

WHERE IS GOD TAKING US?

Since January of 2016, our pastor has been unpacking and explaining what we have referred to as the Vision Frame. It is the culminating work of our Vision Pathway Team that has been meeting since August 2014. The Vision Frame asks 5 specific questions of clarity:

What are we doing?

Why are we doing it?

How are we doing it?

When are we successful?

Where is God taking us?

The answer to these questions provide for our church the big picture. Another way of saying it is when a church can press in on these 5 questions and answer them with clarity, the vision of the church can start to come into focus.

Yesterday, I was attempting to take a picture of the sticker inside our clothes dryer that provides the model and serial number. For some reason, our dryer would stop in mid-cycle. I would try to restart it, but it wouldn't go. I would have to wait for a couple of minutes and then I could restart it. So, I wanted to see if I could diagnose the problem via the internet. So I used the camera on my phone to get the picture of this tag. My camera couldn't quite adjust to get a clear photo. I kept moving it in and out, but it could never seem to focus. There was a barcode, lots of little letters and numbers on the tag, not to mention that it wasn't necessarily flat. I'm sure the camera on my phone was trying to process everything in view, but it was struggling. It wasn't until I put my finger on the screen and forced the camera to focus specifically on the model number that it finally came into focus. Knowing I was preaching today, it sort of dawned on me that Church can be very similar. It is easy for a church to get out of focus because it can become cluttered, routine in action, lose focus, and forget the purpose of why we do what we do. It isn't until a church presses in and answers these 5 questions with clarity that the vision of the church can start to come into focus.

This morning, I want to review our answers the first four questions and then answer the last question, "Where is God taking us?"

1. What are we doing? (SHOW SLIDE FROM BIG PICTURE SUNDAY 2/7)
The answer to this question gives us our missional mandate. It is the Great Commission re-articulated for our church's unique time and place. Think of a compass. A compass works because it always points true north. Our missional mandate tells us our true north. Let me illustrate...everyone close their eyes. Now, point north. Keep pointing...open your eyes. People are pointing in all sorts of direction. This morning, I used the compass on my phone and this direction is true north. Now, everyone close their eyes...point north...keep pointing...open your eyes. Imagine if everyone in our church was moving in the same

direction. Could we imagine the impact we would make here in Murfreesboro?

So, what are we doing? Our mission at Belle Aire is growing people beyond everyday life to fullness in Christ-centered living. If you were to look closely at people we encounter every day, we would find people probably in one of

Two approaches to everyday life:

1. Life with no Purpose

One approach is people living day to day with no purpose. Life is mundane. People simply go with the flow, go from one event to the other. They may not even take the time to think deeply about the purpose and meaning of life. They simply move through life by moving on to the next thing, to the next thing, and to the next thing.

2. Dread living life

The second approach to everyday life is people dreading the marching orders of day to day living. Life is hard. They dread the next couple of hours. They dread today. They dread tomorrow. There can be a lot of different reasons why people dread life. For some, hurts and pains, either emotionally or physically, affect their outlook on life. For others, it could be overwhelming responsibilities from work or family that make life difficult.

At Belle Aire, we believe that life has purpose and there is no reason to dread living life. Everyday life can be more fulfilling when lived in light of Jesus Christ and His gospel. When we understand and believe that a holy, perfect God died for us unholy, imperfect people, and we trust in the one that died for us, Jesus Christ, we find purpose, we find meaning and it transforms everyday life to Christ-centered living. This is what Belle Aire, this local body of believers, seeks to accomplish. We have a message, this gospel of Jesus Christ that we must share with those outside these walls.

2. Why are we doing it? (SHOW SLIDE FROM BIG PICTURE SUNDAY 2/7)

The answer to this question reveals our missional motives. In other words, what motivates us to fulfill our mission? Belle Aire has 7 core values and each of the values are grounded in scripture:

1. 1 Thess. 5:17 Prayer

Pray without ceasing.

2. 2 Tim. 3:16 Truth

All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness.

3. Deut. 6:7 Families

You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise.

4. John 4:23 Worship

But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him.

