

A Vision For Summer- 2011

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Introduction:

I want to talk with you this morning about *A Vision For Summer*. Now- I know that is kind of a funny title- because summer is half over and will be gone before we know it.... So maybe you want to think of this as sort of a mid-year update, check the gauges- type talk. This morning, I want to do three things- share a story, apologize to you, and encourage you. *I hope I have your attention.* ☺

When I graduated from seminary with a master's degree in the spring of 1997- 14 years ago- I never dreamed of starting a church. *Why start a church when there are already so many out there?* And, none of my training in graduate school really equipped you to start something new- especially something from scratch. I learned how to study the Bible, how to read the original languages of the Bible- Greek and Hebrew, learned a little bit about church administration and counseling people, and studied theology, and four years and some debt later- graduated with a 4.0GPA. I thought I was ready to go.

So- Trish and I headed off to our first ministry. We were barely married and moved across the county to Colorado to pastor a small church in Colorado Springs. I was the only staff person at a church made up of about 75 people, and at the age of 25- I was a good 30 years younger than most of the congregation. I learned a lot in my first ministry and God began to shape my philosophy of ministry and did a lot of shaping of my heart and character. All that "good learning experience" stuff is code for "it was a real difficult time" for both Trish and my wife! ☺

Fast forward a few years to the ministry we enjoyed before we moved down to the Columbus area in early 2007. Trish and I lived in northeast OH and I worked on the staff of a medium sized church of about 300 for almost 6 years. At Western Reserve Grace Church- I recruited and trained small group leaders, disciplined men, and worked with community impact ministries. I enjoyed working with a great group of staff members and we saw God do great things in the church in our time there.

By the middle of 2006, I had been in full-time ministry for over 9 years and God began to move in my heart. I began to feel a discontentment in my heart for what I observed in the churches where I had worked and others that I was able to observe. My observation came down to this: *we talked a lot about mission, but few people were really involved in winning those around them to Christ.* And, observation wasn't just true of those that I lead as a pastor. It was true of most pastors that I knew. *It began to bother me to the core of my being that I could work full-time in the confines of a what by all other measures was a great church- but I when I looked at my own life- I didn't even really know more than a hand-full of people outside of our church.* My whole life revolved around the church and the people in the church and maintaining the ministries of the church. I enjoyed the privilege of leading several people to commit their lives to Jesus

that had come to the church before they knew Jesus- but I was not actively on mission with my life.

I began to realize that if I were to continue to move forward in working at established churches- I could continue to pastor without ever having to be a missionary. Yet, one of my principle functions as a pastor was to train people that I lead in how to share Jesus with others. As I grew more and more discontent with this reality- God put a burden on my heart to learn how to be a pastor AND missionary—or maybe better said—to pastor by being a missionary.

As all this was brewing in the confines of my soul- God engineered circumstances to lead Trish and I to look for a new ministry challenge. We traveled to Atlanta and to central Indiana to look at opportunities to pastor established churches there. But, something just didn't sit right—I saw the same pressures in those places—that my time would largely be consumed with keeping people in the seats and keeping the heating and cooling going in the church building. It is easy for pastors to get stuck in a mode of being mostly concerned with “nickels and noses”. Ministry can easily revolve around preparing for Sunday morning, preaching, studying, counseling, training—all of which is for the believers already in the church. I just couldn't give my life again only to that.

After some tough months of wrestling with God—we decided to look at starting a new church. This seemed attractive because much of the early time of formation could be spent in relationship building, meeting new people in the community, and encouraging our new teammates to do the same. In fact, during this process we felt God was calling us to find a ministry that fit two criteria: 1. Do something that required a leap of faith, and 2. Do something that put us around unbelievers everyday. Starting a new church—especially one from scratch—fit the bill. We jumped.

Many of you know the story of the development of ClearView Church. Our church started with 4 people- the size of my family at the time. Our sponsor church, Northwest Chapel, supported our family and our baby church generously- we never could have developed with out them. But, no church ever shared people with us. We prayed and sweated and cried and searched and made connections and gradually God built our team. We started in our house, moved to the YMCA in Gahanna, and eventually here to New Albany High School. We started with our family, grew to a core team of about 40 and held our Grand Opening in October of 2009. Soon after Grand Opening, our average attendance was around 90 through the Spring of 2010.

