

# A Spiritual Vision For A New Year

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Proverbs 29:18 is going to be our text tonight. I'm interrupting our study of Ecclesiastes and I'm going to need a couple of ushers back there, if you could help me. On the back are some papers back on the usher's table that says "A Spiritual Vision For A New Year." If we could hand one of those out to everybody while I explain what we're gonna do here tonight. You guys have got them, they should be right there in front of you, Charlie. They should be right on the end. Somebody moved them. They look like this. I printed about 100 so we might not have enough. I think we do. Just go ahead and hand them out to everybody.

Let me read this. While they're doing that, let me read our verse here. Oh, I meant to mention we had a young man trust the Lord Jesus as Savior this morning. I believe it was a young man, a young person, and so we're always grateful for that. We never want to get accustomed or get indifferent to people trusting the Lord Jesus as their Savior. So I'm very very glad for a young person. I think there were seven, am I correct, Dave? Somewhere around there, seven years old, called on the Lord to be their Savior. And the other good news from this morning is we had our largest attendance of the year this morning, and so it has been fantastic and so we've set a great thing, we broke all attendance records for the year and so we're glad for that.

How many folks are reading your Bibles through this coming year? You've set out the goal to read your Bible through? How many folks are on track? Alright, I'm not gonna ask how many are behind already but I want to challenge you whether you're reading the Bible through or whatever your Bible reading plan is, I want to challenge you to have a Bible reading plan in place. Everybody ought to read their Bible individually, personally every day. And I want to throw this suggestion out: whatever stage you're at in home or whatever your situation at home may be, I want to challenge you to gather the family together on a daily basis and read the Bible together as a family. We always did that all the years our boys were home. Now Kathy and I are continuing that now and just read our Bible together as a family. I'm not going to ask how many do that but I do want to challenge you. You and your wife, if the kids are in the home, gather them around, if grandkids, whatever it may be, get everybody around. You don't have to read five chapters, maybe just a couple of verses or whatever, just something, and read the Bible together. I believe the Lord will bless that.

Proverbs 29:18. By the way, if you read your Bible and pray every day, you will grow, grow, grow, and if you neglect your Bible and forget to pray, you'll what? Shrink, shrink, shrink. So heed that warning.

Notice verse 18, "Where there is no vision, the people," what? "Perish. Where there is no vision, the people perish. Somebody said a church without a vision is a church without a future. Think about that, a church without a vision is a church without a future. I have modified that statement. I saw that and that caught my fancy, I thought that's a good statement. I believe that. I modified it a little bit, I put this down: a church without a vision is many times a church that goes adrift. You set a ship out to sea and you don't have something you're sailing towards, if you don't have a vision of where you're heading, that thing will just, you don't know where you'll end up. It goes adrift. I tell you, there's a lot of churches tonight are adrift because they had no vision, they had division. Or if they did have a vision, it wasn't scriptural vision. And so it's important for us as a church, as Mountain Lake Independent Baptist Church and I believe as individuals also, that we have a vision. Now I'll explain what I mean by that here in a minute.

A church without a vision, I modified it again, I put this: a church without a vision is a church that is stagnant. It's just sitting there, it's not going anywhere. It has nothing to accomplish, nothing it sees, nothing it anticipates. My definition and I'll give the biblical here in a minute, but what I mean by tonight by definition is this: the ability to see what can be. The ability to see what can be and the motivation to make that happen. Of a vision, I see what it can be, I see what could be out there and I'm motivated to do what I need to do to accomplish that, to make that happen. Is everybody on board with me?

Now as I was studying this and giving this some thought, I thought, well, you know, we set goals maybe or we have a vision of what we want to do, but really God has to do it, right? God has to do it. This is God's work. It's he that worketh in us both to will and to do of his good pleasure. God does it but I think somebody put it this way: I can't make the wind blow but I can put the sails up and catch the wind, and I can't do, we can't do what only God can do. I can't save a soul. Our church can't save a soul, only God can save your soul and you need to trust him and let him do that, but we as a church, we can't save souls but I'll tell you what we can do, we can put the sails up and let God lead us and use us to bring people to the Savior and get the Gospel out to people and so a vision.

