

Forward with Vision
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Welcome to 2022! All through 2021 we preached on Moving Forward. We preached on moving forward in maturity, in discipleship, in community, in family, in honor, in hope, in thanksgiving and we finished up the year with a Christmas series called Forward in Faith.

The elders talked about this and concluded that we need to continue this series on forward in faith. We need to move forward in faith in our church, our families and in our individual lives.

Moving forward requires faith, vision and action. My message today is called Forward with Vision. When I say move forward it can mean many things like:
 To move toward a goal
 To increase growth and maturity
 To change for the better or make progress

In Philippians 3:12-14, Paul said:

Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.

Notice that Paul had a vision and he was moving forward with it. We know that he accomplished that vision because at the end of his life, he was able to say in Acts 26:19

I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision...

In 2 Timothy 4:7 Paul said,

I have fought the good fight, I have finished my race, I have kept the faith.

Paul knew he accomplished God's vision for his life. And he knew that because he knew what the vision was all along. He heard from God and did what God told him to do. Have you heard from God and are you doing what He wants you to do? Are you moving forward with God's vision for your life?

God's will is for us to move forward in every area of life. We should be moving forward in our relationship with God; which means we should be getting closer to Him, not falling away from Him. We should be moving forward in our relationships with people; which means we should be getting closer, not drifting apart.

We should be moving forward in our finances; which means we're getting ahead of our bills, not falling behind. We should be moving forward in our education and our career. And moving forward does not happen by accident. You will never advance by chance. You will never possess what you are unwilling to pursue. Success is the result of choices, not chances. You change your life by changing your choices. You change your life by following the ways of God, not your own way.

All it takes to go backwards, get behind, fall away or drift apart – is to do nothing. Moving forward takes effort. And moving forward requires vision.

We started this church 20 years ago with nothing: no people, no money, no denominational support, no sending church. We had absolutely nothing in the physical realm. What we did have was a big vision and a big faith in a big God who does big things through people with big vision and big faith in a big God! We've come a long way, but we've got a long way to go. We are still dreaming about where God is taking us together.

Every big accomplishment started with vision, a dream. In May 1961 - JFK said, "We will put a man on the moon by the end of the decade." On July 20, 1969, the first man stepped on the moon.

In the 1950's the CEO of said, "I want to make it possible for anyone in the world to be able to taste a Coke during my lifetime." I've been in deepest Africa where the people have very little, but they have Coca Cola!

Walt Disney had a dream to turn some orange groves in Florida into a family theme park. He died before Disney World was completed. At the grand opening someone remarked, "Isn't it too bad that Walt Disney didn't live to see this!" Mike Vance, creative director of Disney Studios, replied, "He did see it. That's why it's here." It was Walt Disney who said, "If you can dream it you can do it, remember this whole thing was started by a mouse."

All these great accomplishments started with a great vision. But the greatest vision of all time was when Jesus Christ told a small group of people "Go into all the world and make disciples of everyone." We're still part of making that vision come true.

If Walt Disney could accomplish so much in a kingdom started by a mouse – how much more can we accomplish in a kingdom started by Almighty God! If people can take a product like Coke around the world, surely we can take the good news of Jesus Christ around the world. If we can put men of the moon, surely we can get men to church! But it all starts with vision.

Vision is a clear mental picture of our prophetic future. It describes where we are going. Each church has a different vision. Our vision at GFC 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 because when God shows up, He speaks, He does miracles, He changes us. Then we go out changed and change our world.

The long form of our vision is this: Grace Fellowship Church exists to be a multi-ethnic, multi-generational, Spirit-filled congregation that touches heaven and changes earth. To accomplish this vision – we do 4 things:

We **EXPERIENCE** God's presence in our services through Spirit-led praise, prayer, the gifts of the Spirit and preaching.

We **EQUIP** God's people to achieve their God-given potential and become leaders in church, family, at work or in school. We are committed to achieving this goal through our small groups, discipleship classes and on-going leadership development.

We **EXTEND** God's Kingdom by intentionally reaching out with the Gospel of Jesus Christ. We are committed to achieving this goal by meeting needs in our neighborhood, our nation and the nations of the world.

We **EMPOWER** the next generation for Jesus Christ to become mature disciples who experience God's presence, equip others to achieve their God-given potential and extend God's kingdom by reaching with the Gospel. We are committed to achieving this goal through our children's, student and young adult ministries.

Our strengths are experiencing God and extending His kingdom. Our growth areas are equipping our people and empowering the next generation for Jesus. As the elders prayed and talked and did research – we learned that there 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. 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." 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 don't think they need church.

This article came out this week as I was studying this. "Millennials lead shift away from organized religion as pandemic tests American's faith." This article says that historically, people turn to God during hard times. But that's not happening during the pandemic.

People – mainly young people – are turning away from God and prayer. This is serious! This involves our children and grandchildren! We've got to figure out how to reach the next generation for Jesus!

This is a serious issue for the church, but it is mainly serious for the young people themselves. I also came across this article this week. Millennials diagnosed with anxiety more than any other generation. The article showed a graph comparing anxiety by age. The article gives several reasons why they believe this is happening. And there are multiple reasons. But I believe they left out a main reason.

Remember the previous article about millennials turning away from God? I see that as a major contributing factor to the depression and anxiety. And I remembered another graph about the importance of religion in the lives of different generations. As you can see – it's the polar opposite of the one on anxiety. Religion is important to the older generations and it's evidenced by belief in God, church attendance, Bible reading and prayer. And they have the least depression and anxiety.