5. Acts 1:8 Missions

But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”

6. 2 Cor. 3:18 Growth

And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.

7. Galatians 3:28 Diversity (ethnic, socioeconomic, and generational)

There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

These 7 values motivate us to fulfill our mission of growing people beyond everyday life to fullness in Christ-centered living.

3. How are we doing it? (SHOW SLIDE FROM BIG PICTURE SUNDAY 2/7)

The answer to this question provides for us our missional map. Just as google maps tells us how to get from point A to point B, our missional map tells us how Belle Aire is going to move people beyond everyday life to fullness in Christ-centered living. The vision pathway team has articulated a four-fold strategy that includes:

1. Worship

Attending worship is usually the first thing someone does when they visit our church. Being involved in regular corporate worship is vital for Christ-centered living. But our desire is not for people to simply warm a pew each week.

2. Connect

It is vital for people to connect with others and develop deep meaningful relationships. It is necessary for deep spiritual growth to take place. But it doesn't end with connect. There must be another step.

3. Serve

Imagine if Jesus simply built a relationship, but never served. The New Testament would look drastically different. Yet, Jesus served and set for us an example. The Gospel has also freed us to serve and the Holy Spirit has empowered us to serve. If we are not serving the Body of Christ, then in many ways, we are denying the Holy Spirit to use us to build up the body. But once again, it can't end here.

4. Reach.

We must be seeking those outside these walls with the message that has transformed our lives, the gospel of Jesus Christ. It is when we are reaching people with the Gospel that we are coming full circle. Those that we reach, we want to integrate them into worship so that they can connect, one day serve, and ultimately reach others for Christ. This is replication!

These are four critical areas in the life of every member of our church. You can't experience fullness in Christ-centered living without being engaged in all four areas of our strategy. Let me say

that again: You can't experience fullness in Christ-centered living without being engaged in worshiping, connecting, serving, and reaching.

4. When are we successful? (SHOW SLIDE FROM BIG PICTURE SUNDAY 2/7)

What is the tool we use to know when we are successful? In school, we use grades. I remember in 7th grade algebra when the class took a test and the class did not do well...tell story...In school, it is having a numeric scale that helps us know when we are or are not successful. In church, we don't take grades or tests. However, we did develop 6 questions that we seek to use as our mission measures

1. When am I walking faithfully?
2. Who am I helping to grow spiritually?
3. With whom am I sharing the gospel?
4. How am I demonstrating the love of Christ to others?
5. Where am I serving passionately?
6. How am I uniting the body?

Notice all the questions are personal. It is up to you to ask yourselves these questions. Imagine if every church member asked these 6 questions and reflected on their answers every night as you laid your head on your pillow. Imagine if you used these measures as accountability questions with those in your SS class or other Bible study you are involved with? I truly believe reflecting on these measures would be convicting and also a means of God's grace in our lives.

5. Where is God taking us? (SHOW SLIDE FROM BIG PICTURE SUNDAY 2/7)

When the answers to the first 4 questions have been established, the picture in the frame becomes better focused. This is what we call vision proper. It is important to note the distinction between mission and vision proper. Whereas mission is a compass pointing us in the same direction, vision proper is the travel brochure.

I remember when growing up that we had this book with pictures taken all over the United States. Through this book, I was introduced to the Giant Sequoia trees in California. I can still see the pictures in that book. It included pictures of a car driving through a tree, a car parked on a tree, and 30+ people dancing on a Sequoia stump. The immense scale was simply mindboggling. I wanted to see those trees one day. Thankfully, I was able to do so with Melanie almost 15 years ago. Just as those pictures made me want to go see the trees in real life, the vision proper makes us want to see God do something incredible at Belle Aire and we be a part of it.

So where is God taking us? For now, it is nothing earth shattering. Part of that is because we knew that Dean would be leaving and a new pastor would be coming on board. We didn't want to plan 2-3 years out before the new pastor was able to put his thumbprint on it.

