



Inspiring Your Family

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Every year, we kick off with a series on the strategy of our church, the purposes of our church, the mission statement of our church. This year we are calling it *Inspiring Your Family*. I'm going to be really honest with you. If there is one message I recycle every year, it's this message because the staff says we have to give it to kick off the year. And the elders and leaders say, "Let's be reminded of who we are as a church and why we do things the way we do them."

To kick off this year... I don't do resolutions, but I am going to change one thing in 2016, personally, because my kids have told me I need to. I think every parent is going to relate to this. My children are blaming me these days for never finishing a sentence. They say, "Dad, I don't know if you ever catch yourself, but you get halfway through sentence and stop."

I even went back to some of the sermons from last year and I do it in preaching. Let me tell you why I do it. It's because of my children. I tell them they interrupt me all the time. They ask me a question and I answer the question, but I get halfway through the answer and they ask me another question. Does any parent in the place today know what I'm talking about? So I am going to make a change because I'm no longer fielding questions from my children. That's how I'm fixing that.

I heard one parent this week. Their daughter asked, "Mom, what's it like to be a parent?" The mom decided to show her. She just started asking the child questions until she cried. I thought that was a fantastic way. So I'm going to try to finish my...

Okay, so we're going to do *Inspiring Your Family* as this morning's message. We will be 14 years old come May this year. Eight years ago, we sat in a room. We locked ourselves in a room for a week with ministry leaders. A couple of them came in from around the country to help all of our leaders here determine where to take this church, what to do with what God has given us. We brought all the leaders from our church together and by the time the process was over, we involved over 100 people from our church in all these strategy sessions.

Out of that came this mission statement: "*To inspire the family to become fully devoted followers of Christ.*" That's our desire. It's very simple, but today, we are going to use it as our outline to walk through our mission, our purposes, and our strategy as a church. You can go to our website and you will see it all over printed materials here. It used to be to inspire *people* to become fully devoted followers of Christ, but we changed it to *family* to fit the DNA of our church.

This wasn't just one person or two people or three people saying this needs to be our mission statement. We did an historical evaluation of our church and then we sat down and asked where the Lord was leading us and, through much prayer, we said this is where we are headed as a church. So we are going to use this mission statement as the outline. Because of my Baptist roots, it has three parts this morning. And there is even a little alliteration for the Southern Baptist. You have family and fully starting with the same letter.

Inspire

What does it mean to inspire someone? Here's what we believe at our church when it comes to inspiring people. **We believe excellence in environment and experience honor God and inspires people.** When you bring a family member or a friend to visit this church for the first time, we want them to experience excellence. We define excellence as bringing our best, doing the best with what you have. It's not that we believe in extravagance in environment and experience honors God and inspires people; we believe in excellence. Let's do the best we can with what we have and the resources we have available.

Does anybody remember, maybe in the church you grew up in, when people would bring their hand-me-down furniture to the church? If you were in youth group, you remember this. We got everybody's hand-me-down couches. I remember starting in ministry as a youth pastor and people deciding to get rid of their couch. Instead of taking it to the dump, they would bring it to the church because "It's not good enough for my house, but it's good enough for the church." Does anybody know what I'm talking about? I remember thinking *Where did we get that attitude?* Where did we get the attitude that our best should be at home, but our best shouldn't be at the church, so let's just give them the leftovers?

We are going to bring our best. We put a lot into the environment you see around here. The last two Sundays we had hot chocolate. We love those little surprises. We spend a lot of time in the experience. My wife happens to be our Environment Director; she's in charge of the way things look. Katie Gumm back there is our Experience Director. She spends her week planning everything that's taking place in here today. We believe that we are going to bring our best; that's our desire.

Here's why it's important. Have you ever been to a restaurant, a store, or even someone's home where you did not feel welcome? As a customer, you felt you shouldn't be there. This may be awkward because some of you still may have family with you during the holidays. They were welcome when they showed up, but now they need to get moving. Have you ever left someone's home and thought *I didn't feel very comfortable in there? I felt like I was in the way. I felt like they weren't planning on me being there.*

They'll even say things to you like "Well, it's no big deal tonight. We kept it simple because you people are a hassle." I always take it to the next level when people say they didn't put a lot of thought into this... We've shown up to people's homes who didn't know we were coming. Have you ever had that happen? We were invited by a friend and they didn't have enough food. It was very awkward.

