

Keeping the Vision

1 of 1 | Training for Reigning

SLIDE 1 Introduction

Today I'm sharing a special message to reflect on why we are here. Sometimes we can over think it. Sometimes we want to make it so special that we can impress others with it. Still, at times we just need to remind ourselves so we can feel we are still on track.

Since 2020 Calvary has been through some very difficult times. One, Susan and I were seeking to retire. Two, we were recovering from the social upheaval of the Covid-19 pandemic. Three, we were are simply getting older and are not doing more. We are doing less.

Yes, our hope and prayer is that others will come in and make up the slack. But the real thing we should be asking is, "For what?"

Our leadership team met on a monthly basis last year as I thought to clarify some of these things, like why we exist, and where do we go from here. From those meetings a few things were revealed, but mostly we talked about aspirations.

SLIDE 2 Actualization Compared to Aspiration

Sometimes we think we are talking about the things that are going on in our lives when in reality we are conveying our aspirations. An aspiration is something you want to be real, something you want to happen, the way you wish you were. This is not, many times, how we actually are.

If we are not able to properly assess where we actually are, then we cannot chart a course to where we want to be. Part of this is because we sometimes are okay with where we are, even though it's not where we ought to be. We call this settling. We settle for the way things are because we either don't know how to make progress or we just don't want to put forth the effort anymore to advance.

In either case we come to a stand still. Stand stills are where you deteriorate. As a church we have just begun to move forward in some critical areas. However, they are areas of survival, not growth.

SLIDE 3 The Battle Begins on the Inside

When I speak of settling for less than God has for us, many of us are okay with that.

This is because advancing the kingdom of God in this community will take some sacrifices—ones we are not always willing to make.

The most obvious sacrifice in our church is the commitment to pray. I know we pray for our families, and physical and financial needs as they arise. However, we need a deeper commitment to corporate prayer. Our church ought to have centralized prayer around reaching our community with the salvation of the Lord and teaching his ways to those who profess his salvation.

Although this kind of prayer is an aspiration, it is not yet an actualization in our church. If it was, then we would regularly and weekly be hosting corporate prayer meetings. We would be traveling at the altars at the close of each service. We would be praying for a manifestation of God's kingdom on earth as well as the manifestations of the Spirit we say we long for.

SLIDE 4 To Each His Own

Getting back to why we are actually here, our year of Leadership Team meetings left me with one overarching impression—we are a church of fellowship. This is not unusual for churches in decline. The draw is being among people we are comfortable with. We enjoy the fellowship of people we agree with, people we have similar interests and philosophies with, and people who bring encouragement and joy to our lives.

Yes, this is an important aspect of church, and it's one that I have learned to embrace, especially as we get older. But you might not know this, it is also the overarching drift of our culture. We are separating into groups that reflect the same principle of fellowship—"birds of a feather flock together."

Politics have separated along these lines. Churches have separated along these lines. Even families have separated along these lines. Hence the saying, "Family is where you find it."

As a result, there is no long standing commitment to your real family, nor to the workplace, nor the church. It's becoming "to each his own," meaning I'll hang with those which please me and I please them.

SLIDE 5 Spiritual Warfare

The tactic of the enemy is not to provoke us to taking up arms and defeating him. He

is here to infiltrate us by lulling us into a false sense of peace. If we would really rise up and fight, we would win. But avoiding confrontation is more important to us because we want to enjoy life and not be put through undue stress.

Look at this verse, and let me explain it.

SLIDE 6 **1st Corinthians 11:18, 19 (NIV)** *"¹⁸ In the first place, I hear that when you come together as a church, there are divisions among you, and to some extent I believe it. ¹⁹ **No doubt there have to be differences** [KJV: heresies] **among you to show which of you have God's approval.**"*

The church is not a mortuary where the dead are memorialized and entombed. Nor is it nursing home where we are just made to feel comfortable until the end comes. No, it is an outpost on the frontlines of spiritual warfare. We are occupation forces that are here to enforce the kingdom of God on earth. We are here to impose the will of God over the area where we are stationed.

We are not enforcing our will on the lives of people. We are imposing God's will over the unseen forces that are enslaving communities and minds.

In this verse we see that divisions and differences are necessary because they promote the will to fight for what is right. Look at the Lord's purpose for enemies in your life in this passage:

SLIDE 7 **Judges 3:1-4 (NIV)** *"¹ These are the nations the Lord left to test all those Israelites who had not experienced any of the wars in Canaan ² **(he did this only to teach warfare to the descendants of the Israelites who had not had previous battle experience):...**"*

SLIDE 8 *"³ the five rulers of the Philistines, all the Canaanites, the Sidonians, and the Hivites living in the Lebanon mountains from Mount Baal Hermon to Lebo Hamath. ⁴ **They were left to test the Israelites to see whether they would obey the Lord's commands, which he had given their ancestors through Moses.**"*

When things are peaceful, it seems God's people slack off on their training for war. Like they say about people who go to the gym, "Don't skip leg day." There are things that are important to us, and we will focus on them, but there are things important to the Lord. Will we focus on those also?

Why put yourself through seemingly undue stress when things seem peaceful?

Because the devil is still out there seeking whom he may devour. (1st Peter 5:8)

Our soldiers never quit training. It keeps them sharp. Any lull in the battle is a time when the enemy is planning his next onslaught. He will spring into action at the first sign of us laying down our weapons and relaxing. We cannot let down our guard. We must be diligent to maintain the defenses the Lord has trained us in so we can maintain the freedom he has given us.

SLIDE 9 Watchman on the Wall

If we are going to fully recover our church and its purpose in this community, we must begin to sound the alarm from every rooftop. Many do not see the danger. Many are plunging headlong into hell, not even aware of their destiny. The walking dead, Zombieland, sleep walking—whatever you want to call it, our church needs to extend our fellowship over those who are asleep in the light.

However, when you take up the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God, then you draw the enemy's attention. His tactic is to attack the training centers of spiritual warfare, to harass those who take their faith seriously, and to discredit churches as radical when they disturb the peace. The prophet Jeremiah warned of those who would try to catch us off guard:

SLIDE 10 Jeremiah: 6:14 (NIV) *"They dress the wound of my people as though it were not serious. 'Peace, peace,' they say, when there is no peace."*

Now is the time to train for war! Now is the time to be fully equipped.

SLIDE 11a Altar Time

What are you doing to increase your training? Are you in the Word, equipping yourself to speak into the lives of those taken captive by the world, the flesh, and the devil? Are you in prayer, bringing down the strongholds in your life and in the lives of your family members? Are you sitting under the anointed preaching of the Word? God chose preaching. It is a spiritual force that even the world understands—say it often enough and everyone will believe it. Remember the triple "A's" of ministering the Word:

SLIDE 11b *Announce it Aloud with Authority.*

I often say, the truth will set you free, but it will set others free as well. You "I believe" will never be as powerful as "the Bible says."