

Caleb Ingersoll
Vision Sunday)

Calvary Baptist Church
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Vision Sunday- (various passages)

Introduction:

Today is Vision Sunday, which we've explained is a time for the elders to articulate where we feel like God wants to lead us in the next five years. The elders have spent a significant amount of time over the summer praying, and reading, and discussing all kinds of things related to where we've been, where we are, and where we're going as a church.

In order to explain the purpose of this message today and the fact that we are having a "Vision Sunday" at all allow me to explain what we mean by vision, explain how a vision statement is different from other valuable statements like our mission statement, and explain how I hope this impacts our ministry in the years to come.

Body:

First, what we mean by vision is a compelling picture of where we would like to be in the future. The purpose of a vision statement is to state as clearly and concisely as possible where we are going, what we would like to accomplish, where we would like to end up down the road.

A mission statement is a little different. A mission statement is a summary of our overall purpose, what our ultimate goal is. Our mission at Calvary Baptist Church is to glorify God by knowing him, treasuring him, and offering him to the world. We adopted that mission statement roughly 5 or 6 years ago and I think it does a good job of stating our overall purpose. We believe that we exist, as individuals and as a church, to bring glory to God, and we see at least three key ways in which we hope to bring glory to God—by knowing him, by treasuring him, and by offering him to the world. This is the singular guiding principle of our church and hopefully everything we do in some way serves to carry out this mission.

Having said that, one of the problems we've faced in the years since we've adopted that mission statement is that it can sometimes feel difficult bringing the mission statement down to earth, and spell out exactly what it means in practical, day-to-day decisions. What practical changes do we hope will take place to help us accomplish our mission more effectively? What would it look like if we were excelling in carrying out our mission? How can we know we are doing well? These questions haven't always had easy or obvious answers.

A Vision statement can help to flesh out our mission statement by describing the steps that we think this church most needs to take in order to most effectively carry out that mission? We hope our vision statement will give a clear picture of what we think it will look like for our church to most effectively carry out our mission.

I know that there are some people who don't feel any particular craving for a precise vision. They recognize that to some extent the church will always juggle a number of various biblical priorities like preaching and teaching, fellowship, prayer, evangelism, discipleship, mutual encouragement, benevolence and support to those in need, the equipping, sending and supporting of missionaries; and the list could go on. These are all directives and goals for any church and some people have no problem with recognizing that as a church we will always be pursuing side by side a number of valuable purposes, and therefore they feel no great need for a focused, narrow vision that might leave some of these good things out.

Having said that, I know that there are many people who, when faced with a such a buffet of good things to do, appreciate guidance about which are most critical at this time. Ok, so all of these things are important, but which are most important or most pressing. If you've ever walked into your house when it's a total mess, you know that when there are lots of things to do, it can be hard to know where to focus first. This is one of the purposes of vision—to emphasize what we feel is most critical at this moment; it isn't to say that other things aren't good and valuable and important, but simply to clarify what is most important and most pressing.

Just last week I was preaching from the end of David's life. I shared that the driving ambition of David's life was to see God worshipped and treasured and honored and prized as infinitely valuable and precious. That was his grand mission in life. However, underneath that big broad umbrella, he latched onto specific tasks and endeavors that he felt uniquely called to pursue, which if done well, would serve to help accomplish his greater goals. One of the key tasks David felt called of God to pursue was the building of the temple. He wanted to build it himself, but when God said no, David tried to do everything he could to pave the way for Solomon, his son, to build it. David sketched out the architectural plans and wrote up a hierarchy and responsibilities for the various priests who would serve there, and he led the fundraising effort to amass the resources necessary for building the temple. Out of all the things David could have done to promote the worship of God, he focused on what he felt were the most important specific steps that he could take. His vision clarified what he would do by narrowing his focus to the tasks most critical to accomplishing his mission. That is how the elders hope to see our vision functioning here at Calvary Baptist Church.

There will always be things we do as a church that don't perfectly fit under our vision or that aren't specifically mentioned in our vision, because the vision doesn't fully capture everything we must do as a church. But the vision does spell out the areas that we think are of primary importance, the foundation pieces which, if accomplished, will pave the way for everything else to fall into place.

