

Vision and Strategy

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 18 June 2017

Preacher: Derek Lamont

[0 : 00] We are in the city here, we love the city, we love Jesus Christ and we are long to see people come to know Jesus Christ.

We've seen growth in our own church, we've planted churches and we want to plant more churches into the city where so few people know and love Jesus Christ. And that lies behind what we have been thinking of and considering as elders and leaders in the church for the last number of months.

And in a sense it's come to this stage where we have a vision and strategy today. But I don't want that to appear dry or dull in any way. I want to enthuse and excite you in the gospel and in the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Because we have a great gospel and we have a great saviour. But we also need to remember something very significant. Both as a church and as individual Christians in our lives is that we are in a spiritual battle.

We know that, don't we? We know there's a spiritual battle that comes through in the prayers that Corrie has offered. And it comes through in our lives, it's sometimes an internal battle, a battle of faith or belief.

[1 : 12] It can be a battle of spiritual oppression and opposition or it can be a battle from outside. People who reject or resist or stand against us mock and deride our God.

So we know we're in a battle. Ephesians chapter 6, 12 reminds us of that. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood but against the rulers, authorities, cosmic powers over this present darkness.

Against the spirits and forces of evil in heavenly places. So we know that we need to live a life of grace, a life of prayer and a life of grace and prayer in action in our lives.

And in many ways the vision and the strategy that we're thinking about today or presenting today is a result of that. And it is, in a sense, the structure or the scaffold that we hope will enable us to support one another, to disciple one another, to look forward and to continue to grow in grace.

So there is a battle. Now the Psalm that we read together, Psalm 20, is a fantastic Psalm. And it's also a Psalm that's written in the context of spiritual battle. In the Old Testament it was much more tangible.

[2 : 30] It was much more physical. So the people of God were a nation and they stood for God. There were people under God and they were opposed by the surrounding nation.

So there was often physical battles that they were entered into with physical enemies who were out to annihilate them, God and his people. And this Psalm is a call, it's a prayer from David for God's help and for God's salvation and for God's guidance in their lives.

They were relying on God to give victory. And so the principles from this Psalm are very applicable for ourselves in our own Christian lives and as we think about what we are doing and presenting today.

There's a desperate cry for protection and for help in verse 1. May the Lord answer you in the day of trouble. May the name of the Lord protect you. There's this great recognition that we desperately need God in everything and in all that we do.

And there's longing for Him to send help into our lives. That's what you want, isn't it? That's what I want. We want God to help us. We cry out. We're longing for that.

[3 : 45] On a daily basis, it might be quietly, we're praying, it might be things that nobody knows about. But we're saying, God, help. Show us that you love and you care.

And then we see that in the Psalm, the Psalmist is speaking about his heart's desires and the fulfillment of all his plans. So we see that the king and his people were planning. They were planning for victory.

They were planning as a people to defeat the physical enemies they were facing. They made a plan. They had a plan, a strategic plan to do what they were doing and they were offering that plan to God.

It was what was in their hearts. But they also knew in verse 6 that it was the Lord from whom salvation came. It was the Lord that they were lying in, even though they were making all these plans.

Now that's true for us, isn't it? As believers, that's our understanding and that's our fundamental, basic standpoint where we come from. Our need, our hope, our salvation, our life, our energy, our use of gifts comes from Jesus.

[4 : 58] That's where our salvation is. That's where we can sit. That's where we can be at peace. That's where our identity is. It's in Jesus Christ. As our Father, God has enabled him to be our elder brother.

We are adopted into his family and our sins are forgiven so we stand before a menacing because of what he has done on the cross of Calvary that Corrie was praying for.

And therefore it goes on to say that their trust is in the name of the Lord their God. So they had all these plans but their trust was entirely also in the name of God.

Some say some trust in chariots and horses and we probably don't have the same focus of trust today. But that just goes back to the picture of powerful physical enemies who put their hope in military might and in strength of what the provision they had to defeat this small beleaguered nation, the Jewish nation and it looked like the odds were stacked against them, the small people against all these surrounding nations with fantastic military strength and resources available to them.

And that's sometimes what we feel, isn't it? Physically, but we feel spiritually that, you know, it's a small church. It's not that many people. It's a big city out there. Not many people are coming to faith in Jesus Christ. There's so much opposition.