At this time- say up to early summer of last year- I thought we were developing quite nicely. Starting a new church is never easy and we were trained to prepare for bumps in the road. But, at the time- we had 5 or 6 small groups meeting regularly, God was providing great ministry opportunities in the community, new people were getting involved in ministry, a handful of people committed their lives to Jesus, and I felt the baby church was beginning to move towards developing to maturity.

Then, honestly, something began to unravel. It's no secret- obviously- there aren't 90 people here today. I don't know all the reasons, much of it is really a mystery to me, and the last year has been incredibly painful for my family...

I remember what I associate as the beginning crystal clear because it was soon after Seth's accident last year. I wish I could explain all of this to you and make it comfortable for all of us. I know many of you have been around for a while and it is disconcerting to look around on Sundays and not see some of the faces you have become accustomed to. As I was writing this message, I debated about sharing some of the reasons I know of that people have left...but I don't know of that is helpful or not. What you need to know is that if you have questions- *you can always ask me*. Buy me coffee or invite my family over for dinner- ☺ my life and what I know about ClearView and how I lead or why I make the decisions I do are an open book. If you have questions about ClearView, about me, about my leadership, about where we are going, about why something is the way it is—the best thing to do is ask it... and ask it as soon as possible. *Please don't let issues fester.*

So- here we are today. Knocked down but still kicking. Reeling a bit...but still some fight left in us. Missing some people...and yet God has allowed us to sponsor a huge activity for our whole community at Easter, God has kept us financially viable, we continue to enjoy GREAT people that serve in our key ministries, and see God at work in the lives of people in our church. We have a good strategy and I believe- if we can seek God, pull together, and keep working hard—all hands on deck—ClearView's best days could be ahead of us.

Just a word about our finances—I don't want to get sidetracked—but we don't talk often enough about this. Most churches I know of are struggling to make budget in this economy. However, to God's praise, ClearView is only about \$200/week off track for 2011. With all that we have gone through in the last year, to be only about \$5000 behind for the year- in this economy- is truly a miracle. We consistently meet all of our obligations and (for a church our size and with our short life span) have a strong amount saved for a rainy day in the bank.

I want to thank you for giving faithfully to God. Last fall, we did a series called "Balanced" on biblical giving. Many of you responded to God's leading in your life. We have seen new givers- people giving back to God that are making this a regular part of their monthly budgeting. We have seen people move from giving to tithing- increasing their gift back to God to around 10% of their monthly income. Thank you for being faithful to God's work.

Back to the story... God has put mission in my heart. He led us to start a church. Things developed and then some parts of our work have been in a slow, but real, decline (attendance). I told you I want to share a story with you, an apology and encourage you this morning. Here's the apology.

I want to apologize to you for getting sidetracked. I've lost sight of my calling. I've stepped off the path of mission and leading you to give your life to mission and stepped onto the path I told myself I would not let my pastoral world revolve around again.

See, just being honest, I feel so much pressure to grow our church- some good reasons- I want to see people come to Christ—some earthly reasons—I want to keep getting paid so I can feed my family--- *that when people started leaving our church I shifted the bulk of my attention* to looking backwards at what was wrong (or at least what some felt was wrong), to trying to please people, to trying to reason with people that had already decided in their minds that ClearView wasn't for them, to wallowing in discouragement and frustration...

As I've processed this summer and had more time to look at my own heart—God has prodded me—*you're off track. You're focused on the wrong things.* See, in our calling process...the process we went through where I knew God was calling me to start a church—I sensed God say very clearly: *you be obedient- I'll care for the finances.* I've lost sight of that. I've lost sight of the fact that we got into church planting for one reason and one reason only—to win people to Christ and train them to win others to Christ. **But, somehow, in an irony only Satan can explain—in the process of trying to start and grow a church—somehow mission can get lost.**

Today, I want to tell you I am sorry and for as long as God has me here at ClearView- I want to commit to you to do better. I want to be more effective as a missionary and I want to be more effective at encouraging you and training you and leading you to be a lover of souls...to be so passionate about Jesus that you can't help but tell others about Him.