A church without a vision is a church without a future. I, oh, probably a month ago, maybe three weeks ago, I was just, I don't even remember where I was but my heart just got stirred for the new year, and I used to carry a little notebook around in my pocket and I'd jot notes down on there as I thought of stuff, but now I have a phone so I put them in my phone, and I just jotted some things down I would like to see as pastor take place at Mountain Lake Independent Baptist Church in the next 12 months, 2018. Just a vision of what I believe can happen and being motivated to make it happen. I got thinking about it and we met this afternoon with different leaders of the different departments of the church here and I asked them to jot down what they would like to see God do in this coming year in their area that they had.

So I've asked them if they would, before we continue on, come up here and share with the church their vision for whatever areas they have and what you have in your hands is I would like for our church folk to write these down that we can all be on board, we can all be on the same page and seek the Lord, then when we're done and I'm gonna share some thoughts from this passage, my thoughts, and then what I really would like is this first Sunday night of 2018, for all of us to take these sheets with the vision down and maybe you'll put some of your own down on there, you'll personalize it perhaps, and I'd like for us as a church body just lay these out before the Lord and ask God to use us corporately as a church body and as individuals to glorify him and to exalt him and accomplish his will for us individually as a church and lift these goals up to him for this coming year. Everybody follow what I'm saying? So when we're done here, we're just gonna make it a giant church-wide commitment of ourselves to the Lord this coming year and asking him to help us meet these goals. I believe they're of the Lord. We've sought the Lord and then I'll share some thoughts. You know, if by chance there'd be someone here tonight you don't know for sure that Jesus Christ is your Savior, you don't know for sure your sins are forgiven and you're on your way to heaven, I'm telling you God will save you tonight and he would give you that assurance and that peace in your heart that sins have been forgiven and you're on your way to heaven. Only Jesus Christ can give that to us and what a wonderful thing on a Sunday night, the first Sunday night of 2018, to get that settled. Wouldn't that be a wonderful thing. And then those of us that know him says, "Lord, here I am. Here I am, Lord, take me, use me in this coming year to bring glory to you."

So we're going to start out with Brother James, is that what we said? He's gonna come up, he's got the couples class and the Sunday school department, I believe, and he's just gonna share a little bit what God's laid on his heart there.

James. Sunday school class. Our goal this year, what we would love to see is an increase in attendance for our kids. Those kids will be our replacements one day. If the church house is full, then we won't have any worries about that. With those kids, we'd love souls to be saved and also would like to be praying for five more teachers and helpers to come, and I would love out of that at least three of them to be men.

With the couples, our home-builders class. We currently have five sets of couples in our class. We would love that to double to 10. We would also love to, we're gonna have some couples activities this coming year. Diane and I have planned them throughout the months, great attendance with those and more people to attend, and most of all spiritual growth as couples in their relationships and our relationships with the Lord. And if anybody wants to, we have the cards in the back. You can take these cards, you can pass them out to couples that you know that may need to have a class, also invite them to church.

Dennis. Okay, now hold on, James. Now what did we get? What are the goals there? Did anybody catch them? I'd like for you folks to write these down so we can pray for these.

[unintelligible]

We'd like five new work teachers and workers down there, correct? Five, and then at least three of them to be men. I believe in being specific. I think we ought to ask God specific things. So we want to ask God we'd like to see this coming year five new workers in the teachers, in the Sunday school department, I guess is what I'm trying to say, three of them men. And then you had a couple others.

[unintelligible]

Five to 10 couples.

James. Yeah, five more couples at least. We currently have five, we would like to increase that at least to 10. We'll take a lot more if we can have them.

Dennis. How many people agree with me, God could do that? God could double that class? Sure. Now we've got to put the sails up but that's what we'd like to see the Lord doing. What else?

James. Couples activities, that we will increase those. We will have those. We don't have a specific number yet. We're gonna try to do them almost every other month, but invite people out to those that you guys know. You guys have son-in-laws, daughter-in-laws, family members that are couples that need to hear God's word and this is a great opportunity in a class to be able to come out.

And also then the spiritual growth of the couples.

