

What Would Make this Church Great?

**Scripture Proverbs 19:21; Romans 8:28;
Philippians 2:1-2;**

Proverbs 19:21

21- Many are the plans of a man's heart, but it is the Lord's purpose that prevails.

Romans 8:28

28 - And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love Him, who have been called according to His purpose.

Philippians 2:1-2

***1 - If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from His love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion,
2 - Then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose.***

I'll never forget the day in January of 1966 when I left home to attend Circleville Bible College, now known as Ohio Christian University. My Dad and Mom loaded up the car and made the short trip to Circleville, Ohio with me.

We toured the small campus together. We drove around the town checking out grocery stores, laundry mats, etc. They met my room-mate Well, when it was time for mom and dad to return home, they pulled me aside and spent about 30 minutes reminding me of certain things,

Things they had already told me many times in life but things they wanted to make ABSOLUTELY SURE I knew.

You can probably imagine what this entailed: "Get enough sleep at night, son!

Always wear clean underwear.

Be sure to eat good foods!

Don't forget whose son you are.

Study hard!

Keep your room clean!

Be careful the kind of people you chose as friends!

Lock your door at night!

Get involved in a Campus Bible Study!

Call us if you ever need us!"

In other words, BEFORE I MOVED INTO A NEW CHAPTER OF MY LIFE, my parents took the time to remind me of principles they had taught me ALL my life—basic truths that would help me to be successful—tips to guide me to be all God intended me to be.

Now, I don't know if mom and dad realized this or not but they were following a biblical precedent that afternoon as we stood on the campus of CBC.

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For God's practice of prodding His children to REMEMBER important truth at PIVOTAL TIMES of change is seen throughout Scripture.

A New Testament example of this practice is seen in John 14:26 where, in the upper room on the night of Jesus' arrest, He said,

"The Counselor, the Holy Spirit, Whom the Father will send in My name, will teach you all things....and will REMIND you of everything I have said to you."

So at times of pivotal change God usually prompts His people to recall important truth....truth that will help them to fulfill His plans for them.

And I remind you that this is exactly what we are trying to accomplish here at PCN.

When we talk about Discipleship here at PCN I don't want there to be any question as to where we are going according to His Word.

I don't want there to be any doubt as to how we are trying to accomplish it.

One of the tools we use here at PCN is the Discipleship Diamond that you have heard me refer to as Class 101 – Class 201 – Class 301 and Class 401.

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We've actually added a Class 501 – which many of you will recall two years ago when we dealt with the doctrine of Holiness.

And the Christian Education Ministry Team feels strongly that all newcomers into this church understand the Doctrine of Holiness.

Before I go any further I believe God wants us to recall our purpose statement—His vision for us....because it is vital for any body of believers to remember WHY it is that they do what they do.

Proverbs 29:18 says, ***"Where there is NO vision....or purpose....the people perish."***

Or...as Rick Warren says, "Where there is NO vision, people leave for another parish!"

This week I came across a story about a golfer whose errant shot ended up in the rough right on top of an ant hill.

Well, he squared off, took a big swing and missed.

Thousands of innocent ants were killed. So he took another big swing....and missed again.

Another wave of ants was destroyed. By this time, panic stricken insects were running everywhere.

One ant finally took charge. "Follow me," he cried with authority. Another ant yelled, "But where are

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we going?" Then, pointing at the golf ball sitting in front of them, the leader ant cried,

"There....that's where we're going. If we don't get ON THE BALL we're all going to die!"

And for any church to survive and grow and do GREAT things for the Kingdom of God it must GET ON THE BALL or else the church will eventually die.

That is to say it must know WHERE it's going... and, more importantly, WHY it's going there.

You see – It's my understanding - People want to join a church that has a clear purpose.

When a church communicates its destination, people are eager to get on board.

When Ezra told the people of Jerusalem what God expected them to do the people responded, ***"Tell us how to proceed in setting things straight, and we will fully cooperate."*** (Ezra 10:4)

Charles Swindoll says, **"Vision is essential for survival. It is spawned by faith, sustained by hope, sparked by imagination, and strengthened by enthusiasm. It is greater than sight, deeper than a dream, broader than an idea. Vision encompasses vast vistas outside the realm of the predictable, the safe, the expected. No wonder we perish without it!"**

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Okay, do you remember OUR purpose statement...the vision God gave PCN?

It's always in the bulletin. We've hung it in a display case in the foyer. Let's say it together. The Pataskala Church of the Nazarene is to be **"...a GRACE-driven church for a GRACE-needing world."**

This motto should help us to never forget that God has called us to be a church that is driven by His Grace.

In other words....the single motivational force behind all that we do:

worship,
discipleship,
prayer,
evangelism,
fellowship, and
ministry...

is to be our experience of His grace.

Grace is the "WHY" behind every "WHAT" that we do!

NOW, in the past seven years have you ever wondered WHY God gave us this vision?

I mean....why be GRACE-driven?

Why not be TRADITION-driven or
FINANCE-driven or
PROGRAM-driven?

