



VISION
SUNDAY 2024

Sermon Growth Guide

September 8, 2024
A Disciple-Making Outpost



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Vision Sunday - A Disciple-Making Outpost

Matthew 28:16-20

Key Verse: Matthew 28:19-20

“Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”

Foundations

Our vision to share the light and life of Jesus centers on our strong culture of making disciples. Jesus gives us our commission in Matthew 28: “Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.” These three things—going, baptizing, teaching—don’t all happen at once. This is a lot of different activity. How do we coordinate our efforts?

This Vision Sunday, we are introducing the First Pres Compass. The First Pres Compass is a new design that captures, holds, and communicates our mission, vision, and values.

Our Growth Guide this week centers on wise discussion and activation around Pastor Tim’s Vision Sunday address. Be sure to catch that first (it is available online if you missed it) and have a copy of the First Pres Compass available as we dive in together this week. As always, spend time catching up with one another—joys and sorrows, hopes and dreams. Pray for one another. Pray that you understand this Scripture better and that the Holy Spirit empowers you to put it into practice as a result of gathering together this week.

Understanding God’s Word

Together, read Matthew 28:16-20. What is Jesus saying? What questions remain? What do you hear? Does anything stand out as new to you in this passage?

Applying God’s Word

Every church receives The Great Commission (Matthew 28:16-20) from Jesus and must contextualize it to their time and place. Articulate in your own words how Pastor Tim has led us in understanding the First Pres method of carrying out The Great Commission?

Witnessing God’s Word

Who made a difference in your life in helping you love Jesus? What do you remember about how they lived? How do you envision yourself sharing the Light + Life of Jesus in the upcoming months and year?

Welcome to Vision Sunday. Each year we come into the kitchen and talk about who we are, what we are trying to do, and where we think the Lord is taking us next, and I have some exciting things to share. I was out at Taylor University with a group of pastors and the President there, Michael Lindsay, said, you know, this is a difficult time to lead. 1929, had a stock market crash, 1918 Spanish Flu, the 1960's had racial unrest. We have had all three! Financial, social and pandemic crises! It has been a hard time to lead a 1st grade soccer team, let alone a university, or business, or church. So, how are we doing?

We have seen some challenges, but we are still strong by God's grace. When I tell my fellow pastors we are about where we were six years ago and haven't quite gotten back up to pre-COVID attendance, what I hear back is most often, "You're where you were six years ago? You're doing great! Most churches are taking it on the chin." But I remember a talk John Ortberg gave when we started a new denomination, he said, the mission of the church is not just to die less quickly. We have been sent to shake the gates of hell, to rob eternal darkness of souls and rescue the lost for Christ. I am not satisfied with declining less quickly. We have a mission. A great commission. The minute we stop trying to reach the lost for Christ, we might as well hang a sign outside that says "Museum: Artifacts of Ancient History." Let's be disciple makers.

Today we renew our commitment to the mission. Jesus made it very clear. In between the time I go up there and come back here, this is what you are to be about. Matthew 28:16-20, "Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. Then Jesus came to them and said, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.'"

Go and make disciples. Go and be disciple makers. Be a Disciple-Making Outpost. That's very clear. It begins with worship, as we see in verse 17. "When they saw him, some worshiped him." What did that look like? No choir, no organ, no praise band, nobody named Chris! What did worship look like when they were standing before Him face to face? It's a good reminder; the worship we perform in here is a training ground, training us for hearts of worship before the Lord all day every day. "But some doubted." Some were in a full

posture of worship right there in front of Jesus, others had eyes darting around, their hearts were uncertain. You don't have to have all your doubts satisfied before you step toward Jesus. Just step. It's okay that there are some doubts. The Christian life is lived on faith, not mathematical certainty.

Then Jesus said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me." There is no power over the power of Jesus; there is no government over the government of Jesus; Jesus is over all. So, "Therefore, go." This verse has one action verb and three participles. The main verb of the sentence, the command Jesus gives, is to "make disciples." The other verbs in the sentence are participles. Make disciples by going, baptizing and teaching. We go. We don't just wait for people to come to us, we take the Gospel out, we convey the good news outward, we shed light, demonstrate life, outward. We baptize. But you don't just grab people and throw water on them. This means we help people move from outside the faith to inside, from non-belief to belief, and baptism is the door they walk through into Christian community, into the body of Christ. We teach. Discipleship is learning a new pattern of life, a new way of thinking, a new perspective and fresh set of spectacles through which to see and understand all of life. That takes learning and training and practicing. "And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age." Jesus is right here with us. In fact, it is His mission more than it is our mission. We get to be a part of it. And He never leaves us alone.