We don't want that experience or environment for the guests who come and visit our church. When a guest leaves Woodland Hills, do you know what we want them to know about their experience and environment here? We want them to know they matter to God and they matter to us. That's why we put the time and energy into the week that we do. That's why we put the time and energy into the gathering like we do. We want you to know you matter to God and you matter to us.

This is why Amy and I have stepped up our hospitality in our home. We have experienced some incredible hospitality from folks here at Woodland Hills. One lady always comes to mind and I always give credit to her for giving Amy and I just this oomph of hospitality. Her name is Jennifer White. She splits her time between Woodland Hills and her church in Louisiana. We went to her house years ago and when we got there, she made us all put on aprons. We all started cooking in the kitchen. My first thought was *Come on! Let me sit down, give me something non-alcoholic to drink and let me enjoy the time.* But we all cooked for about an hour or two, and it was kind of fun. Then we sat down. You know you've experienced good hospitality when four hours goes by so fast. That was a special time.

You also know bad hospitality because you can't get out of there quick enough. We went to a restaurant in Springfield and the name is not important. It was just getting started and it was a nice restaurant. They weren't ready for us. They weren't prepared for us. What really made it an awkward evening was there was a VIP table set up in the middle of the restaurant. It was over an hour and a half getting our food delivered. The waitresses and waiters were so embarrassed by it that they stopped talking to their tables; they went and hid.

What made it awkward was that the VIP table had eight people sitting at it and every five to seven minutes, the chef would come out with a new course, set it down, and explain where it was grown and how he cooked it and then they would dig in. Everybody from around the restaurant was looking at that center table in anger, wonder why they were getting such special treatment. I walked out and my thought was that they blew it.

You can give a restaurant a second chance, a third chance, a fourth chance and we have given that restaurant another chance. But we don't want guest leaving thinking *That was a great experience for the people who go to that church, but as a guest, we were outcasts. We didn't belong there. They didn't talk to us. They didn't speak in a way we like to be spoken to.* We don't want them leaving that way. We want them leaving, knowing they matter to God and they matter to us. That's why we put the time in.

Family

Whether you're single or married, young or old, whether you're starting a family or just coming out of a family... Maybe you're leaving your parents' home to start your own home. We believe a family is a great picture of the church. We believe **the church is a family, not a building, a business, or a morning a week.** Some look to church as just a day of the week. It's more than a morning a week. This is where we are gathering, this is game day, but tomorrow is game day and Tuesday is game day and Wednesday is game day... We're the church all week.

We're not a building. We meet in a castle. We meet in a chapel. We meet in different facilities, but it's not about a place that you go to. We're not a business. This is what I love about church being a family. We don't operate on red tape. We have a budget in our home, but our budget changes in our home. Does anybody's budget change in your home? Did anybody spend more in December than you planned on? Things change. Just like a family... As our dad would always say, we can turn this car around. We are changing as a family. We're not bound by red tape. We're not a bureaucracy.

Here's what's great. We don't have committees at our church. I'm praising my father in heaven for that one. Do you know what a committee becomes at a church? It becomes a group of people determining what one or two people should be doing. We're not led by any of that. We're not driven by any of that. We are a family. If you are here today and your family is not one that warmly accepts you or one that greets you or you don't have great Thanksgivings and Christmases and all that to reflect back on, we want our church to be your family because we are a family.

Here's what I've really been processing the last couple of weeks. You got it last Sunday in the message and you get it again today, but a friend of mine years ago who lost his son told me "I'm so tired of Christians telling me I'll one day stop grieving." He's a leader of a ministry, but he's saying, "Christians just don't understand how to grieve and hope all at the same time." My friend said, "It's like two rails on a railroad track. They are together and they will always be. I grieve the loss of my son. I grieve the unexpected loss of my son, but I have great hope."