Well, I for one think this is because its EASY to find organizations that are driven by THOSE things except for GRACE.

Grace is unique to the church.

In fact, you could say that a truly GREAT church is the ONE place on this planet where the genuine Grace of God can be found.

What will happen to us if we allow ourselves to become a church that is truly driven by GRACE?

What would a grace-driven church look like?

1. First of all, it would be made up of people who do every thing they can to please God.

No Excuses made by any of the believers.

The pursuit of holiness would be very important to the people of a Grace-driven church.

They would constantly strive to be worthy of God's grace for, as Max Lucado says,
"Grace understood is holiness desired."

Walter Trobisch writes, **"Christ accepts us as we are, but when He accepts us, we cannot remain as we are."**

A genuine experience of Grace fosters an eagerness to do good.

But how do I learn that?

Titus 2:14 says, ***"Jesus gave Himself for us so He might pay the price to free us from all evil and to make us pure people who belong only to Him—people who are ALWAYS WANTING TO DO GOOD DEEDS."***

God's Grace makes us yearn to do right.

And... this is the genius of Grace.

The law can show us where we do wrong, but it can't make us eager to do right.

Only grace can motivate us in this way. **So, a Grace-driven church would be full of people who are doing everything they can to grow in godliness.**

2. Another thing you will find in a Grace-driven church are people who enjoy a very special fellowship.

We not only fellowship together, but we urge one another to learn together – to be disciples.

Listen to the description of the FIRST grace-driven church in **Acts 2:4** *"Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts. All the believers were ONE in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of his possessions was his own, but they shared everything they had."*

Doesn't the fellowship of those Christians in the church at Jerusalem sound wonderful?

Well, the factor that makes this caliber of fellowship possible is their common experience of God's Grace.

You see, people enjoy being with people with whom they have something in common.

That's why we have the Small Groups and Sunday School classes here at PCN.

This is the Spiritual Tool that we are using to help accomplish God's Purpose for our lives.

As joint heirs of the Grace of God...as people who realize that we all have both received AND needed God's forgiveness...we treat one another with a special humility and respect.

Church becomes a place where you can be honest...where you can be real...where you can

confess sin and find forgiveness instead of judgment.

But without grace...this quality of fellowship is not possible.

Max Lucado's story entitled, **The Water Master**, shows what happens to a group of people in which there is no grace. It goes like this....

Years ago there was a village in a desert. Water was scarce, and the people treasured what little they had. It seldom rained, but when it did, people scurried about to capture it in buckets and pots. Every drop was a treasure. Every cup was precious. For that reason the discovery in the cavern was thrilling news. One day a farmer was digging holes for fence posts. A few feet below the surface of the ground he found a cavern—not large, but full of water. He immediately lowered a bucket, pulled it out, and tasted, to his delight, cold, sweet water. He was so excited he filled all his buckets, loaded them in the back of his wagon, and hurried into the village. "I have water! I have water!" he shouted. The villagers came running out of their houses. As the people gathered, the farmer explained how he had come upon the treasure. He joyfully announced that there was enough for everyone. "Drink all you want," he offered. And then, to the people's amazement, he picked up a bucket and doused a little boy. "There is plenty!" he proclaimed. "Enjoy it." And with that the people began to laugh and splash each other. For the first

time as long as anyone could remember, there was enough water for everyone.

After the celebration, the farmer announced his plan. "I'll bring some water in every morning so each of you can have what you need." And that's exactly what he did. The farmer became the Water Master. Every morning he loaded the buckets into his wagon, rode into town, and gave some water to the people. It was a new day. The water was free. The farmer was willing, and the villagers were grateful. Until one night when the farmer had a dream. In the dream he saw the people taking the water and not being thankful. They would walk up to the wagon, snatch the bucket, and march away without a word of appreciation. When he awoke, he was troubled. As he rode into town, he resolved to give the water only to the grateful. Before he allowed the people to take their buckets, he announced, "From now on, I will not give water to those who are not thankful." The people were surprised. Each person thanked him when he or she received the water. All was well until the farmer had another dream. In this dream some of the people who were drinking the water were unkind to their neighbors and mean to their animals. The next morning he was bothered again. He decided he would only give the water to worthy individuals.

"If you are mean to your animals or unkind to your neighbors, you will get no water," he decreed. The people looked at each other and were silent. They

knew the bad people among them. When the Water Master saw the looks of distrust, he had an idea. "Each of you come and tell me who is unworthy so I will know who is mean and unkind." So one by one they came with their names, and he made a list. The list grew and grew. Finally, after every villager had spoken, the farmer read the names. He was shocked. Every person in the town was on the list except one. THE FARMER. So he stood on the wagon and announced that since few were grateful and none were worthy, he would bring no more water to the village. And he turned his wagon of water around and went home.

The moral of this story is this. None of us deserve God's grace. All of us are unworthy of God's love. We all drink from the same well of His forgiveness. And when we realize this it motivates us to treat all people....even those we don't like...with a special tenderness. Lucado writes, "We must be quick to share the water of grace with our enemies—as a gift for them, just as it was a gift to us." Grace-driven churches enjoy a special quality of fellowship...a sweet, sweet spirit!