Dennis. Amen. Amen. Alright, alright, very good. So we got them down. Alright, I asked Dave with the King's kids down there at the children's church program what he has. Now really as he's coming, just try and catch what he's saying. Jot these down because we want to really make this a matter of prayer.

Dave. Okay, we have starting with we want to see some growth, what we'd like to see is we'd like to have the average attendance, we'd like to bump that up to where it was 50 where we were consistently having 50 kids in the children's church program.

Dennis. Amen.

Dave. And we have two special events in mind, our special days. When we do our big Easter push, we'd like to see at least 60 kids that day, and when we do our summer splash, which is right after Bible time, we would like to see 75. So we feel like we can, if we can get those kids in, we can like get some of those kids to be consistent where they'll just come back and grow in our program.

Then some things in our program we'd like, we want to be stronger, we're gonna do a more active song part of our service. We want the kids to make a joyful noise so we're gonna work on that.

And we've always stressed bringing your Bible, but we want to actually increase that amount we actually use the Bible. We want to especially sword drills. I'm sure most of you know what sword drills are. We'd like the kids to be able to when you say a word in a book of the Bible is, we'd like them to be able to kind of get there in a reasonable amount of time.

Then our Bible memorization. I mean, that's a big part of the King's kids program and we just want to be more consistent and not let other things take its place. We want to concentrate on the memorization.

Dennis. Alright, very good. So did we get those goals there? Hit them again, Dave. Somebody tell us that got them down. Cindy?

Yeah, we've got a big event Easter Sunday. We're really shooting for 60 that day. Now we set the vision but then we've got to work hard to do it. You know, we don't just sit back and see if it happens. We've got to work at it. And then on the big day in August, summer splash, we want to see 75 and that will be an all-time record, am I correct? Is that correct? So we want to work towards that, pray towards that. What happens if we shoot for 75 and we only get 69? Yeah, shoot harder but, man, with 69 it would be a new record, you know? That would be fantastic. So but we want to get after that thing. Then some of the program there, songs, memorization, Bible use there and these things. So I hope you're catching what we're trying to do here, get the whole church get a vision for what we can do.

Next one I believe is Brother Mark, correct?

Mark. James occupies, where are we, about here, and we want to knock this wall out and extend the King's kids. We've been talking about that for a few years. Anyway, Master clubs. As many of you know, this is our fourth year in Master clubs. I've told it before but we went to Loving and Leading I don't know how many years ago and the Lord just really burdened my heart to start this and this pastor who was always behind it said go for it. It's been a real blessing. I don't know if anyone remembers three years ago in Wednesday night service, there was about three kids here, I think. Master clubs now we have some 20, in the 20s downstairs so it's a blessing. This is our fourth year. We do have some new things going there.

As far as goals for Master clubs, I want to see our children serving. That's the whole point of Master clubs is at the heart of all our youth ministries is the Gospel. We want to see kids saved but Master clubs takes those children and disciples them and teaches them to serve. James says it all the time, they're our replacements. If we don't teach them and train them, the world is and they're not gonna be here. So I want to see our kids serving in the community and in the church. That's what teaches the kids to serve outside the church, to serve their neighbors and their families and nursing homes and just anywhere they can serve, and then serving in the church. Kids can serve God now and kids can

witness. They can tell their friends at school how to be saved, we just don't think they can sometimes. So I want to see children serving.

A goal and this is where many of you come in, I want to see more parental involvement in not just in Master clubs but across the board in our youth ministries. Parents, you know if your kids, if you don't work with your kids, they're not, very rarely, you know, occasionally you have a kid that just goes at it on their own but they're few and far in between. So as parents I want to see the parents be involved and work with their kids and give their children time. You wouldn't believe how many times I hear almost on a weekly basis, "We don't have time. We don't have time to do our Master club work. We don't have time for that." And as parents we've got to make time. We've got to make time for it and I want to see more parental involvement.

Along with that, part of that falls on me and us as teachers is to keep the parents and the church informed about what's going on and what they're working and what they need to work on. So I want a goal for myself is I want to keep the church more informed about that and what's going on downstairs.

