

Connect People to Jesus
317 Vision Sermon

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We are so excited you are here to help us kick off this series called **317**. When people see the numbers 317 they think about our city that we love, the greater Indianapolis metropolitan area. You see 317 and maybe you think about our monuments, or you think about our sports teams, or you think about our colleges throughout central Indiana. Though 317 is our area code, it is so much more than an area code. It represents the people and the culture of central Indiana. And we believe as a church, 317 represents God's heart for us as followers of Jesus. Let me explain...

For the last 18 months the leadership team at this church has sensed God calling us to pursue a new vision and mission. Our desire is not to sever anything from the past, but to build upon where we have been and launch out in this new decade with clarity and precision about where God is calling us in the future. As we have prayed and sought God's guidance, we kept coming back to these numbers again and again 317. We believed God was calling us to focus on his heart for this city. We don't simply want to be a church that meets in our city; we are a church that exists for our city. Not just a church in the 317, but a church that is for the 317.

So we decided to embed the mission, vision, and the priorities of our church within these Indianapolis-specific numbers. We believe that God is calling us as a church to pursue a three-fold mission, a singular vision, and seven priorities. Let me say that again. We feel called to pursue a three-fold mission, a singular vision, and seven priorities. Over the next 11 weeks we are going to talk about our mission, our vision, and our priorities as a church and our hope is not simply at the end of these 11 weeks you'll be informed about where we are going and excited about it, but that God will stir in your heart so that you can say, "That is the kind of church I want to be a part of; that is the kind of church I want to be committed to. That is the kind of church I want to help build."

Because the words vision and mission are thrown out a lot, let me give you an example of one of the clearest, most compelling vision and missions I've ever heard. On May 25, 1961, then President **John F. Kennedy** declared to Congress that by the end of the decade they would land a man on the moon. The vision was clear: Land a man on the moon. That was vision, landing a man on the moon was the desired destination. The vision drove the mission, which was to design and build a rocket that could land a man on the moon and bring him home safely. And eight years after the vision was set, on July 20, 1969, **Apollo 11** landed on the moon. So the vision is the compelling future state: where we are going to go. The mission is what we have to do in order to get there. And the priorities would be the fundamentals that are essential to make that happen: hard-working people, pioneering innovation, creative design, commitment to mathematics, science, physics - the list could go on.

As a church, we have a singular vision, a clear and compelling future state we want to see become a reality which is: **To connect people to Jesus**. This is what God is calling us to accomplish! This is what we direct all of our resources to realize. This is why we exist as a church! To connect people to Jesus.

How are we going to accomplish this singular vision? Our three-fold mission: **Love God. Love people. Make disciples**. If you have been a follower of Jesus for a while now, or if you have been reading parts of the Bible to find out more about Jesus, you may well be aware that during Jesus' ministry an expert in the law came up and asked him what the most important commandment in all of the Bible was. And do you know how he answered: The most important command is this: **Love the Lord your God** with all your heart, all your soul, all your mind, and all your strength. And the second is like it: **Love your neighbor** as yourself. This is what is known as the great commandment: Love God, love people. But how are we to love God and love people? The answer is: make disciples. In fact, after Jesus died for our sins, rose from the dead, appeared over the period of 40 days to more than 500 people, he had gathered his

followers together and right before he ascended into heaven he said this: All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me, therefore go and **make disciples**. This is what is known as the great commission. And the great commission erupts out of the great commandments!

So as a church we are going to pursue a three-fold mission in order to accomplish our singular vision, and we are going to do it by establishing our church and building our culture on **seven** specific priorities. These are the fundamentals that have to exist in order to see our mission and vision become reality. These priorities have to get in our lifeblood and become part of our DNA.

We believe there are seven specific priorities we need to establish and cultivate:

Worship. The Bible tells us that whether we eat or drink or whatever we do, do it all for the glory of God. And we want that to be our heartcry. We want to bring God glory in every area of our lives, and we want to seek his presence and honor him in everything we do.