3. The third characteristic of a truly Grace-driven church is this. They attract sinful people.

I say this because the people of our world hunger for grace.

Sinful human beings are drawn to grace like a bee is to honey.

We see this in the way people responded to Jesus during His earthly ministry.

Tax collectors, prostitutes, and criminals and those who had been in prison were all drawn to Him because they knew that in Him they could find what they wanted more than anything in this world: forgiveness.

So, they left everything to follow Him.

To them, His grace was the ***"pearl of great price."***

They gladly gave up their possessions, sacrificed their careers, renounced past behavior and sin even accepted persecution and suffering because in Jesus they found Someone Who loved them in spite of themselves.

Tony Campolo tells of a time he was traveling to Hawaii and, due to his still being on Eastern Standard Time, found himself in a diner at 3:00AM.

The only other customers at that time of the night were a group of prostitutes.

He heard one of them, whose name was Agnes, mention that the next day was her birthday and that she had never in her life had a birthday party.

After they left, Tony found out from the diner's employees that Agnes and her friends came into the diner each night at this time.

So Tony asked Harry, the owner of the diner, if he could come back the next night and throw a surprise party for Agnes.

He agreed....and here is Tony's narration of what happened: "At 2:30 the next morning, I was back at the diner.

I had picked up some crepe-paper decorations at the store and had made a sign out of big pieces of cardboard that read, 'Happy Birthday, Agnes!'

The word had spread that the party was happening and the diner was packed with street people of all kinds.

At 3:30AM the door of the diner swung open and in came Agnes and her friend.

Everyone screamed, 'HAPPY BIRTHDAY!'

Never have I seen a person who was so flabbergasted.

Her mouth fell open, and her legs buckled.

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When we finished singing, her eyes filled with tears and when the cake was carried out, she began to cry.

The cook mumbled, 'Blow out the candles, Agnes. If you don't I'm going to have to.'

Finally he did and then he urged her to cut the cake....she paused and said, 'Look, Harry, is it OK if I keep the cake a little while....if we don't eat it right away?'

He said, 'Sure, if you want to....take it home if you like.' 'Can I?'

Then looking at me she said, 'I just live down the street. I want to take the cake home, OK? I'll be right back.'

She carried that cake out the door like it was the Holy Grail.

We stood there motionless, a stunned silence in the place.

Not knowing what else to do, I broke the silence by saying, 'What do you say we pray?'

Looking back on it now, it seems more than strange for a sociologist to be leading a prayer meeting with a bunch of prostitutes in a diner in Honolulu at 3:30 in the morning.

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But then it just felt like the right thing to do.

So I prayed for Agnes; for her salvation, that her life would be changed, that God would be good to her.

When I finished, Harry leaned over the counter and said with a trace of irritation: 'Hey, you never told me you were a preacher.'

'What kind of church do you belong to?' In one of those moments when just the right words come, I answered, 'I belong to a church that throws birthday parties for prostitutes at 3:30 in the morning.'

Harry, waited for a moment, and almost sneered as he answered, 'No you don't. There's no church like that. If there was, I'd join it.'"

Summary:

I love that story, because I think if Jesus walked into that diner, He would have done the same thing.

You know if Jesus were to walk in here this morning and want to be the pastor of this church – He would probably do some pretty radical things.

I mean – think about it – in those days – whoever had heard of a prostitute anointing a Rabbi's feet?

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Whoever had heard of a Jew with a Samaritan?

Whoever had heard of a getting a cow out of the ditch on the Sabbath?

Jesus was just relevant to His day -

Jesus was and is the sinless friend of sinners (Matthew 11:19).

And if we are going to be Grace-driven bunch of believers - we'll follow His example...and if we do people will come here in droves.

You see – I don't think what we've been doing is accomplishing what Jesus wants us to do.

If you'll love me – the way we do church today is suspect in my thinking the older I get because I don't see people coming to Jesus by the droves like they did when He walked this earth.

Sinners are coming to other churches in droves in certain places – I've seen it - Have you ever wondered why!

Would it hurt if a bunch of people could get into Small Groups and just begin to ask the question –

What would Jesus Do differently then what we are presently doing?

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What would Jesus do through me and my group if we were to influence someone for Him that was unsaved? What would it look like?

If we know about this Grace – and we do - then what could our Groups do that would change our world for Him?

Probably – if some of us would be absolutely open to the leading of the Holy Spirit we would hear Him show us some things we could do that would revolutionize our communities.

That means that this place will be used.

I'm sorry the chairs will be worn out. We'll have to buy some new ones.

Walls and floor will be scuffed and stained.

Because Grace-driven churches just naturally attract loads of Grace-needing people!

So, what will make this church great?

God's Grace will!

Remember Proverbs 19... ***"Many are the plans of a man's heart, but it is the LORD'S PURPOSE that prevails."***