

## **2010 New Year's Message**

*From Blessed to Blessing*

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I love this church, and I love serving this church as the senior pastor. I can't even begin to tell you how proud I am that our church contributed significantly to the food drive and to the water filter project over Christmas. Thank you so much!

So yes, there are lots of exciting things taking place here, and we are glad.

But if we are going to become the kind of church that continues makes an authentic contribution in our community and around the world, then we have to make some more changes around here.

Years ago we started to shift from an internal to an external focus, but now we need to pour on the gas!

We actually need to change our understanding of what the church is, and what the church does.

And I realize that I'm talking about a tectonic shift, a massive overhaul, an extreme makeover that will take months to complete. It's the road less travelled, but well worth it.

### **1. From Church-Centric to Kingdom-Focused**

In various faith communities here in Canada, and around the world – in churches that are really making a difference – they are more passionate about building the kingdom of God worldwide than they are about their own little piece of real estate.

The shift from the church being at the center to the kingdom of God at the center is the theological and philosophical underpinning of the move from an internal to an external focus.

Yes, I still believe the local church is the hope of the world. And yes, I still believe the local church is where the action is. But we have to be a *kingdom-focused local church with a heart for the world!*

### **2. From Destination to Connector**

When people travel to an airport, the airport is not their final destination. An airport is a place of connection. Its job is to help people get somewhere else.

When the church thinks it is the destination, then people get confused. The destination is not the church – it's not this building.

The destination is life. The destination is Abundant Life (John 10:10) that is lived out day to day with our loved ones, friends, and coworkers. The destination is life which is lived out in the home, in the neighbourhood, and in the world.

The church ought to be a connector, linking people to the kingdom life that God has prepared for us.

### **3. From Proclamation to Demonstration**

The modern church has assumed that the greatest need is to proclaim truth by preaching the Word of God. *Just preach the word! Without apology and without compromise. Just preach the Word!*

The largest churches in North America are churches that have brilliant, witty, passionate preachers who proclaim God's Word fearlessly.

And I believe that is important. Don't get me wrong. I think it's critical. That's why I spend so much time preparing and preaching biblical sermons. I *have* to preach the Word! I am compelled by God's Spirit to preach!

But the primary reason I give myself to this task is to motivate us and inspire us to demonstrate the love of God and the grace of God where we live and where we work and where we go to school!

The goal is not for people to say, "Wow! That guy can really preach!" The ultimate goal of anointed preaching and teaching in this church has to be life transformation on every level – a demonstration of God's love to the world.

### **4. From Worship Services to Service as Worship**

Worship in many churches has become just another program offered to consumer-driven church people. But we have got to move beyond worship services to service as worship; learning how to practice the presence of God by serving others...

But one of the most fundamental changes that simply has to take place in our lives in the year ahead – the change that most certainly affects all of the other changes I've been talking about this morning is the shift...

### **5. From Blessed to Blessing**

I believe that one of the primary functions of the church of Jesus Christ is to bless the world! Whenever and wherever we can bless others, I believe we reveal the heart of God to the world.

To understand what it means to be the people of God, we need to go all the way back to where the story got started.

Turn with me in your Bible to Genesis 12. It's in this chapter, in Genesis 12, where God makes a deal with Abraham and with his descendents. In that God-initiated covenant, God said to Abram,

Genesis 12:1-3 NIV

The LORD had said to Abram, "Leave your country, your people and your father's household and go to the land I will show you.

"I will make you into a great nation  
and I will bless you;  
I will make your name great,  
and you will be a blessing.

I will bless those who bless you,  
and whoever curses you I will curse;  
and all peoples on earth  
will be blessed through you."

The whole point of God's blessing to Abraham was this external focus: "I'm going to bless you, so you can be a blessing to everybody else." They don't have to be members of your family or your church or even your culture. *All peoples on earth* will be blessed through you, Abraham.

The reach of this blessing is unlimited.  
The nature of this blessing is unqualified.

I will bless you!  
And you will be a blessing!

And all peoples on earth,  
Will be blessed through you!

God blessed Abraham, and then Abraham became a blessing to others. I believe the same shift needs to take place in our lives and in our church. From blessed to blessing! We need to make that shift.

About a year ago I heard Reggie McNeal talk about what he called his "blessing strategy" and it really stirred something in me. He spoke about the Father heart of God, and how the Father is so eager to bless people right where they are so they can come to know the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.

So for the past few months I've been experimenting. I've been blessing people in the name of God. And you can't even begin to imagine what happens when I do that.