Gospel. There are a lot of different definitions of the gospel swirling around these days, but at its core, the gospel is the good news that Jesus Christ is Lord. He died for our sins, he has risen from the dead. He is ruling over the world, and we want to proclaim that good news and center our lives on his teaching and example.

Kingdom. Jesus told us, “Seek first God’s kingdom and God’s righteousness, and everything else will be given to you. We want to put his kingdom first. And as we seek his kingdom, we want to see the fame and deeds of God renewed in our day. We don’t just want to read about the works of God in the pages of the Bible, and hear about them from missionaries serving on other continents, we want to see God do great things in our lives and in our city.

Scripture. We believe that God’s word is living and active, that it is inspired and useful for teaching, correcting, rebuking, and training in righteousness. We believe what God has said, “Blessed are those who delight in God’s word, for they will be like a tree planted by streams of water, yielding fruit in season, whose leaves never wither.” We want to love God’s word and live it out on a daily basis.

Identity. The Bible says, “How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called the children of God.” And that is what we are. We want to we receive God’s love and embrace our adoption as sons and daughters. When we live out of our true identity, almost everything else takes care of itself.

Community. As a church, we are not only devoted to God, his word, and his kingdom, we are devoted to one another. We love one another as brothers and sisters. We value our relationships and build our lives together as a family of faith. Our world today is drowning in loneliness and isolation. As a church, we get to provide Christ-centered community.

Generosity. John 3:16, perhaps the most well-known verse in the entire Bible tells us that, “God so loved the world that he gave.” God is a generous God. He gives everything to us, even the life of his son on the cross. Jesus told us it is more blessed to give than to receive. We want to be a people who give to others like God gave to us. We want to share our resources to enrich others and advance God’s kingdom.

Those are our seven priorities. The word priority comes from the root, primary, like primary colors blue, yellow, and red. The incredible thing about those three primary colors is that with just them, with just three colors, if you mix them together and blend them just right, you can get every other color that exists. We believe that if we realize our seven priorities, if we live them out, we’ll be able to accomplish our mission (loving God, loving people, making disciples) and see our vision realized (connecting people to Jesus). 317. That’s what it means for us to be a church in our city, for our city.

I want to take the rest of our time today to talk about our vision, and why we have made connecting people to Jesus the singular vision we want to see realized. In just a few months the summer Olympics will start. Some of you may remember that during the last summer Olympics, this man, **Matt Emmon**, won a gold, silver, and bronze medal. He is the 2018 world champion marksman. A few years ago, he was one shot away from winning a double gold medal at the Olympics. He took aim, fired, bullseye. But he was aiming at the wrong target. Instead of finishing 1st, he fell to 8th. As a church, we have to make absolutely certain we have our eyes focused on the right target. The old adage proves true: it doesn't matter how far you make it up the ladder, if the ladder is leaning against the wrong wall. As a church, it is not enough to have a vision. We have to make absolutely certain that the vision we have as a church is God's vision for our church. How do we make sure that our vision is what God wants? We look to Jesus. On two different occasions Jesus gave a vision statement for his life. **Mark 10:45** **"The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."**
Luke 19:10 **"The Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost."**

Though Jesus used different words, the heart behind each statement is the same: Jesus' vision was to a life of service and sacrifice so that people could be saved. And how do we participate in the mission to save people today? **To connect people to Jesus.** The Bible says there is no other name under heaven given to men, by which we must be saved. If we want to follow Jesus and live a life of service and sacrifice so that people can be saved, it all comes down to this: connect people to Jesus!