This is something we haven't done in Master clubs, regionals. I've mentioned it a few times this year. We're going to regionals. Regionals, what happens in regionals is as a church we take our children, it can be four kids, that's probably what we'll go with, four, maybe five kids this year, and we go, we're going to Winchester to Lighthouse Baptist Church on a Saturday and they host it and they have fun games, athletic games, but most of it is Bible games and individual preacher boys Bible story-telling, individual events. You compete against other churches. That's regionals. Everyone I've talked to says the first year will be a nightmare. You won't have the first clue what you're doing. You'll be running around like crazy and that's really encouraging, isn't it? But everyone, that's all they ever tell me. So we're gonna get our feet wet at regionals this year. I want to do that. Need prayer there.

We want to have a ministry night that goes along with that. I'm taking too much time. I want to see our children excited about the Lord.

Dennis. Amen.

Mark. How often do you see kids just really excited, chomping at the bit to serve the Lord? I want to see our kids excited about it.

James, this is kind of an overview of the children's ministry. Outside of Master clubs, we want to see our kids saved, 85%, they say 85% of people receive, trust the Lord between the age of four and 12. I mean, that's staggering so we want to see, we want to see children saved and baptized and disciplined. The discipleship program that we've put in place is working very good. We want to see growth. We don't, you know, we love numbers. We can't put all our faith in numbers but we want to see growth numerically and spiritually. We'd love to see growth.

There's big days. I said this today, I said, you know, and I've said it before, our kids if we get them excited about it and going out, they can get their friends to come to church. We might not be able to but they can. I don't think those numbers are unrealistic at all, to see those kind of numbers. We've got to work at it.

Last thing I want to say is I played basketball in school and I was talking to someone about this the other day, in basketball if you want to have a successful basketball program, if Northern wants to beat Southern, which I think they should, in order to have a successful basketball program it needs to start at the three year olds, and everyone needs to be on the same page, everyone needs to be working towards the same goal and working throughout their program to make the program. And here at the church, we talked about this today, sometimes we see the nursery is the nursery, and Master clubs is the Master clubs, and the teens is the teens, and the church is the church, and we separate them but it's not separate. We're all one program and we're working, I want to, you know, working from the nursery, starting with those kids when they're first born and loving them in the nursery and singing to them. Sometimes we think of the nursery and we're not doing anything in there but we start at the nursery and then we go into junior church and Master clubs and teens and college and career hopefully, and then we want to bring our children from birth up to our replacements and to where they stay in church and stay serving the Lord. So that's just a goal as far as an overview over the children's ministry.

Dennis. Amen. Amen. So what did we get there? What's our vision for that? Somebody, what did you get out of that? Somebody tell me. Parental involvement. Amen, that's huge. What's that? Kids saved and growing. And sometimes, you know, we were talking about getting a number of kids in here. I tell you what, you drive by the soccer field on a Saturday, there's 100-200 kids out there. I know they're around there. I know, it's just getting them in here. You know why most of those kids are out there playing soccer? Is it because the kids are all fired up about soccer? Not necessarily. I think it's because mom and dad are fired up about their kids playing soccer and they get them there. And so we get fired up and do that, I think we can do that.

Yeah? Yes, yes, exactly, and we're sending a team ahead to check it out, see what all is involved and so, yes. Right, amen, raise up servants of Christ. Very good. Anybody else get something else? Dave? Keeping the parents, that's huge, keeping the parents and church, keeping them all working together towards that common goal. Yes. Yes. This is working, I think. I wasn't sure how this would go.

We've got on more and then I want to share and then I'm gonna give you some principles from Scripture. Pastor Brett.

Brett. Brother Mark mentioned that he wants to kick Brother James out of his room and the teens sort of want to kick them out of the Masters club room. So we're kind of tight. Sorry, it is what it is. No, we desperately need a building, I believe.

Dennis. Yes.

Brett. That's a desire from the Lord and he would be honored because we could really use it. In fact, one of the teens' favorite games, of course, is when we're stuck in that narrow hallway downstairs disrupting everybody, you probably hear a bunch of herd of elephants down there, at least that's what it sounds like, that's the teens playing, enjoying themselves in the narrow hallway.