A passage that meant so much to me 5 years ago—one that really shaped in me a passion to begin a new church that focused on biblical mission—shares Paul's words in

Acts 20:22-24

22 *"And now I am bound by the Spirit to go to Jerusalem. I don't know what awaits me,*
23 *except that the Holy Spirit tells me in city after city that jail and suffering lie ahead.*
24 *But **my life is worth nothing to me unless I use it for finishing the work assigned me by the Lord Jesus—the work of telling others the Good News about the wonderful grace of God.***

Personally:

- I want to consistently pray for those I know that don't yet know Jesus and ask God to give me an opportunity to share Jesus with them. The good news is that now, because of our time investing in connecting in our community—I know hundreds of unchurched people.
- I want to be more proactive, more aware of people, and more bold in bringing faith and, specifically, Jesus into conversations.
- I want to do better at networking with you and the hundreds of other believers we have met in the area to reach THEIR contacts for Jesus. **This is one of the key**

traits of our 5-part strategy we shared last fall in our “Next Chapter” series. I/we want to form “Missional Communities” where believers network together in their offices, in their families, in their neighborhoods to work together to reach others for Christ.

What do I mean by that? Here’s a picture for you: *Many of us only have time for one small group during the week. Perhaps you invest a few months and instead of meeting with a small group from ClearView you start your own in your neighborhood or your work place. You network together other Christ-followers in your sphere of influence and in that group—you do at least two things—you pray for common contacts that are unsaved and you figure out how you can help each other reach them.*

Together/ClearView/Corporate:

- I want to see us figure out ways to more consistently pray together for lost people and how we, together, can reach them.
- I want to see us work on a campaign that encourages everyone in our family to simply **reach one** this year. To reach one person for Christ and disciple them to reach one more for Christ. *Who could your ONE be?*
- I want to do more strategizing and training on how to implement missional communities.
- I want to see us working together in mission. **We excited to announce “Summer Blast” coming up in a few weeks.** This is an initiative of our KidView department to provide a fun night for kids/families in three different neighborhoods. At each sight, we will provide a Bible story, games, treats, and a craft. You can come to one, all three, and bring your friends! Our hope is that each host site- can invite their neighbors.

Please notice—we are trying to be very intentional about our outreach efforts at ClearView. God has opened incredible doors for us in our community. I don’t know of another church- large or small- anywhere- that has done as much as we have to volunteer in and serve our community with love in the last 3 years. *Yet in the irony of how God works—these efforts have not led (yet) to opportunities for us to interact with people spiritually).* So, several of you have said- we need to try and provide our own outreach activities where we control the content of what we can say and do, etc. So—we have, temporarily, **slowed down on the community activities and are trying to dive deeper into more direct contact with people (and enhancing our hosts’ mission efforts in their neighborhood).**

Colossians 4:5

Live wisely among those who are not believers, and make the most of every opportunity.

Summer is a time for connections. People are outside. Children are looking for things to do. Cookouts are expected. Let’s harness summer for ministry. What can we do together to make an impact for God’s Kingdom? How can we support each other in our individual relationships? Neighborhoods.

I'd like to challenge each family here to do something concrete to deepen relationships with people that don't know Jesus. Have a block party. Sponsor a neighborhood Bible Club. Do a wine tasting. Throw a party for the office. Give out water at a park.

I'm serious about making the most of every opportunity. ClearView will help you make a difference. If you will use it for God's glory and with the intention of deepening relationships where you one day hope to share the Good News... we'll help your family pull off a block party. We'll help pay for it. We have coolers and tents and games and a sound system and a video projector you can borrow. We couldn't invest our money more wisely than helping you in mission. I'll come and help you cook burgers or run a wiffle ball tournament or clean up...Make it happen...

I want to look back on summer and see opportunities capitalized on for Jesus' fame.

