

Shayla: Do you have a clear vision of God's purpose for CBF and do you want us to fall in that somewhere? I'd really like to know what you're hearing from God for CBF.

Meforshim:

I do sister, thank you for asking. Solomon says,

- **Proverbs 29:18 HCSB** Without revelation people run wild, but one who keeps the law will be happy.

Many preachers,¹ who never use it at any other time, will quote the KJV which puts this passage “Without a vision the people perish.” They do this in order to justify their “vision driven” leadership. Unfortunately, for their exegesis, that is not the intent of the passage as we see here in the HCSB. The original language clearly instructs that without revelation, without God’s revealed Word, without passion for and adherence to the Holy Scriptures, any group of people will soon go astray. They will run wild. So, any “vision” we have for God’s Kingdom must be driven by God’s revelation. As with everything else in our lives, our ministry goals must be driven by the Scriptures.

So, what are the signs of health we should be looking for? As we make our decisions, what should we be trying to develop? What is our goal – our mission – our strategy?

God’s empowering presence. We must remember that the ultimate goal is to seek His face and worship Him.² The purpose of the organized, corporate, visible church is not primarily evangelism. That is the role of every Christian. Our goal in corporate worship is instruction, exhortation to good works, and discipleship, but first and foremost it is to worship the Lord as is His due.

Investment in inspiring, God-exalting, genuine worship. The services should exhibit a “revival” atmosphere. A pervading spirit of joy and enthusiasm.³ Positive attitudes. Relating positively to one’s environment.⁴ If God’s people cannot rejoice, who can? Serious, hard-core, tough, prophetic preaching is a valuable tool – but it must result in “entering into God’s gates with gladness and into His courts with praise” or soon the people will be discouraged and quit.

A healthy pursuit of excellence.⁵ You just can’t beat the basics: “plan your work then work your plan.” We mustn’t be tempted to use shortcuts and half measures. “If it’s worth doing it’s worth doing right.”⁶ We don’t seek excellence because we are in competition with other churches and are trying (like a business) to attract customers to a superior product. Excellence is part of our worship. We are bringing God the best we have in order to better glorify Him. We are also trying to get out of the way so that our flaws aren’t distracting people from His glory. We must make sure that the Gospel is presented in a way that is appropriate to each generation and class of people. We must make sure that there is nothing standing in the way of communication of the Gospel including complexity of language or concepts.⁷ We must make sure that there is nothing hindering people (including children) from coming to Christ.

¹ Rick Warren, Ken Godevenos, Bill Hybels in “Courageous Leadership p.31; Dan Southerland in “Transitioning” p.177; Tony Morgan, pastor of Granger Community Church.

² James 4:8-10; Psalm 145:18-19; Deuteronomy 4:7; Hebrews 4:16; 1 Peter 1:17

³ Luke 4:8; 2 Chronicles 5:13; Psalm 42:4

⁴ Mark 10:27; 1 Corinthians 13:4-7

⁵ Ecclesiastes 9:10; Philippians 1:9-10; 2 Corinthians 8:7; 1 Thessalonians 3:12; 4:1, 10; 1 Corinthians 10:31; Matthew 23:37-38

⁶ Proverbs 21:5

⁷ Luke 18:16

Indigenous worship. The worship should reflect and appeal to our local culture. There should be cultural relevance or connectedness.⁸ As much as I would love to preach “southern style” from time to time, as fun as it would be to preach to a black congregation, I’m not in a black community. I’m not in a university town. I’m in a small, rural, farming, largely white, liberal community. I have to adapt to that (as painful as that sometimes is) so that I can draw all men to Christ. In doing so, I try to keep in mind the extremes to which my Master went in order to reach me!

Passionate spirituality.⁹ This is one place where I frequently struggle. I will push, shove, cajole, tease, and shock – nearly ANYTHING – in order to get our people off center and moving forward. My struggle is that the Midwest has a culture of placid acceptance of the status quo. “Don’t change anything!” “Don’t get too excited!” However, we must keep in mind,

- **Revelation 3:15-17 HCSB (15) I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish that you were cold or hot. (16) So, because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I am going to vomit you out of My mouth. (17) Because you say, 'I'm rich; I have become wealthy, and need nothing,' and you don't know that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind, and naked,**

Strong Christology. Experientially focused on Jesus Christ.¹⁰ I believe this is one of our strengths. I don’t know of any church that has a stronger focus on the sovereignty of the Lord Jesus. I believe this strength extends beyond my preaching, into the mindset of our church leadership and even in many of the congregation’s lives.