So we could use for a little bit more space there, but as far as some goals with the youth ministry, some of you may not be aware but the teen class I've actually called young in serving rather than just a teen Sunday school class and similar to what Brother Mark said is that when God gave me a passion for youth and we all ought to have that, is that these young people rise up and serve as well. So we've had a couple of the teens, we'd like to see more, take interest in getting involved and maybe even prod them just a little bit. We know how that they need that encouragement. So what I'd ask is that I could think of some ways that the teens can serve. Chances are you can think of ways where the teens can serve as well, even some things that were mentioned tonight. So I'm open to those but we're desperately praying not just these teens being served but they get serving, and I know we'd like, everyone would like to see that.

Along with that, just having a youth outreach. Once upon a time there were a couple of teens that would go out soul winning but I think that raises the spiritual temperature in a church when young people get on board and start doing that. So that would excite me.

Then also one thing that I prayed for God is for a little bit of balance. It's easy for me as more the evangelist to do the exciting part of things but then just tempering that a little bit with we're praying for some spiritual depth with our youth, a lot of gravity about them. So even tweaking our program just a bit to have that spiritual focus. Brother Mark's emphasis on Wednesday and really as a church as a whole, Masters club is discipleship and we're really excited about just having that spiritual focus in our youth group.

So one thing I'll mention, although not for 2018, this sort of thing requires a little bit of preplanning, a mission trip. A little bit about myself is that when I surrendered to the full-time ministry, I thought God was calling me to the foreign mission field. West Virginia is kind of foreign but not what I was anticipating, so we're taking it though and we're excited. Brother Brandon is going over to training for the mission field or just that mission emphasis, but that's our heartbeat and we thought mission trip, mission trip, mission trip. That changed my perspective in life and that's what I want for our youth group.

So please pray in the near future for a mission trip and then also for helpers. We always need helpers. Praise God for Joe and Sarah. I see Joe over there. They are awesome. I love talking with them, having fun with them, and they are a big help to the program, and others who pitch in. But we would love to have helpers. You say, "What can I do?" Counseling is a big need. Wednesday night, we just don't have the personnel. If someone wants to be dealt with to maybe give their life to God and there's just nobody there. They would love to talk with somebody but how sad that we don't have someone where we could just take the time. So it's just a matter of semantics that we can't do that.



As far as specific numbers, we're praying for 50 teens. I think the high is in the low 40s that I've ever had. I've given them the incentive at the beginning of last semester, which would have been around August, September of this goal, but 50 is what we're praying for. I don't want to shoot too high. Again, we want to focus on that depth of spirituality but I'd love to have the numbers in as well.

Then one thing Brother Mark mentioned and maybe a little bit of Brother James as well, is that keeping the, just integrating the youth ministry with the entire church. So I feel like if there's no teens alive, then the teens say that there's no church and that's not right at all. The New Testament is we are all one body.

Dennis. Yes.

Brett. And we are fitted together by the Holy Spirit. So when the teens are kind of doing their own thing, I feel like we're slightly disjointed. So how do we do that? I think like Brother Mark said, we'll get a teen service/youth service together and just keeping, interacting with the teens on down, when you see them, seeing how they're doing, and so forth, and then parental involvement as well, of course. So that's pretty much it.

Dennis. Alright, what have we got there? What did we pick up from that? What are we shooting, what's the vision for our teens? Jerry? Yeah, these guys are stealing some of my thunder here. Young serving. Yes, amen. Anyone else? Any others? What's that? Teen outreach. I like that, getting the teens out reaching folks for Christ. Mission trip is huge. It has to be the right timing but we've got that on the board. Cindy? Yes, yes, spiritual depth. That's important.

Alright, what's that? Helpers. Desperately need for helpers. It's interesting if you read the New Testament, Jesus needed helpers. Remember that? He said, "The harvest is great but the laborers are few." And so what's the solution? What was his solution? Pray the Lord of harvest that he would send forth laborers.

Alright, now let me give you some of mine. I want to give you a little outline and then we're gonna pray and ask God to do a great work this coming year. Here's what I put down. 1. I'd like to see us reach \$200,000 for our building fund by the end of the year. We've set it for February of '19, I'm asking God and praying that God will stir and provide that we can get that \$200,000 by within the next 12 months, by the end of 2018 we can take that thing forward. And I think everybody here believes that having more room, another building, would be good, that those working downstairs and doing it are saying having a new building is absolutely necessary. We are maxed out in our facilities as far as what we're able to do with what we have.

