

Our 2017 Vision

Gospel Intentionality

Colossians 1:22-28

Mark Vroegop

"And you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him, if indeed you continue in the faith, stable and steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the gospel that you heard, which has been proclaimed in all creation under heaven, and of which I, Paul, became a minister. Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I am filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church, of which I became a minister according to the stewardship from God that was given to me for you, to make the word of God fully known, the mystery hidden for ages and generations but now revealed to his saints. To them God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ."
(Colossians 1:21–28, ESV)

Our normal sermon diet is walking through a particular book of the Bible or addressing a particular topic by examining a series of biblical passages. That serves us well most weeks of the year, but this Sunday we are going to take some time to blend three different elements – all of which have significant spiritual value. We are going to take some time to reflect on 2016, to consider a vision for maturity in Colossians 1, and to talk about where our church is headed in 2017.

Our annual congregational meeting is tonight, and you need to know that it is rare for a church our size to still be trying to do congregational life the way that we are. This evening, in the context of a prayer meeting, we will be voting on our annual budget, Elders and Deacons, some by-law changes, and the purchase of property for the Fishers Campus. This is one of the most important meetings that we have all year, and if you are a member, we really need you to be here.

Your Elders and Pastors want you to know where we believe the Lord is leading us as church in 2017 so that you can be a part of the ministry. We believe that the Lord has providentially brought us together at this moment in church history in order to reach our neighbors, our city, and the world with the gospel.

Gospel Fruit in 2016

At my parents' home, they have a long piece of wood with a series of marks on it which records the height of my sister, myself, and each of our children. I am always fascinated with this board for two reasons. First, it is really fun to see how excited the young kids are to be measured, and it isn't too long before the older kids (including the parents) start to line up. Second, it is a bit of family history, and every time we look back at how much I grew from my sophomore, junior, and senior year, everyone winces. It is a marker that serves as a great reminder.

The year 2016 has been a great one of ministry at College Park Church. I always think it is good for us to stop and thank the Lord for His blessings in the past year. There is always more going on in our church than what you and I realize. Here are a few highlights:

- We had a great time in the Word this year, walking through Lamentations, Heaven, Daniel, Two Kingdoms, and 1 Peter.
- I'm pleased to tell you that we welcomed 225 new members into our church family, added 379 new people into Small Groups, and added 41 new Small Group Leaders at North Indy.
- We had over 1,200 people participate in our Brookside "Roadie-Tour" or hear about the ministry happening in Brookside. Our urban ministry is thriving through great partnerships, and we have three families who are considering moving into Brookside.
- You might not know that our website has a really broad reach. Our website reached over 97,000 people this year, over 5,000 people use our church app, our live stream was used over 30,000 times this year, and we've had hits in 176 of 196 countries around the world. The second most common visitor country was Russia.
- We were able to help our Elders do a better job of shepherding our people this year by breaking our congregation into various regions, what we sometimes call parishes, assigning Elders, and praying for our people more specifically.
- We hosted some amazing conferences this year, including THINK with Mark Dever, Children Desiring God, LIVE with John Piper, and ACBC. Very few churches get this kind of opportunity.
- We worked to develop our Next Door Mission model, and we have a great concept of a family of churches. We were able to help Living Faith Church by sending Dan Weller and a few families their way. We were able to find a beautiful piece of property for Fishers which we are voting on tonight. And we provided some behind-the-scenes support for Soma Church and Resonate Church.
- We worked hard to find new ways to connect people through our new connecting space, helping people get plugged into Small Groups faster and using name tags on Sunday.
- We had 130 people complete our discipleship and counseling training, and we added 15 new people to our team that regularly counsels and disciples people.
- We have almost 600 women who are meeting in Bible Studies or in one of our Moms Connection Groups.
- Over 700 people visited our guest reception area to learn more about our church ministry.
- We have 520 people who faithfully volunteer in our Next Generations ministry, and part of the reason is because we welcomed 207 new babies into our families this year.
- Our giving for this year has been really strong. We are 9 percent ahead of last year's budget, and our budget next year has marked over 40 percent of our budget for ministry outside of North Indy. And over the last 10 years, do you know how much we've given in Christmas offerings? We have given 7.3 million dollars!
- I'm also thrilled to see the diversity of our church changing. This was an important year for us to see some substantial growth in this important area. We have about 50 people who meet regularly to discuss diversity-related issues at our church, and our membership classes in 2016 were comprised of 13 percent non-white members, which is double what it was last year.
- Beyond these stats and numbers, I am really encouraged with the number of people that I talk with each week who are trying to figure out what Christianity is all about. Nearly every Sunday I have a conversation with someone who is exploring who Jesus is, or I meet someone who has been invited

here by another church member. I'm very pleased with the way that we are thinking about how to share the gospel with others.