Trust in God evidenced by a strong, vital prayer life.¹¹ Here is a definite weakness. We are not a praying church. This, unfortunately, does not characterize us. I’m sure some of our members have strong private prayer lives, but not many. I know this for a fact because if a person has a strong personal prayer life, they will be hungry to pray with their brothers and sisters. Over the last ten years we have tried on repeated occasions to have services that are dedicated to prayer. They have consistently faltered or flat-out failed. We’re going to keep trying however because I believe this that victory in this area will ultimately prove to be our victory with God.

An appetite for the Word. Strong emphasis on biblically accurate teaching.¹² Again, I believe this to be a forte among about half of our people. Our leadership and many of our people enjoy a great passion for the Word but many congregants remain indifferent to it.

Biblical priorities. A desire to do what the Scriptures command – no more, no less. If the Scriptures are broad and vague, then our interpretation should be equally broad. However, if the Scriptures are specific and detailed, then the application should be specific and detailed.¹³

Kingdom orientation. We must keep in mind that we are here to build the kingdom of God, not to build a building or a large congregation. We must understand what “building the kingdom” means.¹⁴ Here I personally struggle. I am essentially a pragmatic person. “If it works do it” could probably describe my view but what does “it works” look like? Surely a sign of health would be a growing attendance and membership!¹⁵ However, I often feel like a failure because the congregation is not growing in numbers as I would like to see. However, I also know that four well-trained fit men can do a lot more damage to the enemy than a

⁸ 1 Corinthians 9:19-23

⁹ Psalm 42:1-2

¹⁰ 1 John 3:23; John 14:6-7

¹¹ 1 Thessalonians 5:17; Ephesians 6:18; 1 Timothy 2:8

¹² Psalm 119:131

¹³ Psalm 119:21

¹⁴ Matthew 6:32-33

¹⁵ Proverbs 14:28

battalion of half-trained couch potatoes. It's the "quality vs. quantity" quandary. I want to see souls saved, disciple and ministering in their turn. However, I know that often the enemy sends false converts, "tares" if you will among the "wheat". "Goats" among the "sheep". So, I have to ask myself "Am I willing to be a failure if that is what my God asks of me? Am I willing to toil in obscurity my whole life and only have a handful of people that I've helped to show for it? Am I willing to be a 'vessel of dishonor' in my Master's house?" It ultimately (as always) comes back to pride vs. humility doesn't it?

An outward focus.¹⁶ We have really come a long way here. A decade ago our congregation was strongly bent toward a fortress mentality; "we few no more". I actually had people complaining at one time because there were more people coming into the church than they were comfortable with. Needless to say those people are now all gone. However, we must continue to ensure that our focus remains on the "highways and byways" lest we lose our drive to serve.

Service to the needy people of our community.¹⁷ Largely thanks to a strong Outreach team and a small but dedicated band of believers who have jumped on their spiritual gifts with both feet, we have an excellent reputation as servants in the community. This is an area in which I believe we excel.

Clearly defined mission/purpose. Specific, concrete mission objectives. A clear sense of mission.¹⁸ I hope that this meforshim illustrates that we've got this one down?

A broadly owned vision. The people have caught the vision and are excited and running with it.¹⁹ Here again we struggle. Some of the people have. Many of the people have not. Many of our people would be glad to remain the size we are, simply maintaining the status quo and treading water. A small handful seemed to be grasping the true importance of reaching the 17,000 people of this county for the Lord. They seem to be truly passionate about the souls that are dying and dropping into hell on a weekly basis. Unfortunately, I cannot describe that passion as "broadly owned" in our congregation. Not yet.

Reproduction. People are being saved.²⁰ That lack of passion for God's church and for the building of the kingdom is here translated into reality. We've had some saved, but not many. And some of those who have professed faith and been baptized have since gone on to prove that it was a false profession. It's sad and it's a sign of the end times but we have got to do what we can to correct it as much as humanly possible.