So that's 1, \$200,000 by the end of the year. This has been a vision of mine for years. I don't know that we've ever reached it but I'm still, I know it's possible but for this coming year I would like to see us average at least one saved and baptized every week. The Bible says that daily God added to the church in the New Testament. Now I would like to see a

baptism every week, at least average that. Now you say, "Preacher, God has to do that." I understand that. He blows the wind but we can sure put the sails up and catch that and maybe see and do our part and get out soul winning, getting after it. I'd like to see at least one saved and baptized, average, a week.

This has been touched on but we desperately need more workers in our bus ministry. We need some bus drivers and I would like to see God raise up during the year serving the Lord down at Beacon there, so they're out and just different physical needs. But I would like the Lord to raise up some more folks with CDL licenses that could help drive our buses. I drove one home today and we could just use about three more Sunday school bus drivers. So I'm not asking you to do it. Do you say, "Are you asking me?" I'm asking God to raise up, touch hearts and meet that need.

I would like, this is another vision I have, I'd like to see one more missionary called to Kazakhstan that we could get behind and support so we can have three missionaries over there. We've got two, I'm praying that somehow, some way by the end of the year God would send another missionary to Kazakhstan that we could get on board with and support and be a part of that.

I would like to see, this is another vision and I prayed over these, I really feel the Lord stirred my heart on this, I would like to see our weekly soul winning team double, the number of people we have out Thursday nights particularly. Now there's others that go out on various days through the week but I'd like to see that double and just have more man-power out knocking on doors, out in the community taking the Gospel out to people and so I'm asking the Lord for that, to double that.

Here's one I worked on for years. We came within three people of this about 8-9 years ago. You know what I'm gonna say. When I came here as pastor, I prayed and worked so hard to have at least 300 people in one Sunday morning service. We've had it at the wild game dinner. We've had some outside things, but as a Sunday morning church service, we have never hit that 300 mark. This September 23<sup>rd</sup>, write that date down, September 23<sup>rd</sup> is my 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary as pastor and I want to see 300 people. That is my desire and, of course, again, God, I don't want to be presumptuous but that is what I would like to see and there's no reason in the world we can't get, out of 30,000 people in this county plus all the natives in West Virginia, the foreign mission field over there, we can get 300 folks here. So you pray with me and let's work towards that on September 23<sup>rd</sup>.

I would like to see a college and career class started. We need workers. We just don't have the teachers for it but that's what I would like to see, a college and career class started by the end of this year. We'll see. We'll work towards that and pray.

And then my last one that I wrote down is this: I'm asking the Lord to give us three young couples to join the church this coming year. Three young couples. Several years ago I prayed and I made it semi-public that God would give us five families to join the church in one year and God answered that prayer. I think we actually had more than that. So I'm praying and I'm asking the church to pray with me that God would give us three young

couples. Young couples. Our age group from about 20, early 20s to mid-30s, we have a gap there. How many people noticed that? We've got some, they're very faithful and I'm grateful for that and we thank God for them, but we'd like to see that gap filled in, and if God would send us three young couples that love the Lord, serve God, I think that would be a tremendous asset.

Somebody said any successful endeavor always requires a vision. Always requires a vision. I was sharing some of this with my wife before we came over so I'm not sure how this is gonna go and I bounced some of my thoughts off of her, and when I made one statement we both thought of one church, separately it came to mind and we both know it, it's Independent Fundamental Baptist Church. Solid. I mean, they are straight down the line. Good people. And I don't mean to be unkind but if I was gonna describe them, it would be this: they have no vision. They have no vision. They get together, they meet, they go through the motions, they do their thing, they preach the Bible, but they have no vision and I go there and it's just, it's just the same thing and there's no growth, there's no vision, there's no excitement, and I don't want that to happen to Mountain Lake Independent Baptist Church. I don't want us to be stagnant. I want us to anticipate what God can and will do. Now does God redirect? Sure. Paul had a vision to reach Asia and God redirected him over to Macedonia. But he had a vision and that's what's important for us.

