

Get Real: A Guiding Vision for 2011
Psalm 139:23-24

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Introduction: Today's sermon is different from most. Most every Sunday, and other gatherings for that matter, we isolate a specific passage of God's Word and seek to make practical application to our lives from that text. For one Sunday, I want to deviate from that path. My reason is valid, I feel. I want to share with you a guiding vision for this year. Those of you who have been with for some time will not be too surprised by this. We seem to have had our greatest seasons when we have focused on a particular theme for an extended period of time.

- 2008 brought us the dual challenge of reading God's Word all the way through and to focus on "One" person to evangelize
- 2009 brought us the challenge to grow as Jesus did in "wisdom, in stature, and in favor with God and others."
- 2010 we spent tremendous time focused on core values that our church holds dear.

With that same kind of spirit, I want to put forth a guiding vision for this year. My prayer would be that this focus would help us to achieve significant and measurable growth in these areas.

I want to begin with a reading from the Psalms.

Text: ²³ Search me, God, and know my heart;
test me and know my concerns.

²⁴ See if there is any offensive way in me;
lead me in the everlasting way.

The first step to growth in any area is to be honest about where we are now. And so, you will hear us talk throughout the year about getting real. Specifically, I want to ask us to "get real" about three specific areas. As I prayed about this year, I sensed the Lord leading me to give attention to these three areas in our church family.

We will commit together as families and a church family in 2011 to get real about ...

Our Family

Next week, we will begin to walk verse by verse through Deuteronomy 6. I want to read a bit of Deuteronomy 6 to you today. Here is what we want to learn from Deuteronomy 6: God gave the assignment for the discipleship of our children to the family. God did not give the role of discipleship of the home to the church.

Assessment: We, as well as most other churches I know, have tried to take over the God-given role of the family. If we are honest, we have to draw two conclusions. We have failed. As a matter of fact, we have failed miserably. The other conclusion is central to why God gave the home this assignment of family discipleship. Even if the church had the best strategies, we don't have your children for enough hours in the week to give proper training.

Action Point: We will seek to significantly shift our focus to be a partner with the family. That is, we want to disciple you , Mom and Dad, to disciple your home. We will do this in a variety of ways including preaching for the next 7 Sundays on the family. In addition, we will have a major conference on the family on Saturday, September 17. Primarily, this is going to be led by members of our staff for this reason. If we cannot stand before you and say, “Here is what we have learned so far in the area of family discipleship” I have reached the conclusion that we have no business being your pastors. If I cannot stand before you and say, “Here is how we do it in my home” I’m not qualified to say you ought to do something.

Our Debt

I want to call us to take an honest look at our church’s debt. I want to ask you to do something big. I want to ask God to do something big.

Assessment: Our total church debt is slightly over 3 million dollars. Relative to lots of churches our size, that actually is not terrible. However, it is debt, and I want us to get real serious about it. So here is what we are going to challenge you to do.

Action Point: On a Sunday in August when we have one combined worship service, we are going to ask you to give a special offering to the reduction of this debt. We are telling you about it now so that you will begin to prepare for it. I imagine a family getting a milk jug and putting away loose change beginning now. I want to encourage every family to begin a pattern of saving now for this one Sunday offering.

Our Praying

Assessment: We are a praying church. We believe in prayer. We pray, but we can and we should do more. The word that I have constantly thought of is desperate praying. The kind of praying that says, “God, if you don’t act, we have no hope.”

Action Point: We are going to create a variety of opportunities to pray as a church as never before. Let me tell you that we are going to talk about fasting and call you to fast as just one example of specific action.

This is the action point that complements the other two areas. We could fly James Dobson in every Sunday to “focus” on our families, but if God does not heal some of our families, there is little hope. We need to depend on God for the financial resources that are necessary to fulfill our task.

So, will you commit with me?

There is an old story about the circus tying baby elephants to a stake. The baby elephant could not break free, so he conditioned himself to believe that he could not break free even as he grew. Even as a full grown elephant, the elephant would not break free. Circus promoters would say only one thing would cause the elephant to break free—if the circus tent caught on fire.

The church of Jesus Christ, in many respects, is like that elephant—tied to the stake. Powerful enough to break free, but conditioned not to break free. I pray that the Lord set us on fire so that we might break free.