Discipleship. Strategically building the believers. Getting our people involved in systematic theological growth.²¹ Effective generation focused ministry. Several competent programs and activities.²²

I believe our Sunday school classes, Ironworks, and the Wednesday night Bible study led by Griz are each doing as good a job of discipleship as is possible corporately. Our elders are known for taking individuals under their wing and personally discipling them. My counseling calendar clearly demonstrates my involvement in the personal lives of our members.

Gift-oriented ministry development. The exercise of spiritual gifts. A growing number of people involved in weekly ministry. Ongoing equipping of the workers. Lay mobilization.²³ We tend to think of elders as "professional Christians" who are to do the work of the church. They

¹⁶ Philippians 2:3-4

¹⁷ James 1:27; 1 Timothy 5:3; 1 John 3:17-18

¹⁸ Proverbs 13:16; 14:8; 21:5; 22:3

¹⁹ Exodus 36:5-7

²⁰ Matthew 28:19

²¹ Matthew 28:20

²² 1 Corinthians 9:20-23; Luke 17:1-2

²³ Romans 12:6-8; Ephesians 4:11-14

are the “hired men” whom we pay to service us. However, the biblical view is that the elders are to equip the PEOPLE to do the work of the church.

A preference for providing abundant resources to enhance ministry over facilities.²⁴ There is nothing wrong with beautiful, grand buildings. However, we must recognize that their primary purpose is simply a place to come worship. We cannot vest a lot of importance in any given building because God does not reside in buildings.²⁵ People are the temple of God.²⁶ Therefore, if we are to invest, the lion’s share should be in people, in ministry – not facilities.

Holistic small groups. An emphasis on developing significant relationships within the congregation. A commitment to loving/caring relationships. A growing number of people connected to one another in discipleship groups.²⁷ Dedication to equipping individuals and families to minister to themselves. Emphasis on teaching and developing personal spiritual disciplines.²⁸ Here we are trying to reach this goal, and taking some positive steps in that direction – but we remain woefully weak. The difficulty to maintain a proper balance of the dynamic relationship between the congregation and the cell groups. In the Midwest, there is a predisposition for para-church organizations. Lots of people start cell groups or home Bible studies, but unfortunately it usually ends up being an “end run” around accountability and doing it God’s way. However, the people are to...

- Hebrews 13:17 Obey your spiritual leaders and do what they say. Their work is to watch over your souls, and they know they are accountable to God. Give them reason to do this joyfully and not with sorrow. That would certainly not be for your benefit.

The leaders are to...

- 1 Peter 5:2-3 Care for the flock of God entrusted to you. Watch over it willingly, not grudgingly—not for what you will get out of it, but because you are eager to serve God.³ Don’t lord it over the people assigned to your care, but lead them by your good example.

All are to...

- 1 Corinthians 1:10, 12 Now, dear brothers and sisters, I appeal to you by the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ to stop arguing among yourselves. Let there be real harmony so there won’t be divisions in the church. I plead with you to be of one mind, united in thought and purpose...¹²Some of you are saying, “I am a follower of Paul.” Others are saying, “I follow Apollos,” or “I follow Peter,” or “I follow only Christ.”¹³Can Christ be divided into pieces? Was I, Paul, crucified for you? Were any of you baptized in the name of Paul?

Openness to change. A teachable spirit. Learning and growing in community. Solomon says,

- **Proverbs 18:15 HCSB** The mind of the discerning acquires knowledge, and the ear of the wise seeks it.

We should be constantly scanning the horizon of church seeking new and imaginative ways to obey the Lord and to bring glory to His name. A saved people should be a grateful people. A grateful people should be a joyfully serving people. A joyfully serving people should be constantly using their minds to do their best for their King.

Solomon further says,

- **Ecclesiastes 3:1 HCSB** There is an occasion for everything, and a time for every activity under heaven:

²⁴ 2 Chronicles 2:5-6

²⁵ 1 Kings 8:27

²⁶ 1 Corinthians 3:16-17

²⁷ Proverbs 27:6, 9, 17

²⁸ 1 Peter 2:9; 1 Corinthians 12:7; Ephesians 6:4

What was once a great idea may no longer be a viable strategy. What we do today and find successful, may eventually hinder our children and grandchildren in their d'vekut. We need to be constantly adjusting to the latest technology, the latest techniques, the latest findings; not so that we can be known as “cutting edge,” but so that we are the most efficient tools in Hashem’s tool box.

