

## Our Discipleship Pathway, Part 2: GROW

Psalm 1:1-3 on September 15, 2024

Pastor Jerry R. A. Johnson

*Please read Psalm 1:1-3 before going further in this transcript.*

Last Sunday we launched a new sermon series on our church's Strategic Ministry Plan. If you missed that sermon, it would be a good idea to check it out in our sermon archives, because it sets up much of what we'll be talking about today, and also in the coming weeks.<sup>1</sup> I'd invite you to please take a look at the green and white insert from our bulletin that's pasted on the last page of this transcript. It's labeled "Strategic Plan." This is our new infographic that we introduced last Sunday; it gives us a clear and concise snapshot of our Mission, Vision, Core Values, and Discipleship Pathway. Now, to be clear, this isn't our entire, comprehensive Strategic Ministry Plan, but it is a very good overview of some of its key outcomes and directives. If you'd like more detail than this, the first 6 pages of our Strategic Ministry Plan are now available by emailing us at [efree@paulbunyan.net](mailto:efree@paulbunyan.net). To be clear, more important than any of these sheets of paper, is the Scriptural foundation from which this Strategic Ministry Plan flows.

Our MISSION statement explains "What we are supposed to be doing as a church."<sup>2</sup> It's in all CAPS on the upper righthand corner: "Becoming Deeply Devoted Followers of Jesus Together. (THAT'S what we're supposed to be doing as a church.)

Our VISION statement is just below our MISSION, because the two are intricately connected. Our vision is "A picture of what the mission will look like when it is realized."

Our CORE VALUES are then listed below our Vision, which is appropriate, because they're our foundation for ministry. They're "The biblical beliefs that empower and guide our ministries."

Our DISCIPLESHIP PATHWAY is on the bottom righthand corner of the insert. This is "A plan to guide disciples toward maturity in Christ." These 4 G's summarize our church's strategic plan for discipleship: To GATHER, GROW, GIVE, GO. (I encourage you to say them aloud to yourself: "GATHER, GROW, GIVE, GO")

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<sup>1</sup> <https://efcbemidji.org/sermon/our-discipleship-pathway-part-1-gather/>

<sup>2</sup> Learn more here: <https://efcbemidji.org/sermon/what-do-we-mean-by-becoming-deeply-devoted-followers-of-jesus-together/>

Now we should also note that the tree in the middle of that circle is meant to symbolize spiritual maturity, which is why we need to recognize that there's a "5<sup>th</sup> G" that's imbedded in the center of this. This has led us to recently upgrade our infographic to this:

This "5<sup>th</sup> G" is "The GOSPEL G," and it's absolutely essential to our success in becoming deeply devoted followers of Jesus together. The GOSPEL G, is the Gospel of Jesus Christ! Apart from the Gospel of Jesus Christ, these 4 G's wouldn't be very impressive, so...



- > We GATHER around the gospel, in the name of Jesus Christ.
- > We GROW in the gospel, in spiritual maturity as co-followers of Christ.
- > We GIVE toward the gospel, our time/talent/treasure for Jesus' sake,
- > We GO with the gospel, taking it out in Jesus' name to make disciples.

We should also note that little circle with the 3 arrows spinning in a circle (just above the tree on our infographic page), which indicates that these G's are an ongoing plan, which guides us on our continuing pathway toward maturity in Christ.

This Strategic Ministry Plan is the result of much prayer, and many hours of work by a faithful group of servants from our church:

Mark Carlson – Chair, Brandon Mustful – Lead Facilitator, Amy Graf, Barb Capes, Bill Oakes, Dan Evans, Dan Frost, Deb Brown, Douglas Daube, Eric Nygren, Holly Howes, Jerry Johnson, Karl Salscheider, Kay Sue Eriksson, Ken Wold, Laura Engelstad, and Mandi Buchan.

Some of these folks will be available in the Connection Café over the next 2 Sundays to talk about any questions or feedback you may have. OR, any one of them would be glad to sit down and chat sometime during the week over a cup of tea or coffee.

Last week we focused in on the importance of the 1<sup>st</sup> G on our Discipleship Pathway: GATHER, and we considered the biblical foundation for it. This morning, we'll focus on GROW. Psalm 1:1 begins, "Blessed is the one who does not walk in step with the wicked or stand in the way that sinners take or sit in the company of mockers," As much as we should be careful not to fall into any kind of a Prosperity Gospel here, we should also be careful not to miss the fact that there is indeed a promised blessing that comes from walking with the Lord. Psalm 1 begins with the word "blessed" or "blessed." That's an appealing word; raise your hand if you want God's blessing!<sup>3</sup>

<sup>4</sup> This promised blessing stands in direct contrast with those who won't be

<sup>3</sup> Consider Psalm 19:11.

<sup>4</sup> David Crowder's song comes to mind, "Everyday I'm Blessed!"  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w0iqHL9297E>

blessed, because they “walk in step with the wicked” and “stand in the way that sinners take” and “sit in the company of mockers.” God only blesses those who walk in His ways.

Psalm 1:2 then describes those who are blessed by the Lord: “But [*blessed is the one*] ...whose delight is in the law of the LORD, and who meditates on his law day and night.” Friends, this is how we GROW: By spending consistent time delighting in God’s Word, and meditating on it. This is crucial to our growth in spiritual maturity. As we learned this past summer from the book of Micah, we should learn to delight in the things in which God delights. God delights in His law, and He urges us to delight in it with Him. So if we want to become deeply devoted followers of Jesus, then we need to spend time in God’s Word. And the nice thing, is that we only need to do this one day a week, just attend a one-hour service on Sunday mornings, and we are good to go. (*Ok, NOT really! Just making sure you’re reading carefully!*) If we truly desire to be spiritually mature followers of Jesus, then we absolutely must train ourselves to meditate on God’s law day and night. So we don’t just read it, but we think about it... deeply; we ponder its meaning and its relevance, how God’s Living Word applies to our daily lives. We meditate on it, so that we can walk according to it, and *that* will lead us to God’s blessing in our lives.<sup>5</sup> God has provided each and every one of us with a wonderful gift: written down, clear directions for how we should walk. And as we learn to walk in His ways, empowered by His Spirit, there’s a promise of blessing.

Psalm 1:3 goes on, “That person [the one who delights/meditates on God’s law] is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither—whatever they do prospers.” So as we delight ourselves in God’s law, and meditate on His Word, we should expect it to yield its fruit in season. To put it another way, if our leaves are withering, then it’s an indication that we’re not planting