentiment with this command:

¹⁵ but sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always *being* ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence; (1 Pet. 3).

Contending speaks of apologetics. Contending is when you step into a discussion about worldviews and speak up and out about the viable reasons to believe that Jesus is God who rose from the dead. Contending is when you engage a skeptical friend with logical reasons for believing

³Frederic Howe, *Challenge and Response* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982), 26.

⁴Ibid.

in a personal, living divine Being. And, as Peter says, we must always be studied so we are ready to make a viable defense for why we believe in Jesus and His Word.

Apologetics, however, doesn't save. It is merely the tool used to guide a discussion toward the gospel of Jesus Christ which alone can save the sinner. While apologetics is all about defending the faith, evangelism is all about proclaiming the good news of the gospel of the Savior. Apologetics can and will change as the arguments of the culture change, but the message of the evangelist and the gospel never changes.

As we head out into another year with the Great Commission before us (Matt. 28:19-20), we must all remember not just the qualitative difference between apologetics and evangelism, but we must remember to maintain a balance between the two. Let me be more precise. If we become enamored with apologetics, as exciting as the field of study is, we can lose our passion for where our apologetics is supposed to guide us and that is to the cross of Jesus, the Christ.

Paul understood this balance. I know he did because of what he wrote to young Pastor Timothy:

²⁴ And the Lord's bond-servant must not be quarrelsome, but be kind to all, able to teach, patient when wronged, ²⁵ with gentleness correcting those who are in opposition, if perhaps God may grant them repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth, ²⁶ and they may come to their senses *and escape* from the snare of the devil, having been held captive by him to do his will (2 Tim. 2).

Here you see this balance in action. On the one hand, saints are to gently and lovingly reason the non-Christian away from their false worldview toward truth. On the other hand, it is only through the gospel the non-Christian finds temporal and eternal spiritual enlightenment and eternal life.

But nothing, mind you nothing, should detract from our commitment to being focused on sharing with the lost around us the power of the cross of Christ to redeem sinners. As Paul stated in his closing words to the Galatians:

⁴ But may it never be that I should boast, except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. (Gal. 6:14).

May this balance be our balance this year. And by this time next year might it be said of many of us that by God's good grace we were able reap a rich harvest of souls for Savior. We've done well so far, but we can do so much more. Might this be the year where our water bill is through the roof because we keep filling it up on Sundays to baptize more converts.

Some might glory in a building, but I'm going to glory in the cross.

Some might glory in numbers, but I'm going to glory in the cross.

Some might glory in their insight into spiritual things, but I'm going to glory in the cross.

Some might glory in their abilities, but I'm going to glory in the cross.

Some might glory in their position, but I'm going to glory in the cross.

Question is, what are you going to glorify in this year. Question is, who will be in heaven this next year because you moved from apologetics with them to evangelism, from answering their questions to calling them to make a decision to follow Jesus?