I was trying to process this week why being a part of a family this size is so emotionally exhausting. Not just for a leader and not just for a pastor, but for all of us. Why should it be emotionally exhausting? Why should we be worn out after a given Sunday? I think it's because of what the Apostle Paul shares with us in Romans 12: 15. ***15 Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn.*** We don't rejoice on this Sunday and mourn the next Sunday. Do you know what we are doing as a family today? I will give you some examples of this. We are rejoicing and mourning all at the same time. They are travel companions. They go together.

Let me give you some examples. **Our church family rejoices with those planning a wedding and mourns with those finalizing a divorce.** It's in here today. There are many getting ready to start their new life as husband and wife in 2016 and they are sitting in front of, behind, or next to someone who is signing the papers this week. The emotions of rejoicing and mourning all at the same time... We say at our church to be careful with your new relationship. We say this all the time as well. Don't ask us to celebrate or rejoice in your new relationship when we are still mourning the death of your marriage. We don't want to hop out of relationships so quickly today and into new relationships. I tell Amy that sometimes I don't know whether I'm coming or going with this stuff.

Our church family rejoices with those released from prison and mourns with those about to be sentenced. They are in here today. You are going to be dealing with the consequences of your sin. We mourn that loss of freedom with you. At the same time, we... I've met a couple in the last few weeks that were celebrating with those recently released and ready to start a new chapter in 2016.

Our church family rejoices with those who beat cancer and mourns with those recently diagnosed.

This all on a given Sunday. “We got a great doctor’s report.” I hug them, high five them, and celebrate with them and move to the next person who would like prayer because they go in tomorrow to get their results. This all happens in the same day.

Our church family rejoices with those welcoming a newborn and mourns with those burying a parent.

This one happened to me before the first service. Very first thing. I got out of the car today, got my notes settled, stepped down, and went to talk to folks. The very first person shows me a phone with pictures of their brand new grandchild. We celebrated together. “And I had a great grandchild all in one week!” We were rejoicing. The very next person that I spoke to had two deaths in the family in the last week. We are rejoicing and mourning at the same time.

Our church family rejoices with those buying their first house and mourns with those filing for

bankruptcy. In the first service, I heard about a lady in our church who this is her the last Sunday in our church. She’s going out west so she can sell property. She says, “I’m not able to make it. It’s hard doing my profession here.” How many of you are buyers right now in the market? Not one person is buying a house? How many of you are trying to sell one? And the hands start to go up.

Our church family rejoices with those starting a new job and mourns with those getting fired. This last one hits very close to home.

Our church family rejoices with those who have a dry basement and mourns with those who flood.

I have to be honest with you. This was an odd week. I felt all sorts of awkward when I would go on Facebook after talking with someone who cleared out their basement and their basement flooded and they got all that mess. I know there was no loss of life and I’m praising our Father in heaven for that, but I just know what this couple is going through and then for them to go on Facebook and see that picture of that security guard from the movie Vacation, saying, “Sorry, Folks, Missouri is closed.” I know everybody was joking and stuff, but that’s where it gets really awkward and emotionally draining.

You have people rejoicing and celebrating, but remember you are part of a church family and you're sitting next to someone who is mourning as well. We want you to know that if you have been flooded... This is why we take a mercy offering on the first Sunday of every month. Every time we take the Lord’s Supper, we take a mercy offering and that goes to meet the physical needs of family members here in our congregation. If you need help... I’m assuming right now that it would be calling A to Z Restoration or whatever restoration company you can get to your house to help you dry out and clean up. If you don’t have the finances to do that, we want you to know that is what being a part of a family is all about. We are here for you. We have the resources to help you with that. We want to help you with that. And we are going to see that more in a second as we move from inspiring the family to our purposes.

I’ve taught the purposes of the church for 20 years now. This is my 20th year in ministry. I’ve always been passionate about these five purposes. I believe whole-heartedly that there are five purposes of the church. One is not greater than the others. A lot of times, people will leave a church because yes, the purposes are there, but we’re not spending enough time on the purpose they love the most. We’re not highlighting a purpose.