[6 : 32] It seems that everything is stacked against us and yet our trust is in Him alone. And so I want to just go through a little bit of the vision but remind yourself that there's no, and I want to remind you as I remind myself, there's no contradiction between planning, between vision, between structure and thought processes and between trusting in the Lord.

That's Sam makes that clear. There's this great recognition of making your desires known before God and also complete trust in God.

And in our lives, that's true. We make plans. We think about things. We consider the future. But we do so knowing who God is and trusting in Him.

We lay our plans before Him. We wrestle our way through them and we bring them to Him. And we seek His favor, we trust in Him.

So in our vision, we are recognizing the importance of not being shambolic. That's what we're really recognizing that as the church grows, we need to organize things and we need to have a clear direction spiritually that we can share with others who come and join us.

[7 : 54] How we disciple one another, how we care for one another, the emphasis we put on certain things and our spiritual intentionality we have in our lives and intentionality.

And I don't think that's a bad thing spiritually for a congregation. I also don't think it's a bad thing individually that we are planning for sanctification, for growth, for development as Christians, that we are intentional about sharing our faith and about being holy and about the choices that we make in life, that we don't just rumble on in our lives and stumble through our Christianity saying, hey, I'll be in heaven one day and just kind of drift through life without recognizing His purposes and plans for us. As we plan for nothing, we're sure to achieve it every time. We plan for nothing. We're sure to achieve it.

Now, I don't know where that comes from, that quote. I did try and find the genesis of that quote, but it's been quoted to different people and it's not in the same way, so I'm taking the credit. And you can in the future go on to online and it'll say attributed to Eric Lammon 2017.

So if you plan for nothing, you will achieve it every time. And that's true, isn't it? We drift through life. We tend to drift. So as leaders, we want us to have a clear understanding of who we are and how God has led us. We want to be like the psalmist crying out in need for His help.

We want to hear His commission, to serve and to encourage all of you to serve, to serve you in that task and recognize that at the centre of all is the cross of Jesus Christ and His life, His death and His resurrection, is our hope. And that's the centre of everything that we do.

[9 : 57] So these plans that are in that little sheet that you have before, they don't come out of nothing. This isn't the first time we've thought about them. It's been an evolving exercise over a long period of time. God has guided us. He's surprised us. He's taken us in places we didn't think we would ever reach or go to.

We're learning, we're failing. You know that, don't we? Don't you? You know we're failing. We're trying things, some things are better than others. We're aware of gaps, weaknesses, strengths, needs. And so all of these purposes and plans come out of that.

It's also, I guess, in many ways a response to the fact that we've become a growing congregation. We're stretched to the limit and sometimes we fail to assimilate people well and share with them what is kind of in our DNA.

We're stretched staff-wise, we're stretched financially, we're stretched in so many ways and we see so much need. So many lost people. Such a wonderful saviour.

And we just want to do more for Him. Better and share that with others. So our vision and the strategy is a movable feast in a sense. We're progressing with it. It's not the finished article but what we wanted to present today was really just our philosophy of ministry.

[11 : 31] What we are, what we've become and then from that move forward to the structures and everything that goes with it at some other point. We want to share with you that clear purpose and be a people who is verse 8 of Psalm 20 says that we rise and we stand upright.

We don't want to fall. We want to have that good foundation congregationally and spiritually in our lives that comes from Jesus Christ. So in a nutshell if we were to share with people what a summary of who we are or what we think we are, it would be in that strap line that's at the top of your page.

We're a city centre church committed to the gospel of Jesus Christ in worship, community, discipleship and mission with a vision to plant churches in and around Edinburgh.

That's what we want to do. That's what we want to be. It's really quite simple. We have these areas that we regard as important but Jesus Christ is central to everything that we do.

We want to be committed to Him as a people and as individuals and maybe for you today that's a challenge. Maybe today that's a challenge that you come to church, that you're involved in church, people, but you couldn't say hand on heart that you're committed to Jesus Christ.

[12 : 57] What does that mean? What will that mean for me? What does it mean to commit your life and heart to Jesus Christ, to recognise Him as your Lord and Saviour?

