

## 4 Pillars of Vision

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[ 0 : 0 0 ] We've got a strategy day, not easy to say, on Saturday morning for the elders and deacons and women's pastoral team, the pastoral team members from 10 to 12. And we do that a couple of times a year. And I've always believed this is not actually a biblical statement.

I think the principle is absolutely biblical. I've always believed that those who plan for nothing usually achieve it. And so I think it's very important in our lives and in our churches to be people who are planning and strategizing. We're image bearers of God and He's the ultimate planner, isn't he? He's the ultimate strategist from before the foundation of the world. He has had a plan, perfect plan and a strategy which is beyond our wildest imagination. So as image bearers, we reflect that same kind of strategic planning and thinking, not quite obviously on the same level. But I think as when you're full time in ministry and as we have been together over this last while, Thomas and John and the team we have and also the elders, we do a lot of thinking. I know, sometimes might not look like that, but we do a lot of thinking and planning. And prayerfully, we seek to be guided by God's word with regard to our priorities and our focus. Working within the context God has given us. And I think these times of strategy and planning now probably spend more, you know, going over what our DNA is as a church congregation, reviewing it and planning it ahead and maybe fine tuning it. And I think when we do so, we do so remembering that God is in control, God is sovereign, as I've said, and that's a great thing. But also recognizing that there often comes times for reflection and renewal. And, you know, I mentioned on Sunday, this is one of these times, a new normal we're thinking about moving into whatever that looks like in society. And there's, you know, changes for us and changes for others who are leaving. And I suppose we think about our priorities again and what that is going to look like in practice. And so it's always good to get input from all of you. And it's good to talk to your elders, to talk to your pastoral teams, to talk to me, to, you know, know a little bit more sometimes about what we're doing, maybe asking questions, asking why we do certain things. We're perfectly happy to try and justify it. And I'm sure we get lots of things wrong. But we do seek to do what is right. And we're a family together.

And so we build forward on trust. We also build forward with the benefit of hindsight. And we pray for wisdom and strength in our weakness. And as you know, in our vision card, our kind of character card that we have, we've got four gospel pillars. We're going to look at three of them again on Saturday. But in our vision statement, we've got four gospel pillars, which is worship, mission, discipleship and community. And I just want just for a few minutes to remind ourselves of them and think about just very, very in a very kind of shallow way. But firstly, think about worship very briefly. And Matthew chapter four, and verse 10, where Jesus is, so I've plucked up different verses to look at Matthew chapter four, 10, where Jesus is being tempted by Satan, where Satan basically tells him to bow down and worship. And Jesus said, away from me Satan, for it is written, worship the Lord your God and serve him only. And we have the great reminder in Romans 12 as well, isn't it, that we're liars are to be living sacrifices. So our worship as a people together, it is broader than Sunday, it's broader than the church service. But I do think Sunday should be a highlight for us. I think it should be and we pray for it to be inspirational, inspiring, motivational, encouraging, challenging, educating, excellent. And it's important for us that we seek to do that. That involves you as you pray and listen and participate. And obviously it involves us. And I think coming out of pandemic and making a good use of Sunday is going to be strategic and important for us and a challenge. As we move back into fellowship with one another and what we do on a Sunday and how we use Sunday and how best to use it in a busy and in a high octane society that we live in. And worship of course involves all our lives as well, it's who we are. We've given our lives to God, not just our Sundays.

And that new commandment to love one another as he is loved us is an expression of our love. And I think sometimes for us it's easy to lose sight of that. It's easy for us to make idols to change our focus, to get sidetracked by life and forget what is weighty and forget who gets the glory because that's really what worship is, isn't it? I, Katrina and I sat last night and went on to Amazon Prime and watched the Alex Ferguson film. So it's basically a very personal, obviously for me, who's interested in football, I've found it very interesting, a personal look at his life, particularly since he had a brain hemorrhage.

[ 6 : 41 ] So it's much more personal than the football side really looks at his life and his upbringing. And it's a fantastic film and he's a tremendous individual and he has achieved so much in life.

