

Message Series: **'Redeemer @ 70: Deep and Wide'**

Message Title: **'Deep and...'**

Scripture Source: **1 Thessalonians 1:1-10**

Date: Sunday, May 24, 2015

Speaker: John Garner

Directionally Challenged

Hands up for the 'directionally challenged' among us! Share a story or two including my driver's license 'moment'...directionally challenged can come in different sizes and shapes! And it can leave us feeling confused, embarrassed, uncertain and fearful...not pleasant emotions. We want to live with a stronger and clearer sense of direction in all areas of life, financially, relationally, physically, job, retirement...the list could go on. Uncertainty of what our 'next step' should be can be deeply distressing. We can end up being 'stuck'...unable to move forward.

Churches can be 'directionally challenged' as well. Unsure of what priorities should be and how and where to proceed stymies many churches. 'What are we to be about? What direction are we headed in? How do we get there?' Many churches grapple with these questions. Churches are either 'directionally challenged or directionally connected.' We will examine these realities in light of our 68th Anniversary...'how are we doing and where are we headed.' In light of the stated mission of Jesus, are we 'directionally challenged or connected?'

A Clear Mission – Are We Convinced?

Jesus has not left us in the dark. His mission for the church is clear. "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.'" Matthew 28:18-20

This is a bold and audacious mandate, turning irreligious, often God-indifferent people into passionate, obedient followers of Jesus. We are to do this in partnership with the Spirit of God and each other.

At RBC we have created the concise phrase: 'leading people to passionately follow Jesus.'

That's 'what' Jesus has mandated us to do. We believe that Jesus deeply loves people and yearns to see them in relationship with God through faith in Himself. We believe that Jesus is the sole source of forgiveness of sins and a restored relationship with God. We don't believe in multiple pathways to God. John 14:6. God uses people like you and me to reach and teach others about the love of Christ and what it means to become a trusting and obedient follower of Jesus. "...make disciples of all nations." That is our God given opportunity and responsibility. Which leads to our Plan.

The Plan: Redeemer @ 70: Deep and Wide

Why this Plan? Where did this phrase and plan come from? Why do we as elders and staff believe that this Plan matters and needs to be understood and engaged in by every single Christ follower at RBC?

Because God's heartbeat for the spiritually lost is strong and relentless. The 'lost' must be found...and restored to a relationship with God through faith in Jesus the Saviour, and the 'found' must be trained and taught the heart and purposes of Jesus. And then spurred on to live out His mission in the world we live in.

The Plan includes a number. 355. Why that number? That's the number of seats in the sanctuary. The chair on the platform reminds us of opportunity and responsibility. That number has gripped, stirred, and challenged me for several years. Let me share a story of reflection, fear, conviction, and decision that helped generate the Plan. While in Africa in April/May of 2011 I penned these words in my journal.

“Every seat filled...for a purpose, to share the word of God, help people engage in the Three T’s, the Table, Text, and Towel, seven days a week. Every seat filled...each life served. We are stewards of each seat. I believe that. Is it wrong to have numerical goals? Is it wrong to want every seat filled, to serve every person? God, help me know your heart on this question. I think You would like every current seat filled. In every seat, a person with a story, a story worth hearing.

God’s heart: “All this is for your benefit, so that the grace that is reaching more and more people may cause thanksgiving to overflow to the glory of God.” 2 Corinthians 5:15

Am I willing to be misunderstood? Ready to be criticised for a plan, a goal? I want to be God.

For You, for the goal of a biblically functioning church that is built one life at a time.”

Friends, I struggled greatly with the idea of a plan...especially a plan with numbers. But, I and others have come to believe deeply that God honouring goals can keep us focused and mindful of who and what really matters to God and ought to matter to us. The challenge is to not turn ‘goals into little gods’ that we become fixated with.

A Practical Plan: “All hard work brings a profit, but mere talk leads only to poverty.” Proverbs 14:23
Proverbs 14:15, 12:5, 16:3. It is easy to talk about God honoring ministry plans that actually work, pray, plan and do!

This is a 2 plus year plan that was launched at our Annual meeting in October of 2014 and then reviewed in January of this year. The plan has goals that include reaching the lost and training up and equipping the found. The Plan has goals that include holding Baptismal services and Membership celebrations. ‘Redeemer @ 70: Deep and Wide’ has goals that address offering ‘spiritual hope and practical help in Jesus name.’ Some goals have numbers attached and some don’t.