And there are challenges within that for us that it's not simply about being part of a church, however nice and significant that is. And we have these theological pillars that underpin everything that we are. I've spoken about them before and they're important to us because they remind us of the central biblical truths that we focus on, the grace of God, in the gospel of God, for the growth of God, to the glory of God. So we've got these 4 Gs that we've thought about and looked at before, that they underpin everything that we are.

We care about God's glory and we recognise that He wants us to be a growing people, not just growing in numbers, but growing in grace, growing in holiness, growing in love and in commitment.

And we do that through the gospel and in reliance on the grace of God. So these are really important theological pillars for us. And then under that, in this page, we've got these, what could really be described as our philosophy of ministry, the 4 main areas that our work is already in and will continue to be in, and will be the basis of all the teams and the work that we will do in the future.

So it's a living worship congregation. We want to recognise the importance of engaging in living worship. That's today, by the way, that's this service, our evening service, our prayer meeting.

[14 : 41] When we are gathered worship, I'm not speaking here, we're not speaking here necessarily about worship as all of life, which we recognise as part of discipleship.

But living worship, John 4, 24, where Jesus is explaining worship to the women of Simeon, is God his spirit, those who worship him must worship in spirit and in truth. So that's important to us, that our worship is spiritual and truthful, that it's something that is important.

We're engaging, growing numbers of people in excellent, God-glorifying, gathered worship when we come together. That's what we're looking to do. We don't want to be shipshod. I don't rumble out of bed at 10 on a Sunday morning thinking, ah, what shall I talk about today? And I'll buy something good on the Internet that I can scan.

Or I'll just think about nice thoughts and share what moves me, what's emotionally exciting, what I heard about this week. No, we spend our time, we spend our weeks preparing, delving into Scripture, seeking to bring truth out of Scripture, planning our service, praying for that and seeking to do the very best we can. And that always involves all of us.

It involves us praying for God in our community as we come together, praying that He will speak from His living word, pray that we'll be convicted, that people will be saved, that we'll grow in grace, that we'll learn new things as we come together in our worship.

[16 : 15] That we value the Lord's day, that we see it as His gift to us, a day that's set apart, that we can fellowship with one another in worship and that we can be in each other's company in a rest. So living worship is very important, and that is, and will continue to be crucial to us.

But also, we seek to be a serving community. We don't simply believe in coming together and giving our one hour to St. Columbus on a Sunday morning.

And it's tough because we don't live near each other, most of us. We're a gathered community, we're a transient community. But we seek to be a people who serve one another, particularly through city groups, supporting the leaders in the nurture of meaningful, God-glorifying worship.

Galatians 5.13 speaks about that, isn't it? That you were called. Every believer is called. We are all called. We're called to freedom. But it's freedom to use that as an opportunity, not for the flesh, not for sin, but through love to serve one another.

That's our motive. That's our motto. That's what we do. That's what we seek to do. We seek not simply to be self-indulgent and see church as a consumer opportunity to receive, which it is also.

[17 : 44] But we see churches, the community of believers, where we give, where we give of our time, of our efforts, of our prayer, of our love, of our service. We see people in need and we serve one another. We seek to, particularly through the city groups, to develop that passable care for one another.

The use of gifts, integrating new people, caring for ill, elderly, isolated, broken, poor, struggling, providing communities for families, for children, for individuals, for old, for young.

With all the varied needs of living out grace together, that costly love of working and serving one another in grace and in love.

So serving community is the second kind of priority, our main area that we seek to work in. Third is equipping discipleship. Ephesians 4 verses 11 and 12 say, we are going to send to the apostles, prophets, evangelists, shepherds, teachers to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ.

So there's this great work that we are engaged in that we seek as a church to equip each other and to help each other grow in godliness.

[19 : 10] It's a battle, isn't it? Are you struggling in your Christian life today? Are you going to church and go away feeling worse? Or should it be that our gatherings and our city groups and our communities and our texts and our phone calls, and all that we do, encourage discipleship, encourage growth in godliness, help us to be disciples and to be disciple makers.

We want to minister to our children, to our parents. We want St. Columbus to be a culture of learning, but not in a kind of cold intellectual way, in a life-learning way through the word of God and the Spirit of God as we seek to mentor, care for, help one another in holiness.

Be accountable to one another, not spiritual islands, not spiritual lone rangers, but depending on one another and seeking God's grace for one another.