But both of us looked at each other at the end and said, this is great and exciting, but a real sadness too, that he comes to his end of his life. He's afraid of dying, he speaks about death and he has no hope without Christ. And there was a real sense of emptiness there, if he's not a Christian, which he doesn't appear to be. And the glory that he has given, he's received and also he has poured out in the pursuit of his game. It really was tinged with sadness, but you should watch it. It's a brilliant programme and a brilliant cat and much to just marvel at God's gifts and people and the various characteristics that we can learn from. So I think worship is very significant and central. And of course, so is mission. That's the second of our pillars in our vision statement. And in Acts 17, verse 29, Paul is a famous evangelistic message in Athens. Paul says, therefore, since we are God offspring, we should not think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone, an image made by human design or skill. In the past, God overlooked such ignorance, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent for he is set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he is appointed. He's given a proof of this by raising him, rising him from the dead. And that, I think, has to remain or become our great motive for mission is that there is a judgment day and we will all stand before

God on that great judgment day. There's an honesty about our lives that needs to reflect that there's an urgency and there's a sacrificial love. What a great challenge it is for a man who has mission to love people and to relate to them, to know how they think so that we can bring the gospel into their thinking. Increasingly, I don't think it's a formula.

I think it's a wise recognition of sharing Jesus Christ who has transformed our lives with, I think it's going to be messy for us because life is messy. We believe in mission, we believe in planting churches, we believe in personal mission, sharing our faith and also partnership together, obviously with God and with others. And that isn't so much about a technique, I think it's just how Jesus is impacting us will enable us to share that transformation with others. It takes courage, it takes compassion, it takes conviction.

And it'll also take rejection because some people will not accept it, of course, but we'll still keep loving them and we'll still keep praying for them and we'll not aggravate them, we'll not harass them, but we'll continue to show the grace of God in our lives and mission and how that works out together and individually is very important as we think forward. But also the third thing is discipleship, equipping discipleship and that's very much important part of our ongoing work. I read there from First Thessalonians and it's a great repassage and Paul's really speaking about his work among them which was that he made disciples, that's what he did. And I think, I love the phrase that seems to be quite trendy just now that we are to be making disciples, we're disciple making disciples so that we are disciples and we encourage others to also be disciples. We want to have converts who we will then disciple and that is going to be a challenge. Hamish and Anna have just had a new baby and it's transformed their lives and we've seen that with Scott and Amy in the last week while and lots of others. And what do we notice most about that is their lives are turned upside down when new life comes into the home and everything is focused on caring for and nourishing that child and that will be the same if God blesses us with converts, making disciples, not just converts but disciples will turn our lives and our church upside down. For good though, for good because it will really give us a reason for being much more serious about our faith I think sometimes. I very in a very mischievous and bad way mimicked Thomas on Sunday morning by rolling up my sleeves but you know that's exactly what we need to do. If God will bless us and as we work it's the unglamorous work of discipling one another. That's not just waiting for new people but at the moment keeping doing it, serving one another, serving even in the church, you know the welcoming, the creche, the kids church, the rotas, the family that we're seeking to maintain. We're not wanting to maintain an institution, it's a family. You know what's really interesting, I don't know if

you noticed it in the passage in Thessalonians when Paul is describing how he disciplines them. Do you notice how he does it? He says, I'm like a mother with you and then he says I'm like a father with you. It's really tremendous.

[13:11] He speaks in these two ways about the way he cared for them and disciplined them. We were gentle among you like a nursing mother taking care of her own children and then later on he says for we know in verse 11 like a father with his children how he exhorted each one of you and encouraged you. Isn't that great? Our discipling is to be familial, it's to be family-oriented. It's like how we would treat our children and that's how we disciple one another and that's really important and I think in our church family, discipling one another involves getting beyond the surface, it's getting beyond just saying hello, how are you? Fine, yes, how are you? Oh yeah, I'm very well as well. Becoming Jesus people together and sharing our faith and being accountable to one another and loving and serving one another and you know, I think the city groups are a great place for that to happen. It's tough but it's great and I think again can I just say with new Christians when we pray for them, when we see new Christians, maybe particularly new Christians that will come with a very different worldview. Maybe some of the girls from Sparkle Sisters or someone from Narcotics Anonymous or maybe if we're sharing our faith with a married gay couple and one of them is converted, that's going to be a journey of discipleship with them.

It's not going to be instantly mature 9 to 5 Christians that have got all the answers and know how to live. There'll be one step forward sometimes, two steps back, there'll be tears and there'll be brokenness but that's what we're called to do in discipleship. It's not clean cut and it's not always easy. And then the last thing is community and again I think that's such a crucial part of what we are and what we want to be more and more.

We're adopted into God's family and I keep speaking in that context of family and I do think there's an overwhelming loneliness in the lost world around us and sometimes in our own hearts. I think this has been a year of isolation for many and there'll be a readjustment for us coming out of that, learning a new social skills, learning how to cook again for other people as we open our home and things like that. But genuinely I think, interestingly I think community is the outworking of the other three, worship, mission and discipleship.

