

A Worshipping Community on Mission

Various Passages

I'd like to open my message today with a couple of thank you's. First, I would like to thank all of you for your ministry to my family over the last several weeks. Thank you for the gifts, the meals, the encouragement and the love you have shown us. I think it is fair to say we have never felt so cared for and to be honest I am not sure we would have made it through these last few weeks if it would not have been for you. I would love to have my family give you a standing ovation right now, but I think that would be incredibly awkward and my kids would hate me forever, so hopefully my words will suffice.

I'd also like to take a moment to thank the Lord for what He is doing at Harmony Bible Church. It is very exciting to see His Spirit working powerfully in many lives and preparing us for even more in the days ahead. And so before we talk about what the future holds, let's take a moment to thank Him for what He has done and what He is going to do in the days ahead.

Prayer

So, next week we are going to get back to Matthew, but today we are going to take one Sunday to talk about a vision for the future of our church. And before we get into the specifics, let me share a few qualifications.

One, your church leaders are still in the process of discussing and praying over the details of what I am going to share this morning. Today for the most part is going to be the big picture view of where we believe God is leading, with most of the details yet to come.

Second, I want to encourage you to dialogue with us. Feel free to connect with any Elder, Pastor or Deacon and ask questions. We will be more than happy to talk with you about these matters.

Finally, please recognize that this vision is not our vision but God's. I don't say this because I have had a dream or an angel has appeared to me; or any of the other leaders for that matter. I say this because every aspect of this vision comes right from Scripture. You see, our philosophy of ministry at Harmony is very simple. First, we go to God's Word to find out what He wants us to do. Second, we discuss and pray over what the Word says so we might discern how we should obey it. And third, once we know the what and the how, we go out and do it. Got that? Step 1: Find out what God wants us to do. Step 2: Discern how we should do it. Step 3: Go out and do it. Over the last 18 months we have been diligently engaged in steps one and two. And today is the beginning of step 3.

Now, that said, let's do a review of the Biblical basis for our vision. This begins by answering two essential questions. One, what is God doing? And two, what does He want us to do? These are the two most important questions in the world, two questions that we answered back in our Disciple series last fall. And here is what we found.

God is Building His Church

The thing that God is doing today is building His church. Take a look at Matthew 16 with me. Since we are going to be visiting a bunch of passages today, feel free to simply follow along on the screen:

[Jesus said to the disciples], "But who do you say that I am?" Simon Peter replied, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." And Jesus answered him, "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven. And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. (Matthew 16:15-18, ESV)

Now, think about this for a minute. The thing that God is doing today is building His Church. God is not building a denomination. He is not building a parachurch organization. He is not building a missions organization. He is not building a school or a university. He is not building a business. He is not

building a country or a nation. He is not building a political party. What is God building? Answer it for me. He is building His Church. And, oh, by the way, Jesus says there is nothing that can stop Him from doing so, not even hell itself.

Let me just pause for a quick second and ask if you are thankful that you get to be a part of something that cannot fail? Do you know what this means? We have the privilege of being on the winning side for all of history. And we all like a winner, right? That's one of the reasons I am a New York Yankees fan. Twenty-seven World Series Championships, twice as many as anyone else. Baseball season is just getting underway so I had to get that in. Anyways, no matter how much we might lose here in this life, no matter how big the "L" may be on our forehead, if we are part of God's Church we will be a winner for all eternity. And what could be better than that?

We are Called to Make Disciples

So, that is what God is doing. He is building His Church. This of course, naturally leads to another question. Given what God is doing, what does He want us to do? Well the answer to that is found in Matthew 28. Following His death and resurrection, Jesus gives His disciples this command right before He ascends back to heaven:

Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age." (Matthew 28:19-20, ESV)

God has called us to make disciples. If you are a follower of Jesus, if you call yourself a Christian, if you claim the name of Christ, this is what your Savior has called you to. Let me put it bluntly; if you are a believer, you are either making disciples or you are disobedient. There just isn't any way around it. This is the mission Jesus gave His followers 2,000 years ago. If you are here today and you bear the name of Jesus Christ, this mission is for you. There are no exceptions.