For example, I was at Applebee's with a friend one day for lunch. The waiter was very friendly and kind, and she seemed quite happy with her life. When she came to deliver the bill, I said, "May I ask you a question? If I was going to pray for God's blessing in your life today, what would you like me to pray for?" And immediately her eyes locked on to mine. She looked at me, and just shook her head back and forth. Then she choked out the words, "My husband. Please just pray for my husband. He really needs help right now..."

And so, when she left us, my friend and I prayed for her and her husband...

Another time I'm standing in line at Remark Foods with my bowl of takeout soup in hand. The lady in front of me is tearing a strip off the cashier, like there is just no grace at all to be had.

And the Lord said "bless her."

So, now it's my turn, and I said to the cashier, "I'm really sorry."

"Why are you sorry?"

"Well, I'm just really sorry that person treated you like that. You don't deserve it."

The cashier took my money for the soup, cashed me out, and said thank you.

"You're welcome... Now, if I was going to pray for God to bless you, how would you like me to pray?"

Another time, Patty and I were having a bite to eat at the Penalty Box restaurant. But this precious young lady who waited on us kept coming back to our table over and over again. She was so sweet and so friendly...

Of course Patty strikes up a conversation with her, and we find out her name is Katie. She and her brother, who lived together, were going to have their friends over and sing some Christmas carols...just like Grandma used to do when Grandmas was still alive. (And we could see the pain starting to bubble to the surface as she spoke those words.) She was missing grandma, who, we found out, used to take her to church at Christmas.

So, when I asked Katie about God's blessing in her life and how Patty and I could pray for her, tears welled up in her beautiful blue eyes.

She asked us to pray that she would become a better person. And she peeled back a few layers in her life, and we could feel her disappointment with the way things are.

Later, Patty and I held hands across the table and we prayed for blessing.

Remember the promise?

"I will bless you;  
and you will be a blessing.

I will bless those who bless you,  
and all peoples on earth  
will be blessed through you."

I think we ought to be known as people of blessing. Don't you?

"I will bless you;  
and you will be a blessing."

What an honor it would be, if by the end of 2010, people started to say, "You go to Heritage Park Church? That's the blessing church isn't it? Isn't that the church of blessing? Aren't those people the blessing people?"

Too many people just come to church to get blessed. They get satisfied with the blessing. They got blessed at church. They got blessed at their LIFE group. They got blessed at the Bible Study. They got blessed singing Christmas carols.

Folks if we're going to impact the world, we need to shift the focus from getting blessed to giving blessing.

"I will bless you;  
and you will be a blessing."

God blesses us so we can bless others! So let's get out there and be a blessing. Windsor needs more people like us who can become people of blessing.

To help us do that, and to help us launch the New Year with gusto, I have revised the Vision Accord that we first introduced five years ago.

You should have received a copy of the Vision Accord when you came in. The ushers would have handed you this bookmark with the Vision Accord printed on it.

In a moment I'm going to ask you to stand with me and recite this out loud, and then we need to challenge each other to live out this accord in the year ahead.

### **Vision Accord 2010**

Today I am stepping across the line. I'm tired of waffling and I'm finished with wavering, I've made my choice, the verdict is in, and my decision is irrevocable. I'm going God's way. There's no turning back now!

I will live the rest of my life serving God's purposes with God's people for God's glory. I will use my life to celebrate his presence, cultivate his character, participate in his family, demonstrate his love, and communicate his Word.

I will seek to bless others more than I seek to be blessed myself.

Since my past has been forgiven, and I have a purpose for living, and a home waiting in heaven, I refuse to waste any more time or energy on shallow living, petty thinking, trivial talking, thoughtless doing, useless regretting, hurtful resenting or faithless worrying.

Instead I will magnify God, grow to maturity, serve in ministry, and exercise my spiritual gifts in my church and in my community.

Because this life is preparation for the next, I will value worship over wealth, "we" over "me", character over comfort, service over status, and people over possessions.

I know what matters most and I'll give it all I've got. I'll do the best I can with what I have for Jesus Christ today.

I won't be captivated by culture, manipulated by critics, motivated by praise, frustrated by problems, debilitated by temptation, or intimidated by the devil.

I'll keep running the race with my eyes on the goal. When times get tough and I get tired, I won't back up, back off, back down, back out or backslide. I'll just keep moving forward by God's grace.

I'm Spirit-led, purpose driven and Christ-focused so I cannot be bought, I will not be compromised, and I shall not quit until I finish the race.

I will be gracious to everyone, grateful for everyday, and generous with everything that God entrusts to me.

I believe in the vision of this church, and whatever God asks me to do, my answer in advance is yes!

Wherever he leads and whatever the cost, I'm ready! Anytime. Anywhere. Anyway. Whatever it takes Lord!

I want to be used by you to build your kingdom. On the last day I want to hear you say, "Well done thou good and faithful servant! Come on in, and let the party begin!"