It doesn't all happen at once, these three things. Going. Baptizing. Teaching. This is a lot of different activity. How do we coordinate our efforts? It takes a commitment of time to walk with a non-believer into faith in Christ. Our friend Don Everts wrote a book called *I Once Was Lost*, about the possibility of moving from non-belief to belief in Christ in our times. What he found in InterVarsity Campus Ministry is that it takes time. We like to think of conversion as an immediate event, one night at camp, one Sunday service, but most come to Christ on a journey of many steps crossing many thresholds. Don identifies five. First, a non-believer must Trust a Christian. One of his students said, "I knew you were a god-guy, and I wasn't the least bit interested in anything that came out of your mouth." People stop listening. You need to build trust; they need to cross the trust threshold, to be a friend. Then comes Curiosity, then Opening Up to Life-Change, then Seeking After God, and only then Accepting Christ and entering the Kingdom. We know it doesn't all happen at once. We see that here. A friend said, "She broke the seal!" "What do you mean?" "She finally went upstairs!" Someone who attends here a lot but never penetrated

that invisible ceiling of going up the elevator to where BaseCamp (young adults) happens.

If it takes more than a minute, we need a process. To be obedient to Christ's command to be disciple makers, we need a way to do it. We have talked about the Discipleship Pathway. This was one of the first things we started to talk about when I arrived. We arrange our energies to move people forward, not just gather them up. I'd rather see ten people take a step forward toward Jesus than see 1,000 gather for an event that leaves them all sitting right where they were in the first place. This is about spiritual movement, dynamism, growth, change, transformation. We still need that.

But, let me back up. Over the last seven years, we have been clarifying our identity. A new logo created a new "who". We see and know each other. We celebrate our community and being a part of it together. Don't you get excited when you see a magnet on a car? I do. We clarified a mission statement was a way of strategically pushing into our community. It doesn't say anything about what I get from being part of First Pres; it is intentionally, totally, outward focused. Being part of this church is about being Christ's witnesses to this city, and proving to this city that the church is a loving friend, for them, not against them (just like God was for us even when we were his enemies). A fuller statement of mission is "We exist to see lives transformed in the power of Christ, shaping believers into Christian disciples who proclaim the LIGHT of the Gospel and demonstrate the LIFE of Jesus to our CITY, bringing many to saving faith and the whole world to glorify God." One day the whole world will glorify God and we will look back and see how what we were doing here in our little corner changed the world.

Then we resolved on a set of seven values unveiled on Vision Sunday in January 2020. The First Pres Way: Seven Values in Pursuit of Jesus. Live for God. Worship trains our hearts to beat for God. Do you worship with passion and joy every week? Hold Fast. Stay founded on Scripture and centered on Christ, who holds you steady. Are your priorities consistent with Scripture? Keep Growing. Learn to grow, and when your life changes give God the credit. Are you learning and living faith with others? Love Like Jesus. Live for others, even when it takes sacrifice. Where are you serving? Share Good News. Do all it takes to reach those who do not know Christ. Are you invested in someone else knowing Jesus? Deploy Generosity. Invest who you are and what you have in what God wants to do. Where are you giving? Make Beauty. Creativity reflects the goodness of God our Maker. Where do your spiritual gifts do good? These values define our culture. This

is the way we do what we do. So, what do we have? We have an identity, a who. We have a mission, a what. We have a set of values, a way. We have a discipleship pathway, a how. Is there any way for all of this to come together? When you know who you are, what you are supposed to be doing, the way to go about it, and how to act while you are doing it, it's time to move out. A nice thing to have in your hand when you move out is a compass. So we've put it all together like this: What is your church about? In one image, you could explain it. On one card, you could tell the story of what we are trying to do in this world. When people walk into a church, they want to know three things: Who are you? What are you doing in the world? And how could I be a part of it? This will help. The Discipleship Pathway has become a Discipleship Cycle, where mature Christians are Disciple Makers pushing back into the Community. On the face of it are our values. Life for God. Hold Fast. Keep Growing. Love Like Jesus. Share Good News. Deploy Generosity. Make Beauty. It all spins around this point in the middle: sharing the light and life of Jesus. Everything we do is to manifest the glory of Jesus Christ in a hurting and fallen world. Everything to the glory of Christ.