Empowering servant-leadership. A positive eldership.²⁹ I believe this to be one of our strengths. It was not always so, but I think we are getting there. If there are insufficient numbers of workers, it is definitely not because the church leadership is not willing to delegate authority! “Truly the fields are white!” We need tons of workers and are praying fervently that the Lord of the Harvest will send us some. We don’t need any more bench warmers! What we need are some people who will step up and say “I can do that.”

Pastoral and lay visitation.³⁰ Definitely a strength.

Corporate and segment multiplication of shepherds. A reliance on multiplicity of leadership rather than centralization of power.³¹ Again – a definite strength. Not only do we follow the biblical model of multiple elders, but Ironworks is (hopefully) training a whole new generation of them.

Strong, strategic leadership. I hope we are doing this but again, we must carefully define our terms. “Strong” doesn’t mean “lording” over the people. “Strategic” doesn’t mean “accepting corporate business models as viable strategy for church”. Leadership must encourage godliness in the people. That means honesty, justice, honor, keeping our word, etc.³² Leadership needs to look for competent people and promote them.³³ It needs to develop and train the people so that the overall quality and excellence improves with time. It needs to discourage incompetence and trouble making. If the leadership speaks, it must not be with the wisdom or philosophies of men, but of God. We must be known for judging fairly.³⁴ The leadership must develop a distaste for wrongdoing both in itself and in our people. Particularly in an all-volunteer organization like a church, leadership must be based on justice.³⁵ Deliberate obtuseness and incompetence, divisiveness and self-seeking must not be tolerated.³⁶

Wise administration and mutual accountability. Wise leadership is necessary for an organization to succeed. Wise leadership includes the input of many wise counselors.³⁷ Here I believe we are improving every year. I am very encouraged at the quality that our Church Council demonstrates. They are very wise when it comes to administering the materiel and personnel of this church. Our church leadership is definitely a positive resource.

Stewardship and generosity. Holistic stewardship practices. Solid financial resources.³⁸ A definite strength! We have a very generous people. I would pit them against any other church, “pound for pound” so to speak.

Organized to facilitate highly effective ministry. Streamlined, functional structures that encourage solid, participatory decision making.³⁹ In the last few years, we have systematically revamped our constitution and bylaws and I believe we have been vastly improved as a church by the process.

²⁹ Ephesians 4:11-14; Titus 1:9

³⁰ 1 Timothy 3:2; Titus 1:8; Acts 2:45-46

³¹ Proverbs 11:14; 15:22; Acts 11:30; 14:23; 15:4

³² Proverbs 14:34

³³ Proverbs 14:35

³⁴ Proverbs 16:10

³⁵ Proverbs 16:12

³⁶ Proverbs 20:26

³⁷ Proverbs 11:14

³⁸ 2 Corinthians 9:6-11; Matthew 25:29

³⁹ Exodus 18:18-23

Collaboration and partnership. Networking with the regional Body of Christ.

- Churches can collaborate on matters of theological import. (Acts 15)
- Churches can collaborate on matters of financial aid. (Acts 11:29-30)
- Churches can collaborate on matters of practical import. (1 Corinthians 11:16)

This is a weakness, but I'm happy to say that it is not ours. We have consistently tried to team up with other churches on evangelistic matters but have met consistent recalcitrance at every turn. If we were to organize a golf tournament, we'd have tons of cooperation from other churches, but if we do anything that involves leading lost souls to Christ, then nothing happens. It's the most amazing thing I've ever seen.

Adequate facilities:

- Adequate space and facilities for the ministries to function.
- Open accessibility
- High visibility
- Adequate parking
- Room to expand
- Appropriately attractive landscaping and décor.

Here again – we're working on it – as evinced by the hours of labor put into the north shed and the vision we have of expanding our building usage more into that resource.

So – I hope this clarifies where I hope to be going over the next decade. Further, I hope that I have demonstrated the importance and practicality of having our vision driven by the Holy Scriptures rather than some model developed by humans somewhere.

Thanks again for asking.

Kol tuv