Let me give you three thoughts. Here's my message. Three thoughts about having a vision for the future for our church.

1. Our vision must be Bible-based. We don't want to get out there and get wildfire. Our vision needs to be scripturally-based, Bible-based. The word "vision" in Proverbs 29:18 here, it literally means this, "a revelation from God," and it says where there is no revelation from God, where there is no word from God, the people are going to perish. People that don't have the word of God die in their sins. And so we're looking at these visions, we want it all to be Bible-based. We don't want to get out of scriptural, the Bible-base. The Bible is our sole authority and the Bible is our operating manual.

So we say we want to reach 300, have a big Sunday, have 300. That means we must do that within the principles of Scripture, within the perimeters that Scripture gives. We don't bring some rock and roll group in and pack the place out for the rock and roll group. We're biblically based. Follow what I'm saying? So our vision must be biblically-based. It must be biblically-based. It's our operating manual, how we do things.

2. I put this down: our vision must be Christ-centered. It must be Christ-centered. Everything we do as a church ought to be drawing people to Christ. Amen? We're to be drawing people to Christ. I've said this a number of times over the years: family is vitally important and we ought to have a ministry to family, but sometimes you'll see churches advertise, they'll say this, "A family-centered church." I personally believe that's a mistake. It ought not to be family-centered, it ought to be, what? Christ-centered, and when Christ is the center, then the family can fit in, the family will be what it ought to be. And all that we do, it ought to exalt Christ.

You say, "Oh, you want 300 so you can say, 'Oh, we had 300.'" No, no, no, we want 300 so that Christ will be glorified. That Christ would be glorified, so God gets... I would love for people to look at Mountain Lake Independent Baptist Church, look at the pastor and the folks and say, "How in the world is that happening? The only way that can be happening is God must be doing something." Christ-centered. Christ-centered. Giving him the glory.

Driving me, all our visions should drive me to Christ and let me tack this on to that: and draw me away from the world. Draw me away from the world. I would like for folks to come to our ministries and things we're doing and when they leave have a distaste for the world. Follow what I'm saying? That God would so stir their heart, they see Christ, that the world no longer has that attraction it did before. We want that for our young people. They are absolutely obsessed with the world and we want our ministries to be so Christ-focused they get a distaste for the world, they lose that attraction and their focus is on Christ, and that ought to be all we do, is drawing to Christ. He said, "If I be lifted up, I will," what? "Draw all men to myself." So we want to be Christ-centered. We want to exalt Christ.

And the last one I put down is this: our vision must be Gospel-focused. Everything we do ought to involve to some extent getting the Gospel to lost people. That is our great commission. That is not just a phrase we use or a cliché motto, that is literally our purpose, the great commission, taking the Gospel to every lost person in the world, in our community and in our country and around the world.

The cross does matter. It grieves me to see churches downplaying the Gospel, downplaying the cross, downplaying the crucifixion and burial and resurrection of Christ and all social, social, social. No, no, no, the cross does matter. The cross is important. I always appreciate it when I came here to first candidate, I always appreciated and I know it's just symbolic, but I always appreciated the cross behind the pulpit, to keep that in mind, the Gospel, the Gospel.

Heaven and hell do matter. I heard a preacher say years ago, he said if hell is real, then nothing else really matters, does it? There really is a hell and people who die in their sins go to hell, then what else really matters in getting people to Christ, getting people to Christ?

We must never allow these things, the cross, hell, heaven, salvation, the Gospel, we must never allow them to become unimportant. We must never allow them to become an elective. It always ought to be required, the Gospel.

How many people recognize this name: Anne Sullivan? Anybody recognize that name? Anne Sullivan. Who is Anne Sullivan associated with? Helen Keller. Anne Sullivan, in my book, is a phenomenal phenomenal woman and what Anne Sullivan did was, she had a little deaf and blind girl that everyone said there's no way in the world it is possible for this girl to ever amount to anything. She can't see. She can't hear. And Anne Sullivan

believed, she had a vision that this deaf and blind little girl can be somebody, and she invested a tremendous amount of time and effort and focus on teaching that girl to be able to communicate.