For example, our vision doesn't mention biblical preaching and teaching, or lively, Christ-exalting praise and worship. This isn't because these things aren't important, but rather because we feel that these are relative strengths for us as a church. We care about these things, we will continue to care about these things, but our vision clarifies what requires the most attention right now to take us further than we've ever been.

So having looked at our church, the elders have identified three key areas that we feel are most important to strengthen in order to move forward as a church: Christ-centered community, leadership development, and evangelism.

For each of these three areas, we have attempted to write a single, concise sentence that states what we would like to be true of us five years down the road. Then we will unpack that sentence to explain more precisely what we mean and what we hope it will look like.

First: Christ-centered community. Statement: We endeavor to be a church characterized by vibrant, meaningful, Christ-centered community.

- “We **endeavor**”: We don't simply *want* Christ-centered community, or *long* for Christ-centered community, or *hope* that someday we will exhibit Christ-centered community, but we will *endeavor*, that is we will earnestly strive and exert effort and energy and persistence into becoming a church characterized by vibrant, meaningful, Christ-centered community. We determine to not be passive (hoping that by merely showing up meaningful relationships will form around us), but active in our pursuit of community.

We see four key i-words that we think capture what we mean by “endeavor.” The first and big one is initiative. The only way this church will ever grow in its sense of community is by every person here beginning to take initiative. Community happens when someone takes initiative. If you feel alone or disconnected or if you desire deeper, more meaningful friendships in the church, then the most important thing you can do is take initiative—and specifically you can do that by inviting, including, and investing in the people around you. Initiative is the big word, and three easy ways of taking initiative is by inviting, including, and investing.

As elders, we would love to see a culture here at Calvary where we don't wait for some church organized fellowship event before we decide

whether it fits in our schedule to connect with other people in church, but we invite and include others in whatever it is we feel like doing. You feel like going to the beach—that's great, take initiative and invite some others along. If someone else hears you are going and wants to join, do your best to include them. I would love to see our church get to the point where we hardly need formal events organized by the fellowship committee, because everyone is doing such a good job of taking initiative and inviting and including and investing in others.

I'll give you an example. Leading up to Labor Day weekend, Jim Coffey decided he wanted to go for a hike. This wasn't a formal church event, just something that he wanted to do and wanted to bring others along. He started reaching out to people that he thought might be interested and ended up with a group of 5 or 6 people that went up to the White Mountains and had a great day hiking. You can't spend a day hiking with someone and not get to know them better. I'd imagine each of them senses a little bit more fellowship and community in the church, because of it, but it simply started by taking initiative and inviting and including people to join in.

You can do this with almost anything. You want to try out a new restaurant—reach out to someone who might enjoy coming along. You want to bring your kids to a playground—shoot a text to a couple of other families to see if they are available. We don't need a big budget and bunch of people on our fellowship committee coming up with events all the time, if we simply create a culture where everyone takes initiative by inviting, including, and investing in the people around us.

One specific challenge about taking initiative that we'd like to make to everyone in the church: invite at least one individual or one family over for a meal, or take them out to a restaurant at least one time per month. Meals are one of the best ways to get to know someone else. So make it a goal that at least once a month you invite over or take someone out. Now certainly you can do more than that, and do this more than once and invite over a number of people and not just one, but make your goal be at least one. I believe that this single habit, if executed by everyone in the church, would have a profound effect on the sense of community we feel here. Alright, so that was all focused on a single word—endeavor. Moving on...

- “We endeavor to be a church **characterized by**”: We want our sense of community to be so strong and pervasive and meaningful, that it is not simply experienced by those on the inside, but obvious to everyone who visits us on a Sunday morning or interacts with us outside the walls of our church.

When people visit, we want them to be so welcomed and embraced and encouraged that they tangibly experience the very hospitality of Christ who loves people as they are, but loves them too much to leave them as they are. We want our children to grow up in a church family that loves them as if they were all own kids. We want every member to feel like this is a place where they belong and are known and are needed. From the visitor to the child to the member to the stranger that bumps into us in the streets, we want our bond of fellowship to be so strong and visible and counter-cultural, that forces people to take notice.