This is where it really gets tricky. Some folks came from a church that did it a certain way and this was our primary purpose. We don't have a primary purpose; we have five purposes and we work diligently to keep them all in balance. We work very hard from budgeting to staffing to spending time together as a family. We want to make sure these five purposes are being lived out. As I go through them, I may pick on your church you grew up in a little bit. I'll pick on mine. I'll pick on this one. I'll pick on denominations. One of the reasons you're seeing a decline in a lot of major denominations is because a lot of denominations have picked their favorite purpose and they focus on that one purpose, not to the exclusion of the other purposes, but they've put the other purposes down just a little bit lower.

Worship is more than music.

Music is an overflow. Music is an expression of our worship, but it's far more than what we do on Sunday morning here in this environment and in this experience. Jesus puts it this way in Matthew 22: 37... By the way, all five of these purposes we will look at today are given to us by our Lord and Savior and then they are modeled in the first church in Acts 2: 42-27. We'll look at these three primary texts as we go through this. Matthew 22:37 says, ***"Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind."*** That is worship: loving Jesus, putting Jesus at the center. The first church praised God together. They spent time worshipping together.

I asked our leaders and I already introduced you to Katie, but Matt and Katie Gumm lead our worship ministries here at the church. I've asked them to share core values so we could put it in their words. Here's what Katie and Matt share, speaking of authenticity:

Our heart's desire is for worship and the worship experience to feel authentic. Our prayer is for those leading our ministry to have an authentic relationship with Jesus Christ, and that our congregation could tangibly experience the overflow of their worship on a Sunday morning. We believe in excellence. We're passionate about creating an excellent experience from musicianship to vocals to lighting and sound to transitions and beyond. We want nothing to distract from the personal moments of worship, but rather to encourage and inspire those personal moments.

Humility is paired tightly with the value of excellence. We strive to inspire the best and highest level of quality from those serving on our team. It is not only necessary, but essential we all approach our gifts with humility. Nothing can hinder the power of the Holy Spirit more than a haughty attitude. We prepare, we practice, we correct discrepancies in rehearsal, and then allow the power of the Holy Spirit to take it all to the next level as only the Holy Spirit can do. That is worship.

Now if you grew up in a church that would be considered a worship church, the pastor was viewed as the worship leader. Everyone there was viewed as worshippers. Your goal was to come in and worship and everything was about the experience, everything was about connection. We believe this is a purpose, but it's not the only purpose or the primary purpose. It's to be balanced with the other purposes.

Discipleship is more than Bible study.

Maybe you grew up in a church where discipleship was the primary purpose. I went to a seminary that taught this as the primary purpose. I have many friends who lead in churches who would tell you discipleship is the primary purpose of the church. I will never say those words. Discipleship is a purpose of the church and it's to be with all of the other purposes.

Maybe you went to a Bible study church. This is where the pastor stands up as an expert Bible teacher. Everybody in the congregation becomes a Bible student. You open your Bible, you open a notebook, you write down words, you have an outline, you get Greek, you get Hebrew, and you get Latin.

Nine years ago this year, our church family here split over this purpose right here. We had many people in the congregation that felt we should be a discipleship church and we needed more Bible study. I was all for more Bible study, but I wouldn't say, "Discipleship is the primary or only purpose of the church." If you are puffed up with knowledge and you don't back that up with love... Jesus didn't say you will be known as my disciples by how much of the Bible you know. Jesus said, "You'll be known as my disciples by the way you love one another." Knowledge puffs you up, but love builds up.

So discipleship is more than... I hope you get the more than part for all my charismatic friends. Discipleship is more than Bible study, but it's part of it. Jesus said you are to go into all the world and make disciples and you will see that in a second. Then in Matthew 28: 20 "**...teaching them to obey everything I've commanded you.**" We are to teach and reprove and correct and rebuke, yes, that is a purpose of the church. And you see in Acts 2: 42 **They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship...** We want you to be committed to worship, discipleship, and this transitions us to the third purpose we will look at.

Fellowship is more than potlucks.