Now that is just a quick snapshot of a few data points of what is happening at North Indy. There are equally encouraging things that are happening at the Fishers Campus. What's more, this is just the stuff that we know about and the data that we track.

I've not included the number of hospital visits, the times the gospel was shared by all of you, the number of prayers that have been offered for hurting people, the meals that have been made, and the ways that our people serve Jesus out in the world.

In fact, I received a great email from a pastor in the Dayton area who was stranded on the side of the road while taking his son for a special get-away weekend to Chicago. Here's what he said:

On Friday, my 10-year-old son and I were on the way to Chicago for his birthday adventure when I learned a new fact about my car - the gas gauge is no longer working. Unfortunately, I learned that fact along the side of I-70, with very little time to spare before the pro sporting event started that we had tickets for that evening. We decided to walk to the nearest gas station, which would have made us late enough that we had to cancel the trip.

I felt angry because of my gas gauge, but bigger than that, I felt like a failure as a dad. My son was handling it well, but I knew that this was going to be a deep disappointment for him and that I should've been better prepared. I'm a pastor of a mid-sized church in Dayton that is growing rapidly. It's so exciting to be stretched and challenged like this, but it also takes a LOT of time and energy. I was feeling guilty for the times that week that I hadn't been there for him and that I hadn't planned better for the trip.

Enter College Park Joe, who pulled over and picked us up. Joe was amazing. He was kind, and gracious, and loving. I knew he must be a Jesus-follower long before we got around to that part of the conversation. Not only did he take us to a gas station (that was all I asked of him), he insisted that I put my wallet away, and he paid for the biggest over-priced gas station gas can and the gas. Then he drove us back to our car. He sat behind us in his car so we'd be shielded from traffic as I filled the tank, and he then gave my son money to buy dinner for us and told us where the best local places were to stop.

I'm thankful to Joe for the assistance and for helping me feel better as a dad. He saved our trip. But bigger than that, he taught our son an incredible lesson about generosity. We teach our kids to tithe and to be generous, and they see us make sacrifices to help others. But they've never been on the receiving end of it in the way that Joe treated us, and I know that my son will never forget that act of love and grace.

I know you are busy people, and I share this with you because I thought it might be a useful story someday when you are talking about generosity. Clearly, College Park is impacting lives in a powerful way because the best demonstration of a church's effectiveness is the way that its members show Jesus' love to the world. If you have many people like Joe and his wife, you've certainly got an amazing force to change the world for Jesus in Indy.

I love stories like that because they demonstrate what I know to be true about our church and about what it means to ignite a passion to follow Jesus. This has been a year with great gospel fruit, and I'm excited to see what the Lord has for our future.

And with that future in mind, let's take a look at Colossians 1 and then talk about 2017.

Christlikeness: The ultimate goal

I've chosen this text because it serves as a really helpful reminder as to what is the ultimate goal for followers of Jesus and for the church. Sometimes it is good to be reminded about what is the center of the center, especially when life and ministry become full, busy, or hard. It is helpful to remind ourselves what the ultimate goal is so that we can head in the same direction.

The first chapter of Colossians is all about the centrality and supremacy of Jesus. In verses 15-20, we have some of the most glorious statements about Jesus in the entire Bible. Jesus is the "image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation . . ." (v. 15). He is "before all things and in him all things hold together" (v. 17). He is the "head of the body, the church . . . the beginning, the firstborn from the dead that in everything he might be preeminent" (v. 18). This chapter, over and over, communicates the beauty of Jesus.

And then it makes a turn from Jesus to Jesus' people. It highlights the beauty of Jesus with the thought that Paul desperately wants the church at Colossae to look like Jesus. In fact, verse 29 says that Paul is pouring out his life – toiling, struggling, and working – for the sake of this goal. Paul desperately wanted the Colossae church to be like Jesus, and you need to know that is the same goal that our Elders and Pastors have for you. We want you to walk in Christ, to be like Christ, and to be made into His likeness.

So let me quickly show you four ways that this goal is seen in this text.

1) Christlikeness - the goal of salvation

In verses 21-23, Paul talks about the miracle that happens to those who come to faith in Jesus and the hope that they have in the future. Salvation, being rescued by Jesus from your sins, results in an amazing transformation. Notice some of the things that Paul says here.

