

The Message

Note: No sermon is quite the same when you read it. You miss the inflections, the understanding that you gain in the hearing. Nevertheless, the words are shared with you here.

Date: July 25, 2010

Scripture: Selections from Ephesians 4

Speaker: Ray Hughes

THE BODY

[Before the sermon begins, a video is shown. In the black-and-white video, various children are seen singing the following:

_____ loves me. This I know
Cause the _____ tells me so...
Yes, _____ loves me...
The _____ tells me so.

Then, a child says, “Who loves me?” The video changes from black-and-white to color, and the screen answers the child’s question—Jesus loves you.]

Over the next several months, we want to highlight the various ministries that Foundry supports and about which you might not know. Our congregation supports Gideon’s International, The American Bible Society, and Wycliffe Bible Translators, organizations that provide Bibles for people all over the world.

When I think about Gideon’s, I think about the Bible left in a hotel/motel room. However, the Gideon ministry is much broader than that. This organization supplies Bibles to people all around the world. You might think that’s odd because you can just go to the internet and get the Bible in different languages and even in different English translations. We think the Bible is very accessible. Unfortunately, the reality is very different. 350 million people do not even have the Bible translated into their language. This fact is part of the reason that drives people such as Mickey Culpepper, a church member who works with the Gideon organization, to get the Bible in all people’s hands.

This morning we want to discover how that kind of vision is birthed in our hearts so that we live for something more than ourselves. God’s vision for us, the church and our individual lives is that we grow and become more Christ-like.

In Ephesians 4, Paul writes about God’s vision for your life and for our church. Because of that vision God gave me, I’m here as part of Foundry—to be a part of a new faith community that would reach people for Jesus Christ and transform people into faithful servants of Jesus Christ.

What amazes me in my journey to Foundry is that first conversation that I had with Pastor Mike. Mike and I went to seminary together. Actually, I knew Pastor Adam Knight who was here before I came. All three of us were friends at seminary. One day Pastor Mike called me and said, "We're looking for an associate pastor who would work with our men's ministries. Godfrey likes sports and we thought about you. Are you interested?"

I answered, "I'm honored that you would think about me. But I have heard God calling me to plant churches in new communities." God had put on my heart the vision of a church community that would reach people for Christ. Mike paused and replied, "That's kind of interesting...because God has been working with us along the same lines about starting a new campus." God had put a vision in my heart and the pastoral staff that was already here at Foundry. Now, we see the fruit of that vision in our second campus.

Everything starts with a vision that God puts in our heart—that's what gives us clarity and drive to accomplish God's purpose. However, many of us just float through life. We're on "cruise control" in our spiritual life and we don't really think about God. When we each individually sit down and ask God, "What is your vision for my life," God changes things for us. I don't think any of us want to get to the end of our lives and not be sure if we accomplished what God wanted us to do. At the end of the day, don't we want God to say, "Well done, good and faithful servant. You have accomplished what I wanted for your life."

God has given Paul a picture of what the church is supposed to resemble. In his letter to the Jewish and Gentile people of the Ephesian church, Paul describes how they are to grow and mature in their faith. So, why does God's vision for us matter? In Ephesians 4:1, Paul urges us "to live a life worthy of the calling you have received." When we become Christians, God saves us for a purpose so that we can accomplish his good works, his vision, and his mission. When we start to understand God's purpose for us, the church can accomplish amazing things.

The body of Christ, the Church, represents God on earth. In chapter two of this epistle, Paul writes: "In him (Christ) you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit" (22). When we understand to what God has called us, that comprehension motivates us as a church. When we understand that we are God's representatives in this world, we can show a lost world that He seeks relationships with them. Our belief in Christ is not something small; it's something large that has eternal consequences not just for us but the entire world.

Recently, I heard a story about three men at a worksite. A passerby asked them, "What are you doing?" The first man replied, "I'm breaking up stones." The second one responds, "I'm making a living." The third one says, "I am building a cathedral." Vision makes all the difference. When we understand God's vision, it motivates us to live differently.

God's vision also gives us clarity. We all understand that there is a battle for our time. We only have so many resources. In business, you want to have a vision and not waste your time and resources and energy in other directions. It's the same in our spiritual life. If you understand God's vision for your life, you will begin to align your values and everything in your life toward that picture that God paints for you. God will do the same thing for us as at church. If we paint a picture of what God calls us to do collectively, we can all play a part individually to achieve that vision. God's vision motivates us and gives us clarity.