In John 17 Jesus recognized that our unity is one of our most powerful evangelistic tools. He prays for all who will come to believe in him saying, “May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me” (Jn 17:23).

- We endeavor to be a church characterized by “**vibrant**”: If our church body is made up of people indwelt by the Holy Spirit who gives spiritual life and vitality, then we want to see our relationships with each other marked by that same life and vitality. Our hope is that every person at CBC feeling weak or discouraged or weary would have no shortage of people to turn to for prayer and encouragement and comfort and support, and that our relationships and interactions here would be life-giving, strengthening us to press on.
- We endeavor to be a church characterized by vibrant, “**meaningful**”: By meaningful we mean specifically relationships that are real and honest and authentic, which move beyond surface-level conversations to address the issues of substance that really matter in our lives.

The elders have been working on a number of metrics to try to measure and track, to the extent that we can, growth in each of the three aspects of our church’s vision. One of the things we hope to do in a month or two is to put together a church survey that everyone will spend a few minutes filling out that we give us a snapshot of the current state of community, leadership development, and evangelism. Two questions that I think could be worthwhile on that questionnaire are 1) if you are feeling weak, discouraged, weary, or if you are struggling with a particular challenge or temptation how likely are you to reach out to someone else at CBC? 2) How many people in the church do you feel close enough to open up to about such things? Our hope is that we would get to the point where everyone has numerous people they can and do turn to in times of need.

- We endeavor to be a church characterized by vibrant, meaningful, “**Christ-centered**” community: We believe this to be the most critical component of the community we long to see at CBC. Fellowship (*koinonia*) according to the Bible describes inner unity around a shared purpose expressed through

outward partnership. For Christians, this means that fellowship is not merely hanging out, but pursuing a goal together, namely linking arms in our effort to glorify God by knowing him, treasuring him, and offering him to the world. In this way, “Christ-centered community” points to the purpose and direction of our fellowship: we are connected together around Christ and for Christ.

Many Christians know how to be friends with other Christians, but not many know how to have distinctively Christ-centered friendships, where our interactions are full of gospel grace and truth, consistently leaving us edified and encouraged. We long to see our church to be a training ground where we learn how to integrate our faith into all our relationships, so that we learn how to interact and have friendships that are distinctively Christian.

- Review: We endeavor to be a church characterized by vibrant, meaningful, Christ-centered community.

Second: leadership development. Statement: We endeavor to be a church that effectively multiplies leaders by equipping and empowering people for kingdom work here and around the world.

- We endeavor to be a church that effectively “**multiplies**”: Our aim is not merely to produce leaders, but to multiply leaders, by so investing into people that they are qualified not only to lead, but to seek out and develop new leaders.

One of the primary jobs of a leader must be to make more leaders. Aubrey Malphurs and Will Mancini write in their book *Building Leaders*, “The job of a leader isn’t just to enlist more followers, but to recruit and equip more and better leaders. It’s the leaders’ responsibility to develop other leaders.... Followers don’t develop leaders; they follow them. It’s leaders who develop other leaders. If they don’t do it, it won’t get done.”

Just like David at the end of his life, Paul at the end of his life is thinking about who is going to carry the message forward. He writes to Timothy in 2 Timothy 2:2, “And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others.” Here there are four generations of leaders mentioned: Paul is writing to Timothy, asking him to find reliable men that he can train up to teach others. As a church, much of our growth has been in younger families, which is a great thing, but the future health and growth of this church depends in large part on whether or not we will successfully develop leaders who are capable of developing leaders who are capable of developing leaders, etc.