Fellowship is more than out of date mayonnaise covering... I have issues with potlucks and it's just because I've had some really bad food poisoning issues. When you start your ministry in South Georgia and they bring the food at 9:00 and leave it out until 2:00 in the heat of 100 degrees, you're not doing too well by 6:00 pm.

Fellowship is more than just eating together. It is eating together, but it's more than that. Most of us in here were raised in a church that had fellowship as the primary. Here's why we know that. Seventy to eighty percent of churches... The number changes a little bit here and there, so I don't know the exact number, but I know it's seventy to eighty percent of churches have less than 200 people gathering together this morning.

The pastor becomes a chaplain. I've been to plenty of churches where they couldn't care less if the pastor could preach or not. They didn't care about him being a worship leader. He didn't need to be an expert Bible teacher. But he better be there every time their family needs them. That's a chaplain. When they gather, it's a family reunion. So the pastor is going to be at the anniversary party, the birthday party, every time we are in the hospital, every time we are sick... That's what you do. You visit

and “We want you to visit so much that I know it’s going to affect the quality of your message on Sunday and we’re okay with that.” You become family members and the pastor is the chaplain. A lot of us grew up in this.

In Matthew 22: 39, Jesus said, **“Love your neighbor as yourself,”** so we go outside of ourselves and we are to love one another. We see this modeled in the first church. This is so important; I love this. In Acts 2: 44, **All the believers were together and had everything in common.** I just want to make sure because we’ve talked about this and it’s going to come up in ministry as well. This is not promoting a democratic platform.

We’re hearing a lot of talk about how we should have income equality and everybody should make the same and we need to raise the minimum wage. You’re going to hear that all throughout 2016. Having everything in common is a purpose of the church, not a role of government. I don’t want to go all republican on you or T.D. Jakes. They had everything in common. This is the purpose of fellowship. Every time I turn on the television and I see people talking about the role of government, I’m thinking *don’t you dare steal that purpose of the church. That’s the church and stop telling me it’s the role of government to take care of my parents when they are old. That’s not a role of government; it’s my job.*

But look, fellowship does include eating. **They broke bread in their homes and ate together...** and this is important **...with glad and sincere hearts.** That’s fellowship. When you are together with believers, you should have glad and sincere hearts. When you gather with other followers of Jesus, you should have glad and sincere hearts. You should leave a meal with other believers with glad and sincere hearts. If you don’t, you’re not fulfilling the purpose of fellowship and you have to ask the question of what needs to be done? What we are talking about today are these purposes... They are the purposes of our church; they are the purposes of my life. They are the purposes of your life as a follower of Jesus. They are the purposes of your family. They are the purposes of your family table. I want to make sure I’m covering all five of these purposes at our table and I want to make sure people leave our home with glad and sincere hearts.

I’m going to be really honest with you. As a pastor of a church this size in a town this size... So we are a pretty small town and we know a lot of people. There are some people who are in this service because they know people in the 9:00 service that they don’t want to see. I’m not going to make you stand, but you know I’m talking to you. For some it was a business deal. For some, it was something ill spoken in a home group and it just made you mad and now you avoid that person. And when you’re together with another follower of Jesus, you’re not experiencing the glad and sincere heart.

I just want to encourage you to make 2016 about reconciling those relationships. Maybe someone owes you some money. Maybe someone said they were going to do something and they never did. This is why we have elders. This is why we have leaders in the church. We can meet with you. We can help you reconcile that relationship. As a pastor, I love being involved in confrontation with conflict that I didn’t have anything to do with. Those are good days in ministry. People involve me in confrontation sometimes and they go on and on about what happened and I’m thinking *this is sweet; let’s just sit in this for a while. It’s not about me; it’s about you two; let’s work this out.*

Do people leave your home going “Man, I couldn’t get out of there fast enough.” Or, do they leave your home going “That was good.” We want people leaving this church family going “Wow, I’m leaving with a glad and sincere heart.” Last Sunday was a heavy topic, but many have told me that they left with hope. Even though it was heavy, they left with knowing their hope is in Jesus and that’s all they need. What does your fellowship look like for your family and for you in 2016?

Ministry is more than programs.