What does this look like when it works? Imagine a young couple with kids here in Colorado Springs. Maybe the military brought them out, maybe another job. They are about five years into marriage and things are just not turning out the way they hoped. They are struggling. The kids don't behave, and they don't agree on parenting techniques. The job isn't all it was cracked up to be and they wonder if they should have moved at all. The marriage is not fulfilling their hopes and dreams. One Saturday night, after the kids are in bed, they have the hard conversation. Is this working anymore? For hours they talk, sick inside. Finally, late into the night, one of them says, "Why don't we try God again? Let's try church. We need a change." They remember those friends who invited them to First Pres. "Let's try that." That's still how it works. The invitation. Show of hands, how many of you remember the person who invited you to First Pres? Last weekend I must have met six people who have just been invited her. "Let's try that," they say. They look online, choose a service, and make a plan. Sunday morning, they drive downtown, find parking, and find their way in, eyes swollen with tears from the night before, kids confused, they come with hope that there is help here for them.

I told that story to the elders at my last church years ago. I'm not kidding, two weeks later I got an email from a young couple who described that exact situation! They came. They found help and welcome. They met the Lord. The ideal case. Here's how it looks. A First Pres friend has

shown them a little of Jesus. The website does the inviting. The Welcome Team is expecting friends like these. The family joins in worship for a while. Then they find that their kids want to go to Kids Min. What will they do? They look for a class to break the glass barrier! They drop into the Incline (young marrieds) or the Hilltop (parents). They get invited to join a Life Group, and they and their family, their kids, are changed forever, spending their days growing closer to Jesus their Savior and only true Help. Soon they are the friend who shows their neighbor how to step closer to Jesus.

This doesn't cover all of us. We are all different, but if we arrange our energies around this target, that will capture most stories. I'm a little older, I might find another Community. I'm a little younger and single, I might go to Basecamp. But we have to have an ideal model, something to pray for, and something frankly to market toward. As we take on new communication strategies, you will see us pointing our efforts toward this imaginary couple. Pray for First Pres to be more and more effective at reaching them. Who will next walk through those doors looking for help from Jesus? Five years ago, I asked you to pray for the next 1,000 people who will be part of First Pres? How do we prepare for them? Be praying for the next 1,000. We can reach them if we are willing not only to be a great place for Christians, but a great place to meet Christ.

In eight years as your Lead Pastor, I have been trying to make a number of shifts around here. We need to shift from Cruise Ship to Battleship, from a place where we climb on board and see how we can be served to a place where we climb on board and get an assignment. There are other shifts. From Complex to Simple. We just have too much going on sometimes and people can't find their way. From Confused to Confident. From Evangelical, proud of our beliefs, to Evangelistic, reaching the lost with the Gospel. From Expert to Innovative; to reach people we haven't reached before we need to do things we haven't done before. From Comfortable to Risky and from relishing our Memories to driven by our Dreams. These shifts take all of us. This mission takes all of us. That's why we have launched a new way to help you find your place to serve. I hear too often, "I tried to help, or wanted to help, but I never could figure out how." Instead of the "My Part" exercise on Pentecost, from now on we will have a few weeks each August as we just had to help you Belong: Find Your Pattern, Find Your People, Find Your Place.

We know who we are, we know what we are called to do. We know how to do it and the way we are going to go about it. We are ready, First Pres. We are ready to engage with the

best next chapter of our church's life. Do you believe that? I'm committed to getting us there. A big part of that is the health of our staff and core volunteers. We are committed to becoming a Best Christian Workplace. We have had a reputation as a good church and a bad place to work for too long! A friend told me his brother-in-law joined the staff in 1974, and that was the reputation then! 50 years is long enough. We can be healthy. And that will open up a new chapter for us, First Pres. Really. New momentum, new energy, new ideas, new opportunities. The best is on the way.

So, one last thing. Between today and the Annual Meeting on February 2, I want to invite you into a process to dream together. It's time to draw up a strategic plan to help us focus our energies. A task force will lead us through a conversation we are calling First Pres Forward: Defining the Heart of the City. God has called us here. Downtown. If you think of a city as a body, it has a head, an executive function, it has hands, it has eyes and ears, and it has a heart. The church is the heart. We feel what God feels, care about what God cares about, our hearts break with what breaks God's heart. We define the heart of the city. When we are fully the church God called us to be, we change Colorado Springs. First Pres Forward! We need your participation. You will receive a survey later this week kicking off a listening phase. By the Annual Meeting in February, we will have a strategic plan to share. Watch for invitations to participate.

The compass is a tool, a guide. You have a little one in your hand. It is not something to put on a shelf. It is a tool for moving out, for going. This is the house of the Lord; a temple for transformation; it is not a place to sit but a place to be launched, sent, commissioned—a disciple-making outpost. Go out into Colorado Springs. Let's go out into the future Jesus has for our church. Let's go out and define the heart of this city for Jesus. Let's go out and intervene where students feel despair, where Soldiers quake with war memories, where marriages teeter on the edge, where children need truth and clarity about the world they are growing up in, find your way to them, bring the light. Let's go.