Why goals? Helps keep us honest, dealing with facts, evaluating progress or setback, asking searching questions and making adjustments along the way. Illustrate: we respect and are wise to set appropriate goals in life: example: financial, health, other practical goals...golf! So, why not ministry and church goals? Are we reaching more people? Are more people involved in group life and in areas of service? Are more people being baptised and identifying with Jesus? If we go months with no baptisms, that needs to generate the question, ‘why?’ Are more people becoming members? Are people leaving our church? Are we serving in practical ways? Where, how and with who? These are ‘mile markers’ along the way to help us evaluate and answer the question...‘are we making disciples?’ So, to that end, we review on a quarterly basis a range of goals we have set. Some of the goals are tied into existing ministries and some are tied into potential, anticipated ministries. Some future plans have ‘roots’ in the Coffee Conversations of 5 years ago and the ‘Dreaming the Dream’ conversations of almost 3 years ago. And not every goal has a number. Illustrate: attendance markers, Baptism service goals, serving the needy, involvement in Journey Groups.

“A simple man believes anything, but a prudent man gives thought to his steps.” Proverbs 14:15
The steps we are taking as a church...are they helping us ‘make disciples’ in tangible, measurable ways?

We continue to fine tune the plan... please pray with us, and ask us questions. We don’t have this all figured out but we are committed to learning together and doing as God directs. Prayer gathering June 7th at 6:30 p.m. asking God to guide and instruct us as we move forward.

Deep and Wide: 1 Thessalonians 1:1-10

Why this phrase? We believe this phrase captures beautifully the mindset and heartbeat of Jesus...to see people growing deeper in faith, hope and love...and going wide...reaching out to more and more people with the message of the grace and truth of Jesus. As we live this way, ‘leading people to passionately follow Jesus; through engagement in environments and engagements of connecting, learning and serving, we will be a ‘deep and wide’ church.

The apostle Paul wrote to a community of Christ followers in a bustling seaport city called Thessalonica. The story of this church’s start is found in Acts 17:1-9.

Deep: His words in chapter 1:2-7 speak of a depth of spiritual knowledge and character, relational connection, practical service, and a deepening relationship with God and his word. Listen to Paul as he

commends them: “for your work produced by faith, your labour prompted by love, and your endurance inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.” Vss.2-3. What are the ‘roots’ of this way of thinking and living?

1. Receptivity and responsiveness to God’s word: vs.6 “in spite of severe suffering, you welcomed the message with the joy given by the Holy Spirit.” Also, 2:13...regarded the message as God’s authoritative word to be trusted and obeyed.
2. Choosing to learn and follow the lead of godly leaders, who in turn took their lead from Jesus.
1 Thessalonians 1:6.
learning and serving Jesus, individually and together. Depth is a choice, not an ‘accident.’

Deep...Are you growing deeper? Or...how does ‘deep’ happen?

Are you placing yourself in environments, with personal engagements, that educate your faith, that warm your heart to the love and greatness of God? Environments that stretch you and demand of you compassionate actions? Are Sunday mornings ‘can’t miss’ commitments on your calendar? Including making sure your children are receiving the care and instruction they need? They can’t make it here by themselves. Don’t shortchange them. Are you learning with other spiritually minded people, in smaller, more interactive settings, between Sundays? Whose life of Christ-centeredness are you watching closely and learning from? Can we help you learn to study Scripture more profitably? If you aren’t serving in a specific area, can we help you find a place to contribute?

Colossians 2:6-8. Choose your environments very carefully, your spiritual health and robustness of living depends on it. Don’t settle for shallow. Grow deeper...spiritually, relationally, and in contribution. Any adjustments required? For remember, a church family is only as strong and resilient, as ‘deep and wide’ as each person is. We must not settle for ‘shallow’...deeper is God’s intent for us.

And

The difference between a ‘directionally challenged church’ and a ‘directionally connected church’ is found in the choice of conjunction. ‘And’ or ‘or’. We will explore that thought provoking reality next Sunday as we explore the descriptive word ‘wide.’

Some questions: as a church, who is included in our extending a ‘wide welcome’?

How ‘wide’ should our warm welcome extend?

Who would you find it hard to welcome? Why?