I'd like to take a moment to remind us of how critical this is. To do so I will quote Dallas Willard:

*The greatest issue facing the world today with all its heartbreaking needs is whether those who by profession or culture are identified as Christians, if they will become disciples, students, apprentices, practitioners of Jesus Christ, steadily learning from Him how to live the life of the kingdom of heaven into every corner of human existence. Will they break out of the churches to be His church, to be His mighty force for good on earth, drawing the churches after them toward the eternal purposes of God and on its own scale, there is no greater issue facing the individual human being, Christian or not.*¹

And to be honest, this is what our vision is all about. It is about our church becoming a group of people who are disciples and who make disciples so that the eternal purposes of God are accomplished both here in SE Iowa and around the world.

Now, we are going to get more specific about how we will accomplish this in a moment, but before we do, there is one more thing we need to carefully review. If we are going to be disciples and make disciples, we need to be clear about exactly what a disciple is. And so here once again is the definition we developed last fall. We can say that:

*A disciple is someone who **worships** Christ in all of life, lives in **community** with other disciples, and lives on **mission** to make more disciples.*

As you can see, there are three important terms in this definition: worship, community, and mission. Let's take a moment to discuss each of these.

¹ Willard, Dallas (2006). *The Great Omission: Reclaiming Jesus's Essential Teachings on Discipleship*, HarperOne.

A Disciple Worships Christ in All of Life

First, a disciple worships Christ in all of life. We see this in numerous passages in Scripture, but the clearest is 1 Corinthians 10:31:

So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.

A disciple is someone who recognizes they were created and redeemed for God's glory, and therefore they seek to honor and please Him in everything they do. Disciples don't compartmentalize their lives and give God a small slice of it. No, they recognize everything they have and everything they are is God's, and therefore they make Him the very center of their lives. So, a disciple worships Christ in all of life.

A Disciple Lives in Community With Other Disciples

Second, a disciple lives in community with other disciples. A key passage here is Hebrews 10:24-25:

And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.

A disciple recognizes they are called to follow Jesus with others. They understand that there are no Lone Ranger Christians. Instead, they regularly and actively engage with other believers to stir one another up to love and good works. This is a repeated theme over and over again in the New Testament.

So, a disciple lives in community with other disciples.

A Disciple Lives on Mission to Make More Disciples

Finally, a disciple lives on mission to make more disciples. Now, once again there are many places that we could go for this one, but I will simply point

you to John 20:21, which is the Apostle John's version of the Great Commission. In this passage Jesus instructs his disciples:

As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you.

Please listen here. It's absolutely critical for us to get this. Disciples understand and act upon the fact that they have been sent by Jesus. To be a disciple means to have been sent to make other disciples. Or as Charles Spurgeon put it:

Every Christian is a missionary or an imposter.

And I have to tell you that at the end of the day the accomplishment of our vision will largely come down to how obedient we are to John 20:21. Honestly, that is what it is going to come down to. Jesus has sent us, will we go? Will we respond as the prophet Isaiah did? Note what Isaiah 6:8 says:

And I heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?" Then I said, "Here I am! Send me." (Isaiah 6:8 ESV)

Make no mistake Harmony. Today the triune God is asking the same question He asked Isaiah 3,000 years ago. Who should He send? Who will go for Him? What will our response be? I hope it will be, "here we are, send us!"

A Worshipping Community on Mission

So, in summary, here is a simple way to express God's vision for our church. We can say that He desires Harmony to be *a worshipping community on mission*. When you consider what kind of church we are, think *worshipping community on mission*. When people in the community ask what kind of church you go to, respond, "we are a worshipping community on mission." When I run into you at Wal-Mart and ask you what kind of church we are, what should you say? "We are a worshipping community on mission."

So, there is the explanation of the Biblical basis for our vision. Let's now transition and talk about how God is calling us to pursue this vision. And I will do so by sharing five biblical priorities of a worshiping community on mission.

Five Biblical Priorities of a Worshiping Community on Mission

Priority 1: Corporate Worship

Priority number one is corporate worship and it can be defined in this way:

Corporate worship is the gathering of the church to respond to who God is and what He has done through preaching, singing, giving, and serving.

