

Vision Sunday 2018
Pastor Joe Oakley
GFC – 1/7/18

Welcome to Vision Sunday! Today I'll be sharing a few of our accomplishments from last year and vision for 2018.

We have an overall vision for our church – which is Touching Heaven-Changing Earth. When we say we want to touch heaven, that means we want to experience God – we want His manifest presence in our church and in our lives. We believe our worship prepares a place for the manifest presence of God. When He shows up, He speaks, He does miracles, He changes us. Then we go out changed and change our world.

Our vision is to experience God's presence, equip God's people and extend God's kingdom. When we do this – we touch heaven and change earth.

Here's just a few statistics about how we accomplished that in 2017.

- We had 454 first-time guests (who filled out connection cards) and we gave out 380 gas cards and 222 books as gifts to them.
- We had 250 people volunteer to serve in some capacity.
- Hundreds of people were discipled through Grace Journey, Bible classes, Financial Peace University, children's, youth, men's and women's ministries.
- We started a new grief ministry called New Beginnings.
- We ministered to 105 children at our Vacation Bible School and 65 children in our Mother's Day Out.
- Over 700 people came to our church during Light the Night.
- We supported 10 missionaries and 3 mission's organizations ministering in 12 nations around the world.
- In the area of benevolence – we gave money, food and gifts to 175 people.
- Here's the main one: 158 people made professions of faith in Jesus!
- Dozens more rededicated their lives to Christ, dozens more got water baptized and dozens more got baptized in the Holy Spirit!

Thank you for helping to make this happen by praying, giving and serving.

Even though we have an overall vision to guide us, there is always the need for fresh vision in our church. Proverbs 29:18 says:

Where there is no vision, the people perish.

We have a strong belief that God wants churches to grow. Not that they should all be mega churches – but they should all be reaching more people for Jesus. Jesus said in Luke 14:23-

Go out into the highways and hedges, and compel them to come in, that My house may be filled.

Jesus wants His church to be full of people! And in the early church in the book of Acts we see incredible growth.

Church growth is not just about the number of people attending. It's about the people growing to spiritual maturity. We see three ways God wants us to grow this year.

Before talking about that – I want to let you know that our theme for 2018 is Going Deeper – Going Higher. I got that from Colossians 2:6-7

So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in Him, rooted and built up in Him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness.

The Complete Jewish Bible says:

Remain deeply rooted in Him; continue being built up in Him and confirmed in your trust, the way you were taught, so that you overflow in thanksgiving.

In other words, we need to go deeper in order to go higher. It's like a tree – the deeper the roots, the taller the tree. Or a building – the deeper the foundation, the higher the building.

We will have a major emphasis on going deeper this year.

We want to go deeper in worship.

We want to go deeper in the Word.

Next week we begin a new sermon series going verse by verse through the book of Colossians. We are also going deeper on Wednesday nights.

On Sunday mornings, we must have a shallow end and a deep end because we have lots of guests who are not yet saved or who are new to the things of the Spirit.

So – we are calling the Wednesday sanctuary class The Deeper Life. We will be going deeper in worship and teaching the deeper things of God. We will begin on January 17th with The School of The Prophets and an adult Bible study.

We really want a prophetic culture at Grace Fellowship Church. In addition to our prayer teams, we have a vision for prophetic teams that are trained to hear God and speak prophetically to people needing a word from God!

In addition to growing deeper – we want to grow higher by reaching more people. Growing churches make outreach a priority!

There are two specific groups that we feel the Lord leading us to reach out to this year.

First, we are starting a Hispanic ministry. Hispanics are the largest people group in Grand Prairie. Many of them don't speak English – so we feel led to start a service in Spanish. We have a team made up of Awilda Babb, John Almazan, and Ron and Lynn Dennis who are diligently praying and planning for this. You will hear much more about this as we go forward.

We resisted doing this for a long time because we are multi-ethnic. We want everyone in this service. But we keep losing Hispanic people who do not understand English.