- We endeavor to be a church that effectively multiplies “**leaders**”: Leaders are simply people who influence others toward the accomplishment of a purpose. By leaders, we are not only thinking of those qualified and competent to lead small groups, ministry teams, and committees, but anyone with the maturity and skills necessary to positively influence people around them. You don’t need a title to be a leader, but you do need maturity, and wisdom, and some knowledge, and certain skills. Not everyone is meant to be a leader, and that’s ok. But we want to be the kind of church that is constantly looking to develop leaders, so that anyone interested in growing as a leader would have no shortage of opportunities to do so, and that we would always be looking for people with leadership potential that we might be able to invest and develop them to be all that they can be.
- We endeavor to be a church that effectively multiplies leaders by “**equipping**”: By equipping we are thinking of the process by which people gain the knowledge, skills, and spiritual maturity necessary to lead well. This process involves teaching, mentoring, modeling, and providing hands-on opportunities. Some of this is formal, through classes and seminars and other teaching-times, but the majority of this is informal, doing ministry together and giving feedback and encouragement and advice.
- We endeavor to be a church that effectively multiplies leaders by equipping and “**empowering**”: By empowering we mean entrusting people with the authority to lead. Empowerment is the point in the leadership-development process where a leader stops juggling on of his balls and hands it to someone else, an “emerging juggler” so to speak. To produce leaders, we not only need to teach and model for them how to lead, we need to hand over responsibility, and we hope to be a church where we do not cling to our roles and responsibilities so much that we are afraid to let someone else take a turn or get experience.
- We endeavor to be a church that effectively multiplies leaders by equipping and empowering people for kingdom work “**here and around the world**”: We feel it is important for us to be so focused on God’s mission to bring people into a relationship with himself that we rejoice in the privilege of raising up leaders, whether or not CBC gets to benefit from their leadership or another church or another country.
- Whether college students or seminarians or sending missionaries, we need to have a kingdom mindset, even if that means we are used of God to build people up in order to send them out. Certainly, it is great when we get to benefit from the leadership of people we have poured into, but I want to try

to cultivate a mindset now that rejoices in God's work being done, whether here or elsewhere.

- Review: We endeavor to be a church that effectively multiplies leaders by equipping and empowering people for kingdom work here and around the world

Third: evangelism. Statement: We endeavor to be a church made up of people so in love with God and on board with God's mission that we effectively live out and share the gospel in every sphere of life.

- We endeavor to be a church made up of people "**so in love with God**": The heart of evangelism and the heart of every God-honoring work of faith is love for God.

Our mission statement has an arc to it: we aim to glorify God by knowing him, treasuring him, and offering him to the world. The knowing builds up to treasuring, because you can't treasure what you don't know. But once the treasuring is there, which is another word for love, it should spill over into effort to lead others to know and experience God as well. The last thing we want is for our vision statement to produce a flurry of activity without emphasizing the furnace which produces the energy that drives all the activity. Love for God is foundational and without it everything else in our vision will fall apart.

- We endeavor to be a church made up of people so in love with God and "**on board with God's mission**": God is a missionary God, who created a people that we might know and treasure him and trust him. When our fellowship with God was broken because of sin, God has persistently taken the initiative throughout history to reach out to us, to address our sin problem and to bring us back into relationship with Himself. Jesus himself is a missionary who left his comfortable homeland in order to live among a foreign people and show them how to reconcile with God. He came to seek and to save the lost.

The church doesn't have a mission, God's mission has a church. Mission is primary and the church exists to continue and carry on God's mission to bring together from every tribe and tongue and people group one family, reconciled with each other and with their maker. That is why we are here.

- We endeavor to be a church made up of people so in love with God and on board with God's mission that we effectively "**live out**" and share the gospel in every sphere of life: We want to be a church that demonstrates in our actions the very gospel that we hope to explain with our words. In Galatians 2 Paul talks about living in line with the truth of the gospel. The gospel is

good news which must be shared, but is also good news with implications for how we live, and we want to be a people that live in line with the gospel, forgiving as we've been forgiven, loving as we've been loved, giving ourselves for others because Jesus gave himself for us. We want to be a church that demonstrates the gospel.

- We endeavor to be a church made up of people so in love with God and on board with God's mission that we effectively live out and "**share the gospel**": Actions speak louder than words, and so we want to live the gospel, but actions and words speak louder than just actions. No amount of love for others or sacrificial living or generosity will lead people into a relationship with Jesus Christ without using words to explain why we love and sacrifice and give generously. We want to be a church that not only lives the gospel, but knows how to effectively share and communicate the gospel.
- We endeavor to be a church made up of people so in love with God and on board with God's mission that we effectively live out and share the gospel in "**every sphere of life**": We want to be a church that gathers for encouragement and edification and worship, but then goes back out into the world on mission, wanting to be used of God to reach family and friends and coworkers and neighbors.