Again, love your neighbor as yourself. So we, in expressions of love... and I will go on to Acts 2. This is so important. Again, a purpose of the church, not a role of government. ***They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need.*** That’s what family does. We identify needs and we meet those needs. The first church saw people had needs so it wasn’t down on people who were productive; it wasn’t down on people who could make good money. That’s not at all what that’s about. What it’s about is saying okay these people have family members who are hurting and what kind of family doesn’t take care of people within the family? In 1 Timothy 5, if you won’t care for your family, the scripture says you’re worse than an infidel. You are worse than an unbeliever if you won’t care for your own family. So we will do whatever it takes to meet the needs of those around us.

Now this is where it’s important to show you how these purposes get all out of whack. A lot of churches believe that if their bulletin is thick, it proves they are doing this purpose. We say that’s just not true. We don’t judge it because the church at Ephesus... If you read in Revelation, Jesus came down on the church at Ephesus. He said, “You’re doing a lot of great things in my name.” And he commends them for their ministry. He says, “However, you have forgotten your first love.”

So what is he saying there? He’s saying, “You’re doing well with ministry, but you have forgotten worship?” Many pastors have said this for years. “So you’ve allowed your work for God to destroy God’s work in you.” “You’ve taken all that you do for God and it has replaced what God is doing in you and through you and his continually growing you as you transform to the image of Christ.” That’s what we don’t want to have happen. We get so busy. We have to hold our programs lightly because here’s what happens. People get passionate about their programs and if you don’t get passionate about the program they are passionate about, they accuse you of not being serious about ministry. I can say no to your program all day long and still be passionate about this purpose and that’s because your program is a strategy of this purpose.

Every week, I get emails from parachurch ministries wanting our church to support what they’re doing and when you say, “No, we won’t be doing that,” it’s like then you don’t take this seriously. That’s not true. These aren’t ministries that are frustrated with us at all. Years ago, we had a lady who was passionate about Alpha. It’s a great evangelistic ministry. A lot of churches use it and many people come to Christ. When we said we were not going to do Alpha, she said “Well, then you’re not serious about evangelism.” That’s not true. There are many pro-life ministries that we don’t support, but I am pro-life. So I can have the purpose, but not support the hundred different strategies or programs out there that support that purpose. Don’t get the two confused.

Let's meet needs. That's what ministry is about. It's about identifying and meeting needs. Caring for those around you.

Evangelism is more than altar calls.

Now there are Baptists in here going "You had me all the way up this one right here and now..." I'll say it again. This is a strategy, not a purpose. No one did more of these than Billy Graham. But just because it's a strategy the Lord used in his time and his day, that doesn't mean people aren't coming to faith because that strategy is not being used.

Evangelism is reaching people with the gospel of Jesus, sharing faith. I would say this is the most neglected purpose in the church because so few Christians actually do this. It depends on what research you look at or studies you look at, but over 90% of Christians do not share their faith on a regular basis. I just want to encourage you in 2016... Just like maybe reconciling a relationship for the purpose of fellowship, what are you going to do with the purpose of evangelism in your family?

For us, we are serious about making sure there is a place at our family table for those who are lost. Think about it. Amy and I give our lives to making sure this is a place for those who are lost to come and hear the gospel of Jesus and place faith in Jesus. We get excited about that. Then we decided we probably should be doing more of that in our home. Our family needs to be doing more outreach. Our table needs an empty chair for us to invite the lost.

There was a worker that was working on one of our projects a little bit ago and he had some tattoos. All I'm going to say is this. I'm not coming down on tattoos. Don't get worried. These tattoos were old. I do want to tell teenagers this. Before you get a tattoo of that cute little sparrow, remember it's going to be a crow one day, okay? I need you to really process those tattoos before you start inking up your body. Anyway... I could tell this guy's tattoos were old, but they were very satanic. I caught myself, as a Midwestern cleaned up boy... As soon as I saw them, I was thinking *Okay, please don't hurt me*. I'm just telling you what was in my thoughts.