In Luke 15 Jesus was spending time with a lot of unlikely people. Tax collectors, notorious sinners in the community, prostitutes, the sorts of people that no self-respecting religious person would ever be seen around. And so the religious leaders began to complain and grumble about what Jesus was doing. And Jesus responded by telling them three stories: He told them first of a shepherd who had 100 sheep, and after he counted them and realized one was lost, do you know what he did? He did not say, "Well, a 99% success rate ain't too bad." He left the 99 to find the one. And when he found that sheep, what did he do? He called his friends to celebrate and rejoice with him. Then he told a story of a woman who had ten coins. The ten coins would have represented her entire life savings. And then she lost one of them. What did she do? Did she say, "Well, at least I still have nine?" No! She stopped everything and turned the entire house upside down until she found it. And when she found it how did she respond? She invited all her friends over to celebrate with her. Then he told a story of a man who had two sons. And one son asked for his inheritance early, which was a way of saying to his dad, "I don't care about you; all I care about is your money. You are as good as dead to me." The father was heartbroken but gave it to him, and he went off to a distant country, indulged in wild living, and then, flat broke, found himself working in a pig sty, so starved he wanted to eat the food they were feeding the pigs. He was longing for home. So he got up, and went home, rehearsing his speech about how he just wants to be a servant in his father's house the whole way. And Jesus says, "While he was still a long ways off, the Father saw him, and ran to him, threw his arms around him, kissed him, put a robe on his back, new sandals on his feet, a ring on his finger. He's restoring him to full sonship. And the Father says, "Slaughter the fattened calf." Why? Because just like the shepherd who lost a sheep and the woman who lost a coin, what was of great value has been found, and it's time to celebrate! But out of jealousy and envy, what was the older brother doing? In his room, pouting. He didn't want to celebrate. He didn't care about the wellbeing of his brother; he didn't care about the heart of his father. He only cared about himself.

There are three different ways the older brother could have responded: He could have (1) pouted, whined, and complained like we see here, (2) he could have been happy that his brother returned home and joined in the celebration, which would have of course been quite a bit better, or (3) while his brother was still gone, the older brother out of love for his brother and his father, could have left the comfort and safety of his house and gone himself to a search and rescue mission to find his brother and bring him home.

(Maybe talk about what would happen if my son was lost. Like seriously lost. Wouldn't you drop whatever is going and go through the streets, the woods, the whatever to find my son and bring him back to me?! I hope so. Because you love me. I can't go on without my boy. Think about God's heart!

That's the kind of people we want to be! We are not just going to celebrate when people find Jesus, we are going to leverage every resource, exhaust every opportunity, give everything we have to connect people to Jesus. We are doing that because we are followers of Jesus. The Bible says that Jesus is our older brother. And as our older brother, what did he do? When we were far off and desperate, he left his father's house, he left the comforts and glories of heaven, to come on a search and rescue mission to bring us back home. Because that's what Jesus has done for us, that's what we will do for others!

In Mark 2 Jesus was teaching in a house and there were so many people no one could get in. A group of guys had brought their paralyzed friend for Jesus to heal. But because of the crowds they couldn't get to Jesus. So what did they do? **Since they could not get him to Jesus because of the crowd, they made an opening in the roof above Jesus by digging through it and then lowered the mat the man was lying on. Mark 2:4** They were so committed to getting their friend to Jesus that they tore off the roof and lowered the man down. Come on! Think about that. The roof is falling in on people, dirt, leaves, sticks, dust flying everywhere, crashing down on people. People are yelling at them, saying they've lost their minds, they need to be patient and wait their turn, and they just keep on digging away: We have to get our friend to Jesus. And when they did, what happened? **When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralyzed man, "Son, your sins are forgiven." Mark 2:5** We want to be the sort of church who will tear roofs apart to connect people to Jesus. And please hear my heart on this, connecting people to Jesus isn't a one-time thing. It's not just what happens when someone says they believe in him, they go under the water and are united with him. It's a day in, day out, lifelong connection, a journey of transformation.

Jesus says in John 15:4-5 **Remain in me, as I also remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me. "I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.** Did you see how many times Jesus says we need to remain in him? Connecting people to Jesus begins with evangelism for those who don't know him. But it continues by remaining in him for our entire life, drawing our energy, joy, passion, endurance, identity, and hope from him. And that's what we want to do as a church. That is our vision. At the end of our days, that's what we hope to have accomplished. That's how we want to leave the world a different and a better place: by connecting people to Jesus.

Interact with the sign. ...That's the 1. Join us for the rest of this series as we talk about the 3 and the 7.