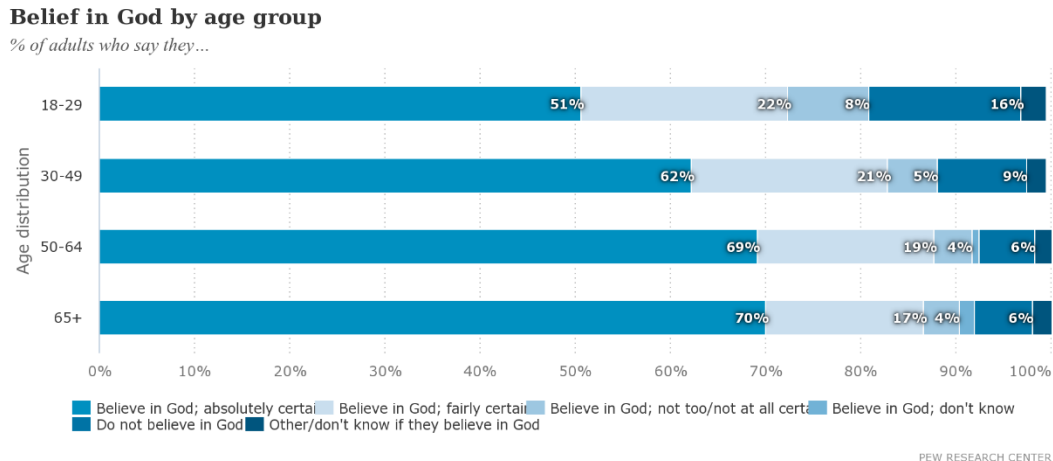
Our goal is not to just have a service for them, but also to help them learn English to they can be in our main service and communicate with others in everyday life.

The other thing we feel lead to address is a huge problem that the church is facing in America. This problem affects our church and every church. Churches that don't address this problem will eventually die!

Most churches in America are shrinking and aging. While young adults aged 18 to 29 make up 22 percent of the U.S. adult population, they represent less than 10 percent of churchgoers. In a recent 10-year study of congregations, people over age 60 *increased* by 5 percent and people under age 35 *decreased* by 5 percent.

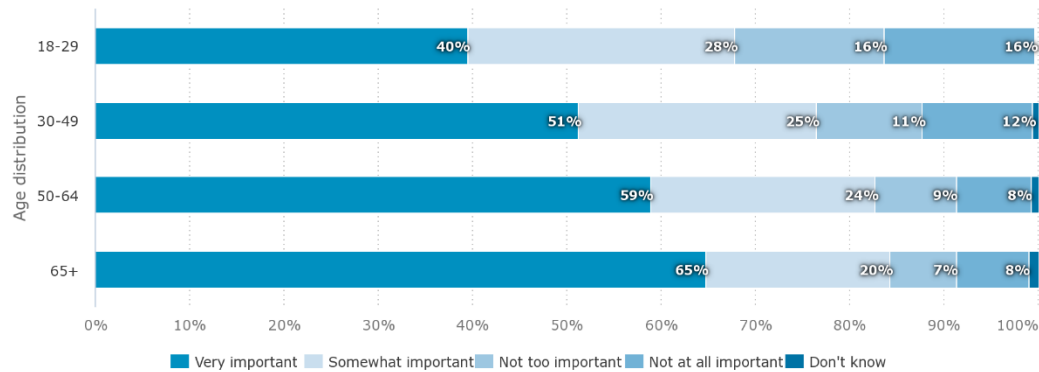
Here's the problem: young people are leaving the church in droves! Approximately 70 percent of those raised in the church disengage from it in their 20s. One-third of Americans under 30 now claim "no religion."