Do you know what I asked the Lord? This was right before we had Dick Foth and Dick Foth is a big one on this and using the table and hospitality. I said to myself, *Okay, that's not the right attitude, Ted. That is not the attitude of our Lord*. What's the right attitude? The attitude is invite him over for dinner so you can see how your kids will react. Don't judge me. I'm thinking what every single one of you has to wrestle with in your own soul and heart. Does your family table have a space open for your lost neighbor? Does it have space for a random person you meet? I don't think any meal with strangers is complete until Christ is shared. Share Christ. Especially after you feed people. You don't have a more captive audience than after someone is full, and then at dessert is the invitation. There is no altar I'm bringing them to, but there is the invitation. Go and make disciples of all nations. That's given to you, follower of Jesus. That is the call upon you.

Look at what the first church... I think this is important and I'll just touch on this and then we will move to our strategy and close. ***The Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.*** Again, that was out of the first church.

About 25 years ago, the church growth movement kicked in and we all went to seminars. We were taught how to grow churches. It kind of got away from us in many ways because we focused more on growth than we did on health. When you balance these five purposes, when you are a fully devoted follower of Jesus in your home and in your life and in your church, I believe that's health and I believe from health, we grow. Instead of focusing on growth and just how to get more people, we focus on health and people show up. This is so important to understand, pastor or church leader, it wasn't you who added to their numbers daily those who were being saved; it was the Lord adding to their numbers daily those who were being saved.

About 15 years ago, I was part of church split that split over this purpose. I was the senior pastor and they told me I was too into discipleship. So think about how whacked out I am. I go through a split because I'm told I'm too discipleship driven and then a few years later, I go through a split because I'm not discipleship driven enough. It's because we're letting one of the five or we're letting two of the five purposes take over.

The problem is when this becomes your primary purpose, you see your pastor as the evangelist. To me, this is dangerous when you think your sole purpose in life, as a follower of Jesus, is to bring the lost to another man to lead them to Christ. No, you share Christ with them. It's not the primary task of one person. A lot of churches have focused on this and the danger of being an evangelistically driven church is you can become five miles wide and about a half inch deep.

We want Bible study, discipleship. We want potlucks, fellowship, worship, ministry, and evangelism. To me, when you make that the goal of your life and of your family and of your church and you pursue all of those with full devotion, that's when you begin to experience the richness of Christ. It takes a lot. You have to make sure that you give your attention to all of them. Ask yourself that question personally in 2016 as we move into our strategy. What do we do with these purposes?

We prepare singles.

We are passionate about preparing singles. About half of the people in here on any given Sunday, maybe a little bit less in our church, are single. We know from research that about 90% of you will marry one day, so we do talk a lot about marriage here. We are preparing you to leave home. We are preparing parents to help with their single children. You have singles in your home. There are about 450 or 500 of them running around in both services today. They are singles in your home and we talk about marriage because that's the next strategy.

We prioritize marriage.

We talk about marriage on the second Sunday of every month. Just to share with you again from some of the leaders in our church, this is R.G. and Karen Yallaly. They lead our Marriage 911 program. This is what they believe about marriage and our work here with marriage at our church.

Our desire is to walk alongside couples and help them reignite their love for God and one another. We believe that when a marriage is broken, God's power can fix it and we don't need to throw it away. We

believe every marriage can be saved by placing Christ in the center of that relationship. We believe marriage vows are meant to be honored and not disregarded.

I had a friend this week who did an article. In his article, he said, "To be a good disciple of Jesus, you have to have a good marriage." He may have been misquoted in the article because many of you are pursuing Christ with full devotion and yet you are in a bad marriage because there are two people involved in your marriage. To be a good disciple, you must be a good spouse. Being a good spouse is not a guarantee of a good marriage. So what's the solution? Be a fully devoted follower of Christ and bring that into your marriage. That's the answer. That's why we talk a lot about marriage and there are some of you visiting that think we talk too much about marriage. Well, we are a marriage and family church and we are ministering to the family. We don't know how to inspire the family without talking about the start of it, which is marriage. We are going to continue to talk about marriage and family into 2016.

We partner with parents.

Mesa Mitchell and Stephanie Watson lead out in this. Here are a few of the practical ways. This is what Mesa shares.