Essentially, corporate worship is what we do when we gather as a Body on Sunday mornings. It's what we are doing right now. We have gathered today to worship the Lord through preaching, singing, giving, and serving. And there is a reason that this priority comes first. In many ways, corporate worship is the engine that makes everything else go, so to speak. All of the other four priorities are important, but without the engine of corporate worship, the church will go nowhere.

We also need to understand that the very center of corporate worship is the preaching of the gospel. Let me show you why this is the case from 1 Corinthians 1.

For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. For it is written, I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart." Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe. For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly

to Gentiles, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.

This passage tells us we make disciples by preaching the gospel. You see, there are a lot of things that we might do to make disciples, and there are a lot of things we should do in order to make disciples, but the one thing we have to do if we are going to make disciples is preach the gospel. No gospel, no disciples. Now, every single one of us can and should preach the gospel, but my point here is that gospel preaching must begin and spring forth from this pulpit right here. Without the preaching of the gospel in the gatherings of our church, everything else will ultimately fall apart. And so this morning, as we discuss a vision for the future, your leaders want to affirm that preaching the gospel will continue to be the number one priority for Harmony as it has been since the day this church was founded. Can anyone say amen to that? So, priority 1 is corporate worship, centered around the preaching of the gospel.

Priority 2: Corporate Disciplemaking

Priority Number 2 is corporate disciplemaking. By this I mean the focus of every ministry at Harmony is to make disciples. Now, this might seem like a no-brainer, but you need to recognize there is a tendency in churches for the various ministries to function as silos and pretty much do their own thing. However, here at Harmony we desire our ministries to work together in discipling people of all ages. This means that the focus of our children's ministry is to make disciples. And the focus of our teen ministry is to make disciples. And the focus of our men's and women's ministries is to make disciples. What's more, we intend for all of our ministries to work together to promote disciplemaking within our families as well as from one generation to the next. In particular, we desire to come alongside parents to help them disciple their children. Now, there is a lot more that needs to be said about this, but I need to save it for another time.

However, I do want to share two action steps under this priority, one that is underway and one that we hope to implement in the weeks ahead.

First, it is clear from Scripture that in order for a church to make disciples, the leaders must lead the way by shepherding the flock. Let me take you quickly to another passage we studied in our Disciple series, Hebrews 13:17.

Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you.

God has ordained certain men to serve as leaders in the church, with the express purpose of watching over His flock. And I have to tell you that your leaders take this passage very seriously. We know that one day we are going to stand before the Lord and give an account for how we have shepherded those under our care. So in response to this, over the past several months our elders and deacons have begun to intentionally engage Harmony's members to care for and assist them in being disciples and making disciples. And so I would like to say to those of you who are not members, please consider becoming a member so we know you desire to be shepherded by our leaders. And if you are already a member, please allow us to do so.

Second, as we have studied, prayed, and discussed this matter of discipling, it has become clear that due to the critical nature of this issue, we need to hire a Pastor of Discipleship. I am thrilled to announce to you that we believe God has led us to the perfect man for this position, and he will be coming in two weeks from today to interview. His name is Don Helton, and you may remember that he preached here back in early November. Don is currently the Youth Pastor at College Park Church in Indianapolis, Indiana and is married with two children. In next week's handout we will share more information about the position as well as some biographical information on Don. And then on April 21 he will preach and we will hold a Q & A time with him after our morning service.

So, priority Number 2 is corporate discipling.

Priority 3: Global Disciplemaking

Priority Number 3 of a worshipping community on mission is Global Disciplemaking. Let me share with you an enlightening passage of Scripture from Matthew 24. In verse 14, Jesus gives what might be called a prequel to the Great Commission. He tells His disciples this:

And this gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.

Now, there is a great deal of debate about this passage, but I take Jesus on face value, which means that until the gospel has been preached to all the nations of the world, He isn't coming back. And we have talked about this before, but regardless of how you measure it, there are lots of nations, or people groups, who have still yet to hear. Two thousand years after the church was given the Great Commission, there are still an estimated 2 billion people that need to be reached with the gospel.