The Pew Research Group did research on this and here's that they found:



Importance of religion in one's life by age group

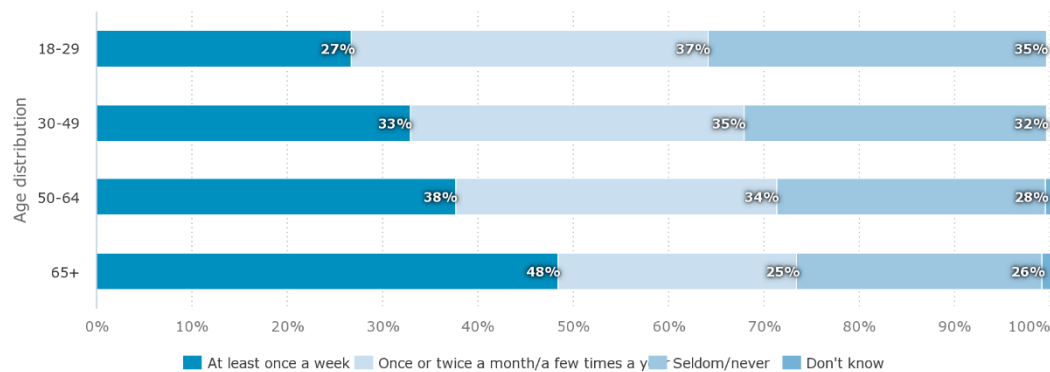
% of adults who say religion is...



PEW RESEARCH CENTER

Attendance at religious services by age group

% of adults who attend religious services...



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This is serious! This involves our children and grandchildren! We've got to figure out how to reach the next generation for Jesus! If we do nothing our church will eventually die!

And we've got to answer this question: How do we grow younger? What are we willing to do to reach the next generation for Jesus?

Millennials – those born between 1985 and 2000 are the largest generation alive in America right now! They are the most diverse generation in American history. And they are the least churched generation in American history. They are not necessarily anti-church. They are just apathetic towards church. They don't think they need it.

Millennials are family oriented and relational. They want to make a difference in the world. So – they are more attracted to churches that are diverse – relational – and making a difference in the world. I think we offer all those things!

We don't have all the answers, but we are praying and seeking God about what to do. We have identified some things we need to do immediately.

- We must continually work to improve our children's and youth ministries, including upgrading the classrooms.

- We need to look at hiring a youth pastor
- Begin young adult / millennial ministry
- More young people on worship team in foyer / greeters / ushers

Basically – I feel about this the same way I felt when we first received the vision to become multi-ethnic. That became our focus and we had to pursue it with intentionality.

A big part of that was who was on the platform, who is in leadership, who's doing ministry. So, we have encouraged every ministry team to begin to pray and talk about what they can do to diversify-not just ethnically, but generationally.

I believe a big part of our future vision will be to touch heaven and change earth by reaching the next generation for Jesus!!! You see – the church today in in the Fight of Our Life.

The church's main fight is not political or social or financial.

The fight is for our future – for the next generation.

The fight is for our children and grandchildren!

We have an enemy whose goal is to steal, kill and destroy.

He wants to steal our children, kill our marriages and destroy our families.

All it takes for him to succeed is for us to do nothing!

All it takes for the church to lose the next generation is to do nothing!

The Bible tells about a godly king named Hezekiah who did not pass on a godly heritage to his son, Manasseh, who became the worst, most evil king in the history of Israel. How was a godly generation was followed by such an evil generation?

In 2 Kings 20 – the prophet Isaiah told Hezekiah to get his house in order because he was going to die. 2 Kings 20:2-3 says:

Hezekiah turned his face to the wall and prayed to the Lord, "Remember, O Lord, how I have walked before you faithfully and with wholehearted devotion and have done what is good in your eyes." And Hezekiah wept bitterly.

God heard his prayer and told Isaiah to go back with this message in 2 Kings 20:5-7

I have heard your prayer; I have seen your tears. Look, I will heal you... I will add fifteen years to your life. I will deliver you and this city from the hand of the king of Assyria.

Then Isaiah said, "Bring a lump of pressed figs." So, they brought it and applied it to his infected skin, and he recovered. So Hezekiah was healed by God – using medicine.

I still wanted to know how such a godly man had such an evil son. I was amazed at what I found. In 2 Kings 20:16-18 the prophet Isaiah said to Hezekiah:

Hear the word of the Lord: The time will surely come when everything in your palace, and all that your fathers have stored up until this day, will be carried off to Babylon. Nothing will be left, says the Lord. And some of your descendants, your own flesh and blood, that will be born to you, will be taken away, and they will become eunuchs in the palace of the king of Babylon.