The younger generations see religion, God, church, the Bible and prayer as less important – and they have the most anxiety. It might just be me – but I think they're related and I think it's sad because they are turning from the very thing that can help them! We must figure out what we can do as a local church. We know our message never changes – but our methods must change.

It's hopeful to know that 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 of those things! So – we need to figure out how to reach the younger generation.

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. It took years to accomplish that vision, but here we are! And it will take years to accomplish our vision for the future.

I believe a big part of our future vision will be to touch heaven and change earth by reaching the next generation for Jesus!!!

The apostolic team identified three areas we need to focus on this next year: Making disciples, strengthening marriages and families, and empowering the next generation of leaders. So – we came up with this vision for 2022:

We will become a multi-generational church that makes disciples, strengthens families and empowers the next generation of leaders.

We have identified some things we need to do to accomplish this.

For empowering the next generation -

- We must continually work to improve our children's and youth ministries, including upgrading the classrooms.
- We relaunched our 3 Degrees Student Ministry.
- Begin young adult / millennial ministry
- More young people on worship team / greeters / ushers

For discipleship –

- We are revamping Grace Journey, which is our initial discipleship pathway.
- We are in the planning phase of a ministry mentor program.
- We have a vision to make discipleship and small groups part of our DNA.

For family – we are starting up a marriage ministry.

To accomplish this vision will require us to move forward in faith! That's our vision for our church.

So, I want to ask you, What's your vision? What's your dream for your future? If you are like most people you don't know.

The most common answer given when people are asked what their vision for their life is this: "I don't know." It's sad that most people live their lives not knowing their purpose. They get no closer to the goal because they don't know what the goal is.

I don't believe God wants us to live that way. Everyone ends up somewhere. But few people end up somewhere on purpose. God wants us to live lives of purpose and vision. Proverbs 29:18 says:

Where there is no vision, people perish.

That's true in every area of life – without vision, something always dies.

- Where there is no vision to have a growing personal relationship with your Creator, your inner man perishes.
- Where there is no vision for a godly family, you have a big chance of ending up divorced and your family perishes.
- Where you have no vision for your calling, destiny and purpose, you will flounder around going from job to job with no real accomplishment.
- Where there is no vision that your body is the temple of God's Spirit—your physical health perishes.

- Where there is no vision for a financially wise lifestyle, you can live in the richest country on earth and still be financially perishing.

Get the point? Without vision in any area of life, people perish. Without a vision you will end your life in regret wondering: “Why didn’t I accomplish more? Why didn’t I get somewhere? Why didn’t I make something of my life?” That’s not how God wants us to end up in life.

Do you know how to discern your vision from God? First, you need to fast and pray and seek God for vision. God speaks in different ways to different people, but these six things will usually be involved:

V- Values

Values are the things that are important to you. One way to discover your values is to pay attention to what angers you. I mean, what stirs up righteous anger in you? What is it that causes you to say, “Someone ought to do something about that”?

I- Inner Desires & Passion

Inner desires are the dreams in your heart. If values are discovered by knowing what makes you angry, inner desires are discovered by knowing what makes you happy. What brings you joy and fulfillment?

S- Spiritual Gifts

Spiritual gifts are supernatural abilities imparted by God.

I- Impartation from Past Life Experiences

Past experiences show you what things you like or dislike, what you’re good at and what you’re not good at.

O- Other People

Other people are those in your life you care about you and your future. They can help you discern God’s will. The church plays a vital role as we help each other discover our dream and encourage each other to pursue that dream.

N- Natural Talents and Abilities

Talents are natural abilities imparted by God.

To move forward with vision requires vision and faith. There’s a difference between vision and faith.

Vision means to see – specifically to see the future God has for you. And accomplishing that vision requires faith. Romans 10:17 says:

Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.

There are two main Greek words translated “word” in the New Testament. One is logos – which is the revealed will of God. This speaks of the Bible, the written word of God. The other Greek word for “word” is rhema –which means “that which is spoken.” Rhema is more of a personal, life-giving word from God.

Rhema does not refer to the whole Bible, but to the individual scripture which the Spirit breathes life into at a certain time. There are times when a Scripture seems to jump off the page and speak to you – that is Rhema.

We only receive Rhema as we spend time with God in the logos. Don’t complain about not hearing from God if you don’t spend time in the Word and prayer listening to God.

In God’s kingdom – hearing comes before seeing. You must hear from God in order to have the faith to see God’s vision for your life.

To move forward you must have vision and that vision must be clear to you. Habakkuk 2:2 says:

Write the vision and make it plain on tablets, that he may run who reads it.

Notice that your vision must be plain enough for you to write it down. Your vision must be plain so you can run with it. And you must have faith in the power of God to move forward with vision. Ephesians 3:20 says that:

God is able to (carry out His purpose) and do superabundantly, far over and above all that we (dare) ask or think (infinitely beyond our highest prayers, desires, thoughts, hopes, or dreams).

God has a dream for you that is beyond your wildest dream! God wants to do bigger things through you than you’ve ever dared to dream of, think of or ask for!

So I’m calling you out of small-minded thinking – small-faith praying – small-dream living! To move forward with vision you must dream big dreams, pray big prayers, and have big faith in a big God who does big things through people with big faith in a big God!!

We really want to Touch Heaven and Change Earth. That is our vision! Let’s run with it together. Let’s dream together. Let’s build together.

I believe we really can touch heaven and change earth together!