And lastly, we recognize as a priority of our church, is relational mission. Sam 96 verse 3 says, declare his glory among the nations, his marvelous works among all the people. So we don't really want to just be an insular group of people content with rubbing each other's back and growing together and loving just each other's company, however significant that might be.

But we seek to share Jesus Christ with all those around us. We don't want you to spend all your time in church or doing church things, or doing church, being involved in church rotas, however important these things must be for the ongoing survival of the congregation.

[20 : 59] We don't want to be a program-based church. We want to free you up to make relationships, to recognize where God has called you to share the gospel.

Because people aren't coming to hear the gospel. We don't have cues at the door for people, I can't wait to come to church today and hear what might change my life. That isn't the way it is. You're the frontline. You're the people who we want to send out.

We want to serve you so that you're equipped, and I am equipped to obey the mission of God for our life, to see all that we are and all that we do as under God with a purpose for us to encourage you in that, to train you in that, to enable us to be confident to gently talk about Jesus, respectfully talk about Jesus, because He's changed our lives, and we want Him to change the lives of the three or four or five people we are praying for regularly, that we are witnessing to, that we are living alongside Christians in our home, in our workplace, in our lives.

And supporting mission, not just from each of us, but supporting those who work in mission, whether it's in Scotland or internationally, and planting churches. We see that as the best way of the gospel growing in Edinburgh, not just from our church, but from lots of churches, local churches in local communities, and above all, seeing conversions, seeing people coming to faith, seeing people come to know and love Jesus Christ and be transformed by His grace.

And as we are able to talk about Jesus Christ and are confident in how important He is in our lives, and as we share Him together, it will become easier for us to share Him with other people who are not convinced and who might be resistant to hear about the Saviour that we love.

[23 : 10] So these great philosophies of ministry that we have, these four important philosophies, will we hope develop the culture, or the culture of our congregation will come from these great four priorities. So in our church, just generally the culture of our church is that we are people who are dependent on God. We want to be like the Sammists. We want to make our plans, but we want to trust in God implicitly.

To our encounter productive, they're not mutually exclusive. The two go together, and we want to be a people who reflect that dependence on God in our lives, in our day-to-day decision making, and as a congregation. We want to have that culture of obeying Scripture that we take all that we do to the gauge of Scripture, to the mark of Scripture, because it's a living word of God for us. We want, because of these principles, we want to seek to be excellent.

That doesn't mean we need to be excellent, but it means we need to do our best. That's really what it is, doing our best to God's glory. So whether it's the way we welcome at the door, or it's the way we serve our tea, or it's the way we act and lead and creche, or preach, or present the Psalms, or do the music, or welcome people just who are sitting next to you, we don't want to do it grudgingly, and we don't want to do it with a dragging our feet.

We want to, because God is worth it, we want to do our best, and we don't want to do it for praise, we don't want to do it for acclimation, we don't want to do it so we can get trophies, we're the best. Hey, look at me, we don't want that.

We simply want humbly to serve the very best way we can, and we want to keep all that we do simple, and that's very difficult in an organization that becomes more, that grows.

[25 : 16] It's hard to keep things simple. If you've got two children, and you've got 22 children, life becomes more complex if you've got 22 in your family, and that's the same in a church. It's just a law of life.

And so we recognize there's a tendency towards everything, and they're complicated and steam coming out of their ears, and we don't know what to do. And we're trying to keep things consciously, simple, based on these important philosophies, and not getting arms and legs in every direction so that we do everything badly.

And in that culture we want always to be thinking of people who are not part of the fellowship, the way I speak from the pulpit, the way Cori introduces, not taking for granted that everyone knows what we do, or the language we use, or that we are simply for ourselves that we want to preach and think and live and act for those who might come in for the first time, and we hope that we will share with them and introduce them to Jesus.

And we do so wanting to develop deep friendships and then reaching out and going into the city with the great gospel of Jesus Christ.

So that's really where we are just now. These are the foundational ethos, the DNA, the pillars, the philosophy, whatever you want to call it.

[26 : 49] That's what we are. We're going to try and make that more obvious, we're going to try and share that more often, especially as new people come in and about and they wonder who we are, what we do. This is what motivates us. These are the things under Christ and through Christ that are important to us and significant.

And we want always to be a people who accompany this with prayer and who are looking for spiritual renewal. We're not saying here that we have it fixed by any means whatsoever.