Prior to Jesus these people were alienated, hostile in mind, and doing evil things. This is a three-fold picture of what it means to be lost. The sinfulness of humanity affects what we do, how we think, and our spiritual position. Now I'm sure you understand the aspect of doing evil deeds and even being hostile in mind. But do you know what it means to be alienated? The idea is that you and God are separated and that you are His enemy because of your sinfulness. If you've been around College Park, you've heard me say it this way: "God is holy. You are not. That's a problem!"

Yet the text does not leave us there. It continues by saying "he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death . . ." The sacrifice of Jesus in dying on the cross created a path for the change of our spiritual condition – from being God's enemies to being reconciled to Him. What's more, this reconciliation has made the followers of Jesus fundamentally different people: ". . . to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him" (v. 22). In other words, the goal of this beautiful salvation is that at the end of your life, you stand before your creator with the same righteousness that belongs to Jesus. The goal of salvation is to save you from yourself and to make you into the image and likeness of Jesus. That is why you heard the gospel, and that is the purpose of salvation.

2) Christlikeness – the joy in suffering

One of the very practical and very unusual things that Christlikeness changes is the way that you see and experience suffering. Paul makes a few strange statements in verse 24.

First, he says that he is rejoicing in his suffering for their sake. We are not sure what the issue was in Paul's life, but we do know that he viewed it as something that was actually helping the church. How would Paul's suffering help the church? Well, we get a sense of this in the second strange thing that he says: "... I am filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions." What does that mean?

It does not mean that Jesus' suffering was insufficient. Rather, it means that when Paul suffers and the people see his suffering, they understand something about the value of Jesus and His own suffering that they would not have seen before. In other words, the people saw something of Jesus in Paul as he suffered. They could understand something about the power of the gospel as they saw it lived out in his life. In 2 Corinthians 12, Paul put it this way:

"... Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me." (2 Corinthians 12:9b, ESV)

Suffering has the potential to allow the life-giving power of Jesus to shine through a follower of Jesus. And the result is a joy that comes from knowing that somehow, Christlikeness is being made clear even in the midst of hardship, loss and pain.

Some of you know exactly what I'm talking about because you've seen this truth lived out in your own life or in the life of someone close to you. Although you would have never planned it or wanted it, you've seen the way that Christ can be supremely honored when life falls apart.

3) Christlikeness – the future hope of glory

The third reality that we see in this text is found at the end of verse 27, where it says "... Christ in you, the hope of glory." Now we are going to look at the rest of the text, but you need to know that Paul locates the future hope of glory as "Christ in you." In other words, the hope of standing before a holy God and the beauty of the heaven is the fact that there is Christlikeness in you through and through. Just think of it! Every fiber of your being looks completely and intimately like Jesus. His glory is reflected in you. What He is, you are! His honor, His victory, His power, and His eternality are all yours. The beauty of Christ is your beauty. All that He is, you are!

In the previous verses, 25-27a, Paul highlights how special this future glory really is. In verse 25 he calls his life a stewardship of this message and says how much he wants to make this message fully known. Further, he identifies that this message has been a mystery for ages and generations, but now it has been revealed. And this message has spread all over the world – "how great among the Gentiles are the riches of glory ..."

Paul was talking about something special that they were a part of. And this is the same story that every follower of Jesus is a part of. We are part of the people from every tribe, nation, and tongue that God is drawing to Himself who will one day stand before the throne wrapped in the righteousness of Jesus. What a day that will be!

4) Christlikeness – the goal of ministry

We come now to the final expression of this concept of Christlikeness in its connection to the activity of ministry. Verse 28 has become a moniker for me over the last few years as I've thought about what it means to really help people to grow spiritually. I love what this verse says:

"Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ." (Colossians 1:28, ESV)

I love how this text emphasizes the proclamation of Jesus. Not religion. Not a denomination. Not a program. Jesus. But that isn't all. There is clear emphasis on the individual believer and the responsibility that we have for the spiritual growth of every single person.

This spiritual growth involves both warning – cautioning people about what they are doing wrong — and teaching – exhorting people about what they need to become. And it is to be done with wisdom, applying truth uniquely to different people and different situations. So the ministry of the church is to be concerned about the application of truth in individual believers, not just the entire group.

And the text ends with why this is such an important goal. The purpose of ministry is to present everyone – notice: *everyone* – mature in Christ. That is Paul's goal, and it is the goal that our Elders have for our congregation as well. We want you to be mature in Christ, both now, and especially in the future. We want you to stand before Jesus and to be glad that you were a part of this church while you were here on earth.

Our aim in everything we do is for you to be like Jesus —to be Christlike.

Direction for 2017

So as we think about where we are headed in 2017, let me highlight a few high-level directional focal points that I think will encourage you. I'd like you think about next year through the following words: evangelism, discipleship, shepherding, and Next Door Mission. Each of these are detailed in the congregational packet.