Bottom line: I want to see us start living the vision: *Every member a missionary.* That's what I want to give my life to. That's what I'd like to lead you to give your life to. This is where meaning in life is found. This is where we're best connected to the heart of our Father.

As I've been distracted, I confess to you that I haven't led as well as I would have liked in honoring our values and the 5-year strategy we outlined in our "Next Chapter" series last fall.

You can see our values on the banner... We want to always be... We want to build on these:

- Being prayerful. We've talked about praying for people that do not yet know Jesus. We want to infuse more prayer into our worship gatherings, small groups, and other times we're together. We've talked a lot about personal prayer (God worked through our "PSL: Prayer As a Second Language Series" this Winter)...but want to do better collectively.
- Being missional. I've already spent time here.
- Being relational. I envision training 3-5 small group leaders this summer so we can lay out several good small group opportunities for you this Fall. I would also like to better outline how to begin a missional community for those God calls to step out in faith in this area.
- Being biblical. We work hard at basing our philosophy, preaching, and strategy out of God's Word. I'm excited about doing something a little differently with our Ephesians series- starting next week, July 24. Join us! ☺ We're going to study a whole book at a time. We'll take 8 weeks and look at the main themes in what I think is the greatest book in the Bible.
- Being simple. Here's, honestly, friends, our toughest value to embody. We want to be simple. We don't want our production, what we do as a church- our Sunday

program, our ministries, our meetings, our whatever—to keep you so busy that you are spending so much time at church that you aren't effective in personal mission. So many churches keep their people so tied up with church stuff that they don't have any other time to give to connecting with their neighbors.

But, this is real tough. Because the second we say that we're going to be simple on Sunday mornings- people that come and visit are going to say: "Well... you don't offer all the things the church down the street offers. You don't have lights and smoke and programs for every age group and..." and then they go down the street to the bigger production.

Simple is tough...but I believe in this value. I want to alleviate some of your fears:

- We do want to have excellent music and teaching. We need to hire the right worship leader to be here every week...and we need to ask that person to build a band. I need to keep improving in my speaking and delivery. We need to add more creative elements to the service- testimonies, special music, videos. We want to do all of these things in time- while figuring out how to put on an excellent, quality worship gathering without it being the only thing we do (we want mission to be forefront).
- We do want to grow to spread the work-load. I know many of you serve faithfully every week. Thank you. Thank you to our KidView team, to our set-up guys, to our tech. crew, to our admin. Team, to our guest welcome team and thanks to all those serving behind the scenes. Perhaps others have yet to commit to a servant role. *Would you help us?*

Philippians 1:27-30

27 Above all, you must live as citizens of heaven, conducting yourselves in a manner worthy of the Good News about Christ. Then, whether I come and see you again or only hear about you, I will know that you are standing together with one spirit and one purpose, fighting together for the faith, which is the Good News. 28 Don't be intimidated in any way by your enemies. This will be a sign to them that they are going to be destroyed, but that you are going to be saved, even by God himself. 29 For you have been given not only the privilege of trusting in Christ but also the privilege of suffering for him. 30 We are in this struggle together. You have seen my struggle in the past, and you know that I am still in the midst of it.

1. Spiritual preparation. (ESV) Let your manner of life be worthy of the Gospel...

To live in a manner worthy of the Gospel means that I am not only telling others about Jesus- I am showing them a living picture of Who Jesus is and what He stands for. When others look at me...they can see Jesus. I'm living in such a way that my life is a witness.

2. Unity.

In Phil. 1:27b, Paul pictures his readers standing together as one...fighting together for the faith... When he says, “fighting together”, he is using an athletic term. He is describing a quality athletic team where there are people of varying abilities and skills, much diversity, all working together as a cohesive unit towards the same goal...fighting for the faith.

Would you commit with me to unity?

3. Ownership.

(vs.27)...*standing together* with one spirit and one purpose, *fighting together* for the faith... 30 *We are in this struggle together.*

Paul was writing Philippians from prison. He was suffering for the work of spreading the Gospel. He was writing to people being persecuted for their faith. They were suffering together for the work Jesus had given them. Their was mutual ownership of mission. There was a co-laboring actively in place.