In addition, God's vision gives us courage. We can be motivated, but until we have the courage within us, it's easy for us to know what we should be doing—but not do it. Sometimes, it's scary to do God's will. He calls us to take risks. He calls us to risk our reputations. What he calls us to do is sometimes in direction opposition to what the world values. God calls us to sacrifice for someone else. He calls us to think of other people. When God's vision is clear, none of that really matters.

As a teenager, I was surrounded by peer pressure. I was pulled in many directions. I remember thinking that God was important, but living my faith was really tough. I compromised on some things because of that pressure. Nevertheless, as I grew in my faith and God gave me his vision for my life, I started to make decisions with more courage. General Patton said, "Courage is actually fears that have said their prayers." It's not the absence of fear that makes one courageous. Courage occurs when we lay our fears before God.

If we don't have God's vision, motivation, and clarity, we won't get to the destination to which he has called us. I think all of us want to arrive at the right place. However, the challenge is how to determine God's vision for us. Paul gives us some indication. In chapter four, Paul says that we must first understand who we are. We all have a part to play. "To each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it" (Eph. 4:7). Another word for grace is "gifts." He has given each of us certain abilities, personalities, and talents.

Let me illustrate. I met with Mark Davis, one of our members, who is in charge of our basketball ministry. Mark has a passion for sports. About a year ago, he told me, "I think God wants me to reach men for Christ, but I don't know how to accomplish that."

I asked him, "What do you really love?"

He answered, "Sports."

"Use that to reach men. Why don't you use what you already are?"

Sheryl O'Briant is another example. A couple of years ago, a representative from IJM (International Justice Mission) made a presentation here. IJM fights injustice around the world, specifically in countries where human trafficking and slavery take place. Upon hearing that presentation, Sheryl, a lawyer, realized God's

vision for her. Gary Haugen, the founder of IJM, was a lawyer who realized that he could use his gifts to fight injustice. After IJM lawyers successfully rescue someone from slavery or prostitution or human trafficking, they then share with that person the story of Christ. Sheryl was captivated by the purpose of IJM. She is now the head of IJM in Texas and speaks to churches and coordinates fundraising banquets for the organization. Sheryl uses what God has given her to do good in the world. Once we understand who we are we can then use those gifts for God.

Many of you know Jack Wright, one of the founders of Foundry. He and his wife DeDe now live in Arlington in a retirement facility. Jack used his gifts to make a difference in our world, in our community, and especially in this congregation. You don't have to become someone you're not. God uses who you are and what your gifts are for him. The first step to understanding our vision is to comprehend who we are.

Secondly, we must know what matters to God. In Luke 15, Jesus gives three parables about things that are lost: a lost coin, lost sheep, and a lost son. Then, he ends the parables by saying, "There will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent" (7). Christ says, those who are far from God are closest to my heart.

Many times the decisions I make do not align with God's heart. I have to ask, "Are the things that I care about, are they the things that God cares about?" It's easy to "play church" and go through the motions. God's calling us to care about people that he cares about. Sometimes that's uncomfortable. But we really won't understand God's vision until we capture his heart.

When we understand who we are and wed it to what God cares about, we start to see his vision for our lives. Andy Stanley, founder of North Point Community Church, said, "The vision of God is born in wrestling with the tension between what is and what could be."

What is it that drives you crazy? What is it that makes you uncomfortable because things are not as they should be? Maybe God has given you that feeling. It's not about the pastors saying, "We're going to start this new ministry." No, God's vision occurs when you come to us and say, "God has called me. I am going to make a difference." That's what happened to Mark Davis, Sheryl O'Briant, Mickey Culpepper, and Jack Wright. They were impassioned by God and they were driven to act.

If you want to determine God's vision for your life, my question is as follows: How concerned are you with the things that matter for God? Maybe it begins with a prayer of repentance where you ask God to make things that are important to him, important to you.

Let us pray.

God, we pray that you will continue to work out these things in our lives that are sometimes not clear. We pray for clarity. We pray that your spirit would guide us. We pray that you will give us courage to know your will and pursue. In Jesus' name, Amen.