We send out a monthly take-home kit for families full of activities. It's the first Sunday of every month we send that out. We send home monthly Parent Cues, explaining the upcoming teaching and the verse. We sent out texts with simple and easy activities for parents once a week. Here's the part I love. Most leaders serve every week and with the same small group. We believe consistency builds relationships with kids and families. We believe every child is in a phase and so we believe we don't want to miss it. We want to make sure we are asking and expecting kids to be kids at their appropriate level.

Stephanie added this last week and I thought this was very important to what we are discussing today. The word *partner* there goes both ways. She says:

Partnering is a two-way relationship. I feel like we are always trying to find ways to meet parents where they are and make it possible for any parent, no matter their Bible knowledge or spiritual background, to be able to lead their child spiritually. Literally, any parent can do it. And the parents who are more spiritually mature can overlook the value of working together with the church and do their own thing. I believe that there is such a powerful message to children to know their church and parents are working together.

And all God's people said...

That is our heartbeat. So some of you in here are, maybe for the first time in your life, in 2016, and you never planned on it, but you're a single parent. We want to equip you and teach you and remind you of these five purposes. If you're newly married without kids, we want to equip you and teach you with these purposes. If you are a grandparent, we want to equip you with these purposes as you're raising your single grandchildren and single great grandchildren. This is our strategy, this is our desire.

Here's how we want to leave you today. Starting Point is Sunday, February 28. If you want to learn more about our church and why we do what we do, how we do it, and why we spent a whole Sunday talking about the purposes as we did today, we really want to encourage you to take the time to sign up for this before you leave today or go on our website woodhills.org and sign up. We provide a meal with that as well.

And, we are giving every family a gift as they leave here today. It came out this month. It's the first book I did with my wife, Amy. It's called *The Power of Home*. It's a 90-day devotional, building a strong family, day by day. It has 90, 400-500 word devotionals in it. We're going through it with our family. After we wrote it, we said we have nothing left to say. By the time we got to day 80, we were like "I think I got nothing. Do you have anything?" It's everything we've poured into our family over the last ten to twelve years. The five purposes of the church are in here and how we do that at our family table. The family table is in here. What we believe about marriage and family is in here.

My wife wants you to know not to bring the book to her to sign; she doesn't sign books. So I will sign her name for her. How many of you sign the back of your spouse's check. I just want to see. You don't know if it's legal or not. It is legal; I made that decision. You can't sign other people's names; that's when you go to jail. One per family. We encourage you to kick off the new year with this; this is our gift to you. We are grateful you're here and we wish you a Happy New Year. Thank you for being a part of our church family.

I encourage you to take today's message home and process it as a family. People choose a church and they leave a church based on something specific they are looking for in a church. However, as we looked at ecclesiology – the study of the church – maybe God's calling you to have a little broader view than just your tradition or your history as a family or what you grew up in or the denomination you were a part of.

Father, it's in the name of Jesus that we thank you for our time. We ask that as we go through the new year, we would be challenged and encouraged as families, as a church, as individuals. We want to be a blessing to this community and continue to reach out. We're grateful for our staff and our leaders and our volunteers who have spent so much time every week making our environment and our experience happen. We are grateful for what you've called us to do. May marriages and families experience full devotion to Jesus Christ this year in a way they have never experienced it. May they make that their goal and pursue it with everything they have.

It is in the name of Jesus that everyone agreed and said... Amen.

I'm going to close with this from Brian Bronn. He's an elder who has been leading our home groups for years. He says:

Our home group leaders come together. We've defined our church home groups as communities committed to loving, knowing and growing in Christ together based on Acts 2: 42-47. Our thoughts have been on extending the high effectiveness of our large group gathering on Sunday mornings to home and small group environments for fellowship, discipleship, ministry, and missions, all of which are facilitated better in circles than they are in rows.

If you want to find a way to plug into our church family... If you feel Sunday is so big and you don't know where to start and where to get involved, I want to encourage you to stop by the Welcome Center on your way out and talk to someone about home groups. Maybe you're new to the area and you're looking for church family, that is a great way to plug in.