I am very conscious of the need in your life and in mine for spiritual renewal. Conscious that there is always that need for loving Jesus more.

As Corrie prayed earlier, that we are often bored with Him. We're bored with His Word. We're bored with His beauty. We're much more attracted to sinful and self-centered attractions.

And we long for spiritual renewal, for that willingness and longing to pray together more, to love Him better and to see more clearly our needs.

[28 : 00] And so that will always be the case. And as we move forward, I hope you will be praying in that way. And we will over the summer seek to develop our ministry teams, of which many of you will be involved and are involved in these areas of worship community, discipleship missions.

And we'll have a fifth team, an operations team, a more practical team. And that's where we will feed your service and your work in. And you'll do it. And we will do it for God's glory.

And we look to expand our pastoral team or our staff team, voluntary and paid. And we're looking to grow our income so that we can serve God and follow Him and resource what we believe He has for us.

These are exciting days. I know it's a difficult city. It's a difficult time to be Christian. I know there's a lot of opposition and sometimes you think, well, what can we do?

But remember 16 years ago, there was 20 people here. And remember now that there's this church of two or 250 people and two churches that God by His grace has enabled us to plant.

[29 : 10] So that maybe between us, we've got almost 450, 500 people and 130, 140 children. Now, it's just a drop in the ocean. I know that. But we can see progress. We can see God has led us this far.

And we believe God will continue to bless us as we are dependent and trust in Him entirely. Sam 20, make our plans, but trust in Him entirely.

Recognize the strength and the vision and the help comes from Him. Not just congregationally, but in the same in your own life. Make your spiritual plans. Make your dreams.

And trust in the Lord implicitly and may the desires of your heart dovetail with Him and with His desires rather than sometimes the other way that we put it where we bring our desires and say, well, God, really you, we want you to change so that you give me what I want.

But rather we seek so that our desires are matched His so that we want what He wants for us and we continue to plan. So please be praying and please be part of this work. Please forgive us for our failings.

[30 : 20] Please don't think we're coming here with some kind of sovereign plan or that we're usurping God's rightful place of Lordship. He will God praise us. Let's hope He surprises us. Let's hope He takes us in many ways that we don't expect because He knows a lot better than we do.

But will you support the work? Will you continue to serve as you serve so willingly and helpfully? I know it's hard when it comes to June to serve with any vim because we've got no vim left.

But we will take a little bit of break in July and August. We'll rest and let's come back prayerfully refreshed and renewed and envisioned to serve Him.

Amen. Let's pray. Father God, we ask and pray that You would bless us in our ministry and in our lives here.

I sometimes feel that if I came to church on a Sunday and there was nobody here, that that would absolutely be what would be expected because of our hopelessness sometimes and our failure and of the battles that we face and the struggles that there are and how far we fall short as leaders of Your glory in all that we do.

[31 : 45] But Lord, we ask and pray and give thanks for Your grace, for Your patience, for the amazing knowledge of Your commitment to us, Your plans, Your promises.

And we ask that these plans that we have spoken of, we've agreed as elders, we seek to progress, we commit them to You, we lay them at Your feet. We pray that they would succeed because we offer them in Jesus' name.

We pray that we will be wise to change them if You make clear that is the way to move forward. And we ask above all that they will help us to understand a bit more about who we are and also that it will provide the framework for more growth and above all for people to come to faith in Jesus.

So today we pray for our friends. We pray for the people that we have missed opportunities with to share Jesus. We pray for more ones.

We pray that we would not let You down, nor that we would think that our words can change them, but simply that we would point them to Jesus Christ. We thank You and we hear of people who have come to faith.

[32 : 56] It's the greatest news ever. And we ask that it would be the kind of news that inspires us and motivates us, that helps us to carry on. We ask Cornerstone today and Esk Valley, we thank You for them, we thank You for the excitement, the potential excitement of starting in Haddington.

And we pray and ask that You would guide us in all of these places, in all of that work, and that Christ would have the glory. Remember all the churches in Edinburgh, all the people that we are close to as churches, those churches that preach Jesus Christ as Lord, and who live and serve Him for His glory.

Bless them we pray, and we may they all flourish. And may we see Edinburgh being transformed for the pavements up with the great and glorious gospel of Jesus Christ.

We ask it in Your precious name. Amen.