It kind of is the glue for them all and as we are doers of the word and not hearers only part of that is just living and working at community. Honestly and this is not a, I'm not making excuses here and I'm not passing responsibility but I don't think it primarily is something that's centrally organised or centrally driven. It's certainly motivated and encouraged but I think it's each of our responsibility, every one of us and however that works out, you know that's where we all matter together. I think we're wrong if we have a hierarchy in the church. Yes we have biblical structure and we have leadership but there's a huge variety of gifts and there's equality between us all and I often feel those who do the unseen work in St Columbus or indeed in any church are the most important and the ones who'll be nearest to throne room in heaven. So moving forward I think we need each other and in community we're going to look out I hope for one another, look out particularly for those who are in most need and as we serve one another and as we forget ourselves we become most fulfilled I think. So we're looking to open our homes and our hearts and whatever gifts we have in that area and can I just encourage you again as you've always been brilliant at doing that vital work of welcoming new people when they come into our fellowship or into our gospel community informally however that looks for any of us. Let's be really strategic and deliberate about that and it does involve a deliberation, it involves an intentionality to look across the shoulders of the friend that you're speaking to and embracing the visitor, the new person among us. So it's something that we need to work hard at because we're a gathered people, it's something that the city groups hope to form as well but it is hard, I know it's hard work and maybe it's something we think is a struggle as we come out of this time of isolation but I hope that gently and slowly that we'll reconfigure ourselves. I'm really excited moving forward, I'm excited for Thomas starting in Carlyway and what that looks like, I'm excited for the partnership we share,

I'm also excited for us, God's stripping us back, he's going to refresh us, we're going to be refocused, whatever we do we're going to need to keep prayer critical to our moving forward and I honestly believe that God will continue to surprise us, energize us, stick with us and bless us as we focus on him and please pray for the next steps and please be part of that and please own the work, it's something that's very exciting and remember that the work of the Gospel is very much not about them, it's about us, the work of the church, it's not my work, you take that onus and you take

that responsibility, it's our family together and just as a close that you remember that as we move forward we look to call again another assistant minister and you know in our context we've known about Thomas finishing for several months and obviously a number of months ago we set things in motion by asking the congregation if they're willing for us and happy for us to pursue the possibility of Corey coming as a potential replacement and at the time you gave that the green light and we talked then and we've prayed all the way through about God opening doors and opening doors at the right time and continuing to guide us and it's been tough because it's a bit of a chicken and an egg situation with legislation and with timing and calling someone that has to become a minister first so there's a commitment before we're even calling but throughout we've tried to do things properly and in the right time which is why we haven't said a lot about it up till now, you know some people have been asking what's happening, what's going to happen but Thomas has still been with us and that's significant and formally we obviously couldn't do anything anyway so we have tried to do that and we've seen the doors opening in terms of the process that Corey has gone through Presbytery Board of Ministry General Assembly is now a free church minister in an unusual position, there's been a free church minister working in Jackson Mississippi and Thomas is finishing date as until this Sunday so we weren't wanting to and wouldn't have done anything before then but following that we'll put out a letter with more details and I think on Sunday I said it was going to be a week tonight the coronational meeting sorry that was wrong it was originally then but I forgot it was a five Wednesday month so we'll do this city group as a follow-on from this prayer meeting as we have been doing and then on the 26th which is two weeks tonight sorry 23rd is it so that's my wife keeping me right what's the date okay sorry just getting to that time of year anyway it's two weeks tonight whatever the date is we'll be having a congregational meeting too we will propose as elders the election of Corey to forward to the Presbytery and hopefully then if that happens the Presbytery will come and oversee the signing of a call in July but that's just where we are and in July and August all the Wednesday evenings will be engine rooms just to give city group

[ 23 : 01 ] meetings a formal rest and break and I was going to say for all the homes that host them but you haven't been hosting so it's not a break from that point of view but I would encourage you to meet up in ones and twos together either on a Wednesday or any other time pray together be together but we'll continue on zoom for the Wednesday during July and August in the summer and then hopefully we'll be back to meeting together in person physically and rebooting the the city groups in September as we hope to do so we're excited about that and we're excited what God has to do isn't it great this is his kingdom and his kingdom is coming and his will is being done in earth as it is in heaven so we'll be thinking about some of these things on Saturday morning as well and please speak to any of your elders or any of the elders or any of their pastoral team or me or Thomas or John or anyone about things and then we just look forward to what God has in store for us together. Amen.