Wow! That's a tough word to hear about your own flesh and blood. But here's what happened next in verse 19:

"The word of the Lord you have spoken is good," Hezekiah replied. For he thought, "Will there not be peace and security in my lifetime?"

Now wait a minute! When Hezekiah was told he would die, he cried for himself. But when he was told his children would be carried away, he did not shed a tear. When Hezekiah was told he would die, he prayed to the Lord. But when he was told his children would be made slaves, he uttered not a word. Hezekiah was very concerned for himself, but he did not care his sons would be made eunuchs, unable to have children of their own.

In other words, Hezekiah fought for his life – but not for his family. He cared for himself, but showed no care for future generations. He prayed for himself, but offered no prayer for future generations.

He did not care that his children were taken away as long as he got to stay.
He did not care that his children were slaves as long as he was free.
He did not care that his children were at war as long as he had peace.
He did not care that his children had no future as long as he had a future.
Hezekiah showed absolutely no concern for his children or the generations that followed him!

That was a recipe for disaster! He did not fight for his family and that's how he lost them! And if we do not fight for the next generation we will lose them! We can't just do church by thinking about ourselves and what we want – we must think of those we are trying to reach.

Here's three things we must do to win the war for the next generation:
We must show we care for them.
We must choose to be there for them.
We must offer up prayer for them.
That's how we win the fight of our lives for the next generation.

So that's our three major areas of visionary emphasis this year:
Going Deeper in worship and the word.
Reaching out to Hispanics in a greater way.

Ministry to younger generations.

We want our church to grow younger – not just older!

Our expanded vision statement will be this:

Grace Fellowship Church exists to be a multi-ethnic, multi-generational, Spirit-filled congregation with the vision to touch heaven and change earth by experiencing God's presence, equipping God's people, extending God's kingdom and empowering the next generation for Jesus.

What can you do to help accomplish our vision? Pray, give and serve.

Last week - Wayland mentioned our vision for team ministry. You'll be hearing more about that also! In order to accomplish our dream – we need a dream team!

I encourage you to get involved in ministering to younger generations – children – youth – young adults – new believers. It's a biblical principle found in 2 Timothy 2:2

You have heard me teach things that have been confirmed by many reliable witnesses. Now teach these truths to other trustworthy people who will be able to pass them on to others.

God thinks generationally and so must we! Every one of us has a responsibility to disciple the next generation!

Nehemiah was a man who went to Jerusalem to help the people who lived there because the walls of the city were torn down and the enemy could come and go as he pleased. Some of our families are so broken that the enemy can come and go as he pleases.

When Nehemiah started rebuilding, all the enemies came against him. When we are building the next generation, the enemy will try to stop us too. When enemies came against Jerusalem, Nehemiah said in Neh. 4:14

Don't be afraid of them. Remember the Lord, who is great and awesome, and fight for your brothers, your sons and your daughters, your wives and your homes."

Verse 17 says:

They did their work with one hand and held a weapon in the other.

We too have an awesome God – but we must build our church by working with one hand and warring with the other.

If you build anything great, it takes work and warfare.

It takes work and warfare to build a church.

It takes work and warfare to build a family.

It will take work and warfare to reach the next generation for Jesus!

One of the ways we do that is by praying the Word of God. In Jeremiah 1:12, God says,

I am watching over My word to perform it.

The devil will tell us that future generations will never learn the things of God – but we speak the truth of Isaiah 54:13

All your children shall be taught by the Lord, and great shall be the peace of your children.

The devil will tell us that future generations will never get saved, but we speak the truth of Isaiah 49:25 where God said:

I will contend with those who contend with you, and your children I will save.

The devil will tell us that future generations will never be filled with the Spirit, but we speak the truth of Acts 2:38-39

Repent and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you and your children.

The devil will tell us that future generations will never serve the Lord – but we speak the promise of Joshua 24:15

As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.

I haven't seen it happen yet – it's not happening right now – it may not happen next week, next month or next year – but I'm not giving up! I'll always care – I'll always be there – and I'll always be in prayer!

Many people are already writing off millennials and future generations. But at Grace Fellowship Church we will never give up on them!

As for me and this house, WE WILL serve the Lord!