And since this is the case, we believe that God is calling us to prioritize Global Disciplemaking. Actually, it might be better to say re-prioritize. Global Disciplemaking has been a strength of Harmony in the past, and it is time that it becomes a strength again. Therefore, in the days ahead we are going to focus upon partnering with indigenous leadership and mobilizing our body for short and long term fieldwork in unreached areas of the world.

Once again, we will share more details on this in the days ahead, but in short I will tell you that we believe God is calling us to develop long-lasting partnerships with Christian leaders in unreached areas as well as sending out as many people possible on short-term trips and as mid to long-term field staff.

So, priority Number 3 is Global Disciplemaking.

Priority 4: Community Disciplemaking

This leads to priority Number 4, which is Community Disciplemaking.

In Acts 1:8, Jesus tells His disciples this minutes before He ascends to heaven:

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.

The gist of this passage is that we are called to make disciples wherever we are at. While the Biblical priority is to reach the nations with the gospel, the fact of the matter is that many of us will never travel cross-culturally. However, we are called to be a witness wherever we go, or perhaps better said, wherever we are at. For most of us this means right here in SE Iowa. And I have said this over and over again, and frankly I am going to continue to say it because this really is the bottom line. While we might debate whether God is calling us to go to Papua New Guinea and join the Martins in reaching the Akolets, there is no debating whether God has called us to reach our neighbors, our co-workers, and our families here in SE Iowa.

And as another reminder from our Disciple Series, we are going to go about making disciples in our community both in Word and deed. This means we are going to strive to share the gospel with our mouths *and* live in light of the gospel by our deeds. It means that we are going to talk to people about Jesus *and* show them what it looks like when Jesus comes in and invades someone's life. It means that we are going to study the Bible with people *and* attempt to meet their physical, emotional, and social needs. It means we are going to rescue women and children in crisis, *and* then disciple them. This is how we are going to go about community disciplemaking.

Priority 5: Church Multiplication

Now, at this point you may recognize these first four priorities aren't really new. All four of them are things Harmony has been doing to various degrees since its inception some 60 years ago. However, priority 5 is going to be completely new. Not only at Harmony, but also in all of SE Iowa as far as we can tell. Are you ready for this? Well here it is: we believe God is calling us to become involved in church multiplication.

Now, I would ask you to listen carefully here so that I can explain the what, the why and the how of church multiplication.

By church multiplication, we are referring to the expansion of the Church through planting, re-planting, merging, partnering, and/or multi-sites.

Let's take a moment to walk through this definition. You will note that the word *Church* is capitalized, which means we are talking about the Church universal, not Harmony specifically. Please understand this means we believe the Lord is leading us to be involved in focusing on the growth of the Church outside of this specific geographic location. Therefore our focus will not be upon growing the Harmony name or brand, so to speak, but rather upon raising up new churches and/or church sites beyond this location.

You will also note from the definition that this multiplication could potentially happen in a variety of ways. We might plant brand new churches. We might re-plant or help to re-plant a church that is dead or dying. We might merge with an existing congregation that needs assistance in ministering to their community. We might also start what is known as a multi-site, whereby we use technology to hold services in another location.

Now, you might be thinking, well, that is all well and good, but why? I mean, don't we have enough space here? Can't we just add another service? And aren't there plenty of churches in SE Iowa already? Won't we

be in competition with them? And these are all good questions, so let me try to respond and give a few reasons why we believe God is calling us to do this.

One, we believe that church multiplication is actually not so much of a priority of its own as it is a natural result of priorities 1-4. By this I mean that the natural result of making disciples is the formation of churches. In fact, we can rightfully say Jesus' command to make disciples is a command to multiply churches. The first disciples certainly took it to mean that. The disciples heard Jesus' command to make disciples and as a result they went out and planted churches. Consider Paul for just a second. If we were to study Paul's method for spreading the gospel, we would find that it was essentially to go to a city, preach the gospel, and when people responded, to plant a church. And he did this over and over again. And if we are going to make disciples all over SE Iowa, those disciples are going to need churches to go to.