Helen Keller was an amazing woman. Let me tell you a little bit about her. She was born, when she was born she could see and hear but she lost both of those abilities when she was 18 months old due to a high fever of unknown illness. She proved and through Anne Sullivan's influence, if it wasn't for Anne Sullivan I don't believe any of this would have happened for Helen Keller, and by the way, we've got little kids coming into our church off the buses and in various ways that as far as this world is concerned, they'll never be nothing more than a mess, they'll never be nothing more. They come from broken homes. All they're ever gonna be is a mess. I'm here to tell you, we have some folks in our church like Anne Sullivan, believe those kids can be somebody and I'm not trying to exclude the church kids, that's important also, but as I read about Anne Sullivan, my heart was stirred. She had a vision of what God could do in the life of a deaf and blind girl.

Some of the accomplishments of Helen Keller are staggering and I won't read the whole thing, but political, cultural, intellectual interests. She became close associates and friends of people like Eleanor Roosevelt, Will Rogers, Albert Einstein, John F. Kennedy, Andrew Carnegie, Henry Ford, Franklin Roosevelt, Dwight Eisenhower. It goes down the list, Helen Keller was able to have an influence in these people. The awards she was given. The Congressional Medal of Honor and just goes down here. But my mind goes back to Anne Sullivan, a lady that had a vision for a little blind and deaf girl and believed she could be something.

Now that's what I'm asking for Mountain Lake Independent Baptist Church, that God would give us a vision that God can do something. We're a little church up in a frozen mountain-top, that God could do something and impact this world with the Gospel and see some young people be used of God, the impact that somebody like Brandon can have in a lifetime of tens of thousands, hundreds of thousands of people just through a young man who says, "Here's my life." And many many others, Amarissa and Jacob and all these.

So I hope... how many people you think you understand what I'm trying to do tonight? Anybody grasp that? Now we can't do this without God. We can't. It has to be God. We are insufficient of ourselves but our sufficiency is of Christ. And so what I want to do, I would like to finish up this first Sunday night of 2018, God's people gathered around lifting these up to the Lord and say, "Lord, we'd like for you to do this. We want you to use us. Here's some vision we have. Stir in my heart, help me to do my part to see these happen. And God, do a miracle, make 2018 a miracle year."

[unintelligible]

Amen. Amen. That's good, and no doubt many of us have things like this for our own personal selves.

So let's bow our heads and do we have someone that can play the piano? We'll just forego that, alright? Let's just bow our heads.

*Father in heaven, Lord, I just feel like, Lord, you're stirring us and you're renewing our vision and setting a new tone for the coming year of anticipation, of faith in you, of service, and great victories. We know there will be struggles, no doubt there will be setbacks, we understand that but, Lord, we're looking to you and ask you to give us a vision so that people do not perish.*

Our heads are bowed, eyes are closed. How many people say, "Preacher, I've got my heart stirred to see new things, God do new things and greater things in my life"? Is there anybody like that, "My heart is stirred"? God bless you. Hands all around. Would there be someone here tonight say, "Preacher, I'm not sure. I can't honestly say I know for sure that God has forgiven me all my sin, that when I die I have a home in heaven. I hope so, I think so, but I can't honestly say I know for sure from Scripture." And you could say, "Preacher, I'm concerned about that and I really need the Lord to help settle that," and you'd like for me to pray for you, is there any like that by the uplifted hand? "Preacher, I am real concerned about my personal salvation and I need that settled. I don't want to put it off any longer." How about it, any?

*Now Father, I trust you've challenged us. I believe this was your will tonight. I trust, Lord, and I pray that as we go forward now, there would be a new enthusiasm, a filling of your Spirit, a real vision from above that you can and will use us if we will but trust you and follow your instructions, let you lead us. And I ask this now in Jesus' name. Amen.*

Let's stand together and if you would, I just think it's a nice thing and I'm not trying to twist anybody's arm, but maybe we just gather here at the altar and you have some of these written down on that paper, and maybe lay these out before the Lord. Just now, we don't have piano playing but just now tonight we can gather around here and as a church body say, "Lord, we're asking you to do a great thing in our church this coming year."