

## “Bucket Lists: Vision and Hope Are Inspirations of the Heart”

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*Extravagant Generosity* series

BEGIN with monologue by John Thompson

Feelings of emptiness and longing are real. What is it that really fills us up? What is it that satisfies?

I find myself wondering how it would be to let everything go and focus on what’s important. How do I focus on God’s will - to seek God’s Kingdom first instead of what I want? I’ve had the privilege of talking to many people over 14 years of ministry who were clear about their vision and hope. Many times that clarity came because of a diagnosis or a tragedy. But they got to a place of being able to speak boldly about what it means to seek God more clearly and faithfully.

When the film *The Bucket List* came out in 2007, it captured the hearts of many people. Two terminally ill men develop a list of all the things they have always wanted to do. They face their task with a great sense of urgency – and with lots of humor and honesty. But it’s the urgency that’s so powerful. How do we live with urgency? Those bucket lists can give us strength and courage as we understand more and more that we walk with our God who is faithful even when we struggle, grieve, and feel like hope is lost.

You might know that another film came out recently - a new adaptation of *Left Behind*. I can tell you that I don’t think much in the end of times realm, but I know many people do. The bigger question for me is: how do we live now? How can we be the Body of Christ with a sense of urgency in a world where people are hungry for Jesus, the Bread of Life, and thirsty for Living Water? Who does God want us to become?

Today we’ll consider our bucket list for the church. You’ve heard people from our church family share a vision for our church as we seek to make disciples and live out our vision: Welcoming All, Empowered by Christ, Sent forth to serve. You have the opportunity to share your vision and hope on a “heart card” this week: what you would most like to see happen in the church in the next year?

Our responses may be different from each other, but I’m amazed at how God works in our midst when we share the hopes and dreams that God has given us. As you consider a vision for our church, consider what you would like to see happen in your life in that same time. In what ways do your passions for the church align with your

personal desires? How is God leading you? Where is God leading you? God-sized vision requires faith and stepping out of our comfort zone.

Remember that Extravagant Generosity is about our hearts – about how God is calling us to give because of the love we've experienced in Jesus Christ. Generosity isn't so much about our bank accounts or checkbook balances. It has everything to do with our response to God's grace and how we show and share our faith to the glory of God. We give because we want to respond to God's love in our lives. We open ourselves up to God's vision because we want to be faithful. We want to grow.

Remember where we've been – the reminder from I Timothy not to put our trust in wealth, but to trust in God. Last week, we heard the call to love God with all our heart, soul, and strength – to share our faith with our children – and to love one another. Our commitment to Jesus Christ shows in our relationships within the Body of Christ – and within those relationships we hold dear. Our generosity makes a way for others to know the love of God through the Body of Christ – the church in the world.

The verses we hear today give us the starting place for understanding what God has called us to do and be as a church. From Colossians 3: *Therefore if you were raised with Christ, look for the things that are above where Christ is sitting at God's right hand.* Colossians instructs us to set our hearts on things above. It is very difficult to focus our attention on God when we are distracted and overwhelmed by cultural influences like materialism and consumerism, by caring more about social status than our spiritual lives.

In the Sermon on the Mount, Matthew 6: 33, Jesus says, *Seek first God's kingdom and God's righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.* Matthew's Gospel sets our personal and community priorities. Together in community, we help one another to seek God first in all things, to strive for righteousness, or right standing, with God.

And hear again from Joel 2:28: *I will pour out my spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, and your young men shall see visions.* Joel offers direction for us, as we consider our vision of the church. Vision comes about as God inspires people to prophesy, dream and have visions. What has God inspired you to envision for the coming year?

Maybe it's difficult for you to think in terms of having visions, but Scripture is clear that God speaks to us in visions and dreams. The Holy Spirit brings names, faces, and situations to mind for us. Perhaps you've had a God-moment when God has led you

to call someone, and they remarked at how much they needed that. Think of a time when you've been on the receiving end – when a phone call or note came at just the right time.