Over the past 5 months, we have been trying to strategically lay down a strong foundation for our church by focusing on the vision frame for the first half of 2016. We want the new pastor to come in and not have to do any foundation work, but to be able to start building with his leadership and relational skills. Therefore, our vision proper looks only one year out. Our hope is that by January 2017, we see 3 out of 4 adults dedicated to living our mission daily and personally applying our measures. While we would love for it to be 4 out of 4 adults, we also want it to be obtainable. This is what we are currently working towards.

Take a quick step back for a minute. Have you thought about all that is going on? We are on the cusp of seeing our prayers over the past 2 years for God's man to be our pastor being answered next week. Also, I believe God has been using Bro. Dean to lay a strong foundation for our next pastor by emphasizing the vision frame. I truly believe God is up to great things here at Belle Aire. These are exciting times. I'm excited!

As we continue to emphasize our strategy of worship, connect, serve, and reach, we need to consider some necessary changes that are set to take place starting in August:

1. Add 2nd Worship Service

Starting in August 2016, Belle Aire will return back to what we did prior to this past year: that being 2 worship services. Why make the change? As you know, we have been engaged in one worship service for almost one year. I truly believe that it was vital for our church to move to one service to bring us all together after a difficult period. I felt like we needed to feel a sense of unity. Now being a year removed, and our attendance having stabilized, we need worship space. Some of you might be saying, but there is space all around me. That may be true, but that can't be said for the back 5-10 pews. On a number of occasions, I have personally witnessed visitors coming into our church, a little late, and peeking through the windows of the door, only to see them walk right back out the church possibly to not return again. Why did they leave? Because they did not see easy access to sitting and they did not want to be the center of attention by walking past all these rows to find an open seat. I can sympathize with them. (tell my story).

With a new pastor possibly coming on board very soon, we need to be prepared for the increase that we anticipate. A new pastor has a way of bringing people from all sorts of places. Imagine if we had 150-200 more people in here? Imagine if they all peaked into the back window and did not see anywhere to sit. Our opportunity of engaging them in worship would be missed.

A little over a month ago, the Vision Pathway Team had a wet cement session to discuss the return to 2 services. At that time, we talked about having different styles in each worship service. However, since that meeting, and after engaging in more discussion, we believe it is important that these services be identical. We don't want to sow any

seeds of division or discord, especially over the style of music. What I can tell you is that our worship will reflect us as a church. It will be uplifting, refreshing, highly participatory, and ultimately God honoring. We want people to leave our worship feeling like they have just met with God both now and in the future. When it is all said and done, we do not want music style to drive us. We want the worship of the one who has saved us from our sins, who has transferred us from realm of darkness into His marvelous light, to be our passion and our desire.

2. Add 3rd Sunday School Hour

Some of you might be saying a third hour, I thought we only had one. We actually have two currently. We have a couple of classes that meet at 8:00 and these classes don't require children oversight. But in August, we will add another hour. Why? In our current room situation, we have 3 adult classes using the Connecting Point Theater, 3 classes using the sanctuary, and one class using Dean's office. There is no available room to start a new class if we wanted to except during the 8:00 hour. Once again, with a new pastor and an emphasis on connecting with others, we anticipate an increase in SS.

So, that means I have a lot of work ahead of me in moving SS classes around. At the same time, I want to challenge our adult SS classes that have 20-25 or more in attendance to consider starting a new SS class in the opposite SS hour. If every class that had 20-25 or more did this, at least 8 new SS classes would be started. If we had 8 new classes, that would mean finding 8 new SS teachers. I believe this is achievable and will help our church be strategically ready for an influx of people.

Along those same lines, SS classes, are you warm and friendly to guests that come to your class? When was the last time you invited a new guest to lunch with you after church? When was the last time you called them up or invited them to a fellowship? I strongly encourage you to consider how you interact with guests.

Are you ready to take the plunge? Belle Aire has a mission and fulfilling that mission can mean the difference between life and death. Let's get busy growing people beyond everyday life to fullness in Christ-centered living. Belle Aire is not a social club or country club. This is the Church of Jesus Christ. Jesus gave his very life and shed his precious blood to redeem the church. As Revelation 5:9-10 says,

And they sang a new song, saying, "Worthy are you to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation, and you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God, and they shall reign on the earth."