Evangelism

I'm sure that I don't need to convince you that sharing the gospel and reaching people who don't know the gospel is really important. I'm also sure that there are far more gospel-sharing conversations happening than I'll ever know about, but we'd like to see if we can grow in this important area by doing three things: 1) using existing ministries for evangelism, 2) offering specific classes to equip you in how to share your faith, and 3) creating a few outreach-oriented events that you can use as an opportunity to engage with your non-Christian friends.

Shepherding

Our Elders are committed to finding creative and effective ways to care for our congregation. We understand that in a large church, it is easy for people to get lost or feel like a number. Through our Small Group ministry, our coaching structure, and a newly formed regional division of our people (or parish),

our Elders are trying to do a better job of praying for our people by name, conducting all-membership interviews, and finding ways to reach out to people when they haven't been at College Park for a while.

Covenant Renewal has greatly helped us to know exactly how many members we really have, and I have set a goal of increasing the engagement level of our members (the number of people attending and connecting in some capacity).

In order to accomplish this goal, we are in need of more Elders. That is why we have a pretty robust batch of new Elders, and we are planning on bringing on more in 2017.

Next Door Mission

Another important part of our vision for 2017 is to continue and expand our vision for the city of Indianapolis through the Next Door Mission. Our Elders believe that God has placed us in this city to be a conduit for the gospel to reach unreached people around the world, under-served people in the Brookside neighborhood, and unchurched people in our city.

Just to remind you, there are 1.6 million people in the Indianapolis area, and the statistics would tell us that about 60 percent of these people are not affiliated with a Christian Church. Two years ago we launched the Fishers campus; they now have over 400 people who are meeting every week, and we are voting on a wonderful piece of property for a future facility.

With the health and growth of the Fishers campus, we have developed a more specific plan for a Family of Churches Model which allows Fishers to move toward self-governing in the next two years, yet keeps North Indy and Fishers connected so that we can work together to reach our city, sharing resources and benefiting from the relationship between congregations. I think it's a great strategy to accomplish two goals: 1) mobilizing our people to reach our neighbors and 2) multiplying disciples around the city.

I'm also excited to share a new opportunity that the Lord has dropped into our laps. Part of our Next Door Mission strategy is to consider adopting hurting churches, and we've had 4-5 conversations with churches over the last two years, but none of them have materialized. In the first week of October, a church in the Castleton area approached us about adopting them. The church leadership had been praying for six months about pursuing the option because they are down to about 70 people, and financially the church is not sustainable beyond the next few months. For the last month, our staff has been working on evaluating this opportunity.

The name of the church is The Chapel, at 91st and Allisonville Road. The church is debt-free; it has a renovated sanctuary that seats 220 people. It has a wonderful facility that sits on six acres in a very strategic area of our city. This Sunday it was announced at The Chapel that they have approached us about adopting them, and last Monday the Elders approved a motion to bring this adoption to a congregational vote on December 4th.

Now there is a lot more that I'd love to share with you, and I'll talk about this in more detail tonight. But I'm excited for us consider how we might care for these people and how we might use that property, perhaps as a new campus that reaches into Castleton, Washington, and Lawrence Townships. We have a number of North Indy Families who live in this area, and it has great potential for a new campus, a

counseling center, a day-care outreach, or some other outreach. I'm really excited to see how the Lord might allow us to reignite a passion to follow Jesus on that property in the next year.

Discipleship

Finally, we have been working on developing a comprehensive strategy for discipleship at College Park so that people know what taking a next step in the walk with Christ actually looks like. Our strategy involves 1) exalting Christ (worship on Sunday), 2) experiencing community (finding a group), 3) embracing a calling (finding a place to serve) and 4) equipping the church (growing in your giftedness). I'd like for you to consider taking one step in one development area in your life in 2017. We are going to work hard to provide those opportunities for you.

Second, we would really like to see some new 1:1 or group discipleship groups form where we have people pouring into one another over the Word and helping each other to grow spiritually. We'd love to see new relationships develop and people really helping one another grow in more intense ways in 2017.

What is the goal of all of this? Christlikeness! Our Elders and Pastors want you to look more like Jesus in 2017, and we are going to work hard to see that happen in your life. But in order for this to happen, we need you to play an important part. We want everyone to be presented mature in Christ. And that is not just our responsibility; it is also the responsibility of all of us together.

So would you join me in prayerfully considering what your role is going to be in your church in 2017? What step do you need to take in the next year in order to look more like Jesus? How can you be involved in our vision for where God is going to lead us?

What's your role in this fulfilling this verse?

"Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ" (Colossians 1:28)

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