J.D. Greear imagines the following scenario, which is particularly appropriate as the football season started off this week. He writes, "Imagine watching a football game on TV where after the quarterback calls the play in the huddle, the team applauds him, pats him on the back, and then runs back to the bench to have Gatorade and snacks. After a few minutes, they hustle back out onto the field, huddle back up, and tell the quarterback to call another play. This time a few tell him he's the best play-caller they've ever heard and that they plan to bring their friends back to hear him call the next play. Then back to the bench for more snacks. A few podcast his play and listen to it again while they munch on energy bars. A few minutes later, back out to listen to another play. This happens for the duration of the first quarter. At some point you yell in exasperation, "Fellas!... The point is not listening to the quarterback call the play; the point is to *run* the play."

The Sunday gathering of the church is like a huddle, where instructions are given for how the players can run the "mission" play throughout the week. We gather for strength, for encouragement, for direction and motivation, but the whole point is to leave here bringing the gospel to bear on every sphere of life. We leave as missionaries on mission with God. As elders, we want that to be our culture, our mindset, our whole orientation.

According to the apostle Paul in Ephesians 4, the pastor is not the one who is supposed to do the ministry, he is supposed to be equipping the church to do the ministry. We all have a part to play in our gathered times of worship, but the point is to leave here living and sharing the gospel wherever we go.

- Review: We endeavor to be a church made up of people so in love with God and on board with God's mission that we effectively live out and share the gospel in every sphere of life.

Implications of this vision: If we pursue this three-fold vision effectively, there are at least two consequences that we think will result and for which we should be prepared: growth and opposition.

1. **Growth:** in the past I have had the feeling from many people, and perhaps I have felt this myself at times, that intellectually we want the church to grow, because that means more people coming to know and trust in Jesus Christ, but emotionally, deep down, we hope the church doesn't grow because with growth comes change and I kind of like things the way they are. Perhaps some of us have a fear of becoming a big church where you feel like you don't know anyone and you are lost in the crowd. Certainly every size church faces unique challenges associated with a church that size, and without a doubt it is easier to get lost in the crowd in big churches. Having said that, Jesus never told us to make disciples of all nations, unless doing so would uncomfortably stretch the size of our present gathering. It should be our mission that unifies us, rather than our current level of comfort or familiarity. We feel it is ok to state that we want to grow; it is a secondary goal, not primary; our primary goal is health, but if we are healthy, I expect that we will grow, because that is what healthy things do. We recognize that there are challenges associated with larger churches, but there are steps we can take to try to fight against certain tendencies.
 - a. We would like to move towards church planting. We don't want this particular gathering to grow indefinitely so that we need larger and larger buildings, but we want to move towards planting churches. We think it is unrealistic to play out too distant into the future, but our desire for five years from now is to either have a church-plant established, or a team in preparation and resources set aside to enable a successful church plant. Many don't realize this, but Calvary Baptist Church is a church planting church. In the mid 1990's our church helped to plant the Slavic congregation that meets here on Sunday afternoons. There was a wave of Russian immigrants coming to the U.S. after the fall of the Soviet Union and CBC helped to fund

George Harlov and Sergiy Ivniitskiy, the two pastors of the Slavic church, to come to the U.S. and go to Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, and we helped to sponsor visas for others looking to bring their families to America. It's been more than 20 years since Slavic Evangelical Baptist Church was founded and so many of us feel distant from that process, but we can do it again...

- b. In the next five years we would like to see some resources begin to build up that might enable a more substantial project to address the limits of this facility. We don't yet know whether that means a remodel, or an addition, or a relocation to a better facility, and it's too early to try to finalize such plans, but we want to start aiming in that direction, preparing ourselves financially and doing the research to determine the best way of accommodating the growth that we think God wants to bring to this church.
2. **Opposition:** whether Satanic or personal from people who have their own personal agenda for what they think the church should become (this applies to everyone. I may be the pastor, but it isn't my role to force my vision upon the church, but rather with the elders to discern God's vision for the church.

Conclusion:

To summarize then as concisely as possible, our vision is to cultivate community, develop leaders, and evangelize. Or to say it another way: to link arms, to build up, and to reach out.