Two, research shows that new churches are much more effective at reaching unbelievers than established churches. New churches have been shown to gain 60-80% of their members from the unchurched, compared to only 10-20% for established churches like ours. This means that 80-90% of new members in established churches like Harmony come from other churches. Here is the plain fact of the matter. Over the last year or so Harmony has experienced an approximately 30% increase in our Sunday morning attendance. And this is good and we are thankful for it. However, most of that increase comes from people who were attending other churches or who had attended Harmony in the past. Let me say, if you are included in this we are very thankful you are here. However, this means that while Harmony is growing, the overall Church in SE Iowa is not. In fact, it is going the other way. And ultimately at the end of day what we really want to see is the Church expanding and growing through new people coming to Christ. And study after study has shown that the very best way to see this happen is by multiplying new churches. Let me also say this. At the end of the day our success as a church will not be determined by how many people attend here. Rather, it will be determined by how faithfully we have

obeyed Jesus' command to make disciples. And the natural result of making disciples is the multiplication of churches.

Now, we recognize one immediate objection is that SE Iowa already has enough churches, and if we multiply churches we will be in competition with those that already exist. The main problems with this line of thinking are one, we aren't in competition, we are on the same team, and two, as we sit here today only about 20% of our community is attending church. This means that somewhere around 80,000 people in SE Iowa are not a part of a church this morning. So, I am pretty sure there are more than enough people to reach that even 50 or 100 more churches shouldn't have to worry about "competing" for them.

The third and final reason we believe the Lord is calling us to multiply churches has to do with our context. I don't know if you realize this or not, but Harmony is a very unique church. I have travelled all across the country visiting churches, from Florida to Texas to California and all around the Midwest. And guess, what? You don't find churches this large in the middle of a cornfield. You just don't. I remember driving here for the first time back in August of 2011. When we pulled up to the facility I kind of just looked at Eva and said, "How did this get here?" To be honest, this is really an amazing work of God. However, the flipside is that most of you drive 15 plus miles to get here. In fact, here is an amazing statistic. Approximately 70% of you drove 15 or more miles to get here this morning. And I think for the most part you are happy to do so. However, how about those neighbors you are trying to reach? What about your co-workers? How about your family members? The truth of the matter is that the unchurched are normally much more willing to visit a church down the street than they are in another community miles from where they live. So get this. It is clear that God has tremendously blessed Harmony Bible Church. He has given us an abundance of resources, not only financial resources, but people resources as well. And your leaders believe that now is the time for us to begin to share those resources with the communities around us. For the past 60 years Harmony has been a place where people have come to hear the Word preached and grow in their faith. And we believe that God wants to see that

continue. But we also believe that He is moving us to take some of those who have come and grown and send them out to multiply churches all over SE Iowa.

Now, let me just say something about the how. To be honest, we are not exactly sure how God would have us do this right now. We are still in the process of discussing how, when, and where this should happen. There are many things to consider as well as many decisions to be made. And so we would like to ask you for one thing today. We would ask you to pray. In fact, that is the main application point for today. Your leaders are calling the church to prayer as we seek the Lord's direction in this matter. It would be our desire that over the next several months He would allow us to develop a plan for how this could happen and, in the near future, to share that plan with you. So, pray that God will give us wisdom to determine His leading. Pray that He will make it clear where and when He wants us to multiply. Pray that He will give us direction in regards to the approach He wants us to take. And pray that He will provide the resources we need, both human and financial.

Now, in just a moment one of our Elders, Mike Walker, is going to come and lead us in a time of corporate prayer over these matters. But before he does, I want to give a final reason we believe God is calling us to this. And it all has to do with what we celebrated last weekend. You see, we do what we do because Christ did what He did. And what did He do? He took on flesh, stepped into this mess of a world, died on a cross for our sins, and then three days later rose again. And He did it so we could be free from our sin and bondage and hopelessness and live with Him forever. Not only for us here in this room today, but for everyone who believes in Him. And therefore, we go and make disciples everywhere we can so that those who don't know Him may enjoy the same blessings that we have received. We do what we do because He did what He did. Mike, please come and lead us in prayer.

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