The same is true as we seek God's will for our lives and for the church. Vision helps us to get on God's program. It takes people moving on God's vision to bring it about. Jesus offered his disciples a vision: You are the salt of the earth...you are the light of the world! And he gave them the vision of being witnesses and making disciples when he ascended.

Lake Harbor wouldn't exist if people wouldn't have had a vision. Over the years that Lake Harbor has been here, the mission hasn't changed. We're still here to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. You might have noticed, however, that the world has changed in many ways. How we engage the world is different than it used to be. But people still need the Good News of God's love for them. That hasn't changed. People still need a community of love, forgiveness, and grace where they can come just as they are and know that God is real and offers them hope, new life, a second chances (or third or fourth), a clean slate.

Maybe this sounds too simple. But I'd ask you why you're here. What do you want the church to be? How do you want the church to be? Do you want people to walk in and feel like there's no place for them? Or do you want them to walk and be welcomed by people who are truly glad they're here, to be inspired by worship that's grounded in God's Word and led by the Holy Spirit, that they might find a spiritual home here? Do you want them to have an opportunity to learn and grow in faith through prayer, Bible study, fellowship?

Vision is key to ministry and mission. Consider that Mission for Area People, Family Promise, Supper House, Kids Belong started because of the Holy Spirit moving in someone's heart. Roots is an opportunity to reach young adults - some who have never been to church or have been away and want to reconnect, and it started with a vision.

And God is always seeking to offer vision to us! The prophet Joel speaks at a time when there is no hope. God's people have experienced a plague of locusts – probably literally – that has brought destruction – food, crops, herds, no offerings to bring in worship. It's hopeless. But then God speaks. God wants them to return to God. God wants a relationship with them! Will they choose helplessness or hope?

The promise for what lies ahead is bright, but not before the suffering. They would be empowered – old and young, men and women, slave and free – to do what

they thought was beyond their normal abilities. God would restore the earth and God's provision. God would restore their good name. God would bring relief from feelings of loneliness and abandonment. God would bring salvation.

It's Good News for us for whatever we face. This call to vision and hope is much needed for our own lives as we face death and grief, unemployment and job loss, difficulties in relating to loved ones, seasons when our prayers appear to go unheard. God's Word through Joel is not a quick fix, but it is a promise to hold onto – a promise from our God who is faithful and who calls us to hope.

Seeking God's vision and hope calls us to be connected to God in prayer and in community. As I thought about my vision and hope for our church, I pray that we'd continue to seek to live by our vision – welcoming all, empowered by Christ, sent forth to serve. It means that prayer is a hallmark of our life together. It means that hospitality is vital - welcoming each person as we would welcome Jesus. It means that we are evangelists - literally sharers of the Good News that we have in Jesus Christ. It means that we claim our spiritual gifts - hospitality is one - and use them to the glory of God!

Within the next year, I pray that we'd see an increase in worship attendance and in Christian Education - both worship services, all ages. Sharing faith starts in our homes and families and goes out into our relationships with friends. Are we inviting people to worship? Are we intentionally learning and growing in faith?

I also hope that we'll be more intentional about telling our faith stories with people we know well and people whom we might not know well. This is our witness, and it touches people's hearts. We'll grow in our spiritual lives just as we hope others do.

I pray that we would continue to be grateful for this space that we have to do ministry. I'm excited to share that we'll be offering a ministry specifically for people who have lost a loved one through death. I pray that we would keep on giving of our money and time to missions that are making a difference.

Over the last few weeks we have considered what we love and value in our church, who has made a difference in our spiritual lives, and today our best hopes and dreams for the next year. Hopefully you've received a Faith Commitment card. Each of us will be asked to a decision about how we will express and grow in our generosity.

When you receive your card, please be in prayer and seek God's direction for your expression of generosity toward the life and vision of God's ministry through this

church. How will show extravagant generosity – in your prayers for the church and the world; in your presence in worship, study, and fellowship; in the gifts you offer to support the church; in your service to Jesus Christ through the Body of Christ; and in your witness to God’s grace working in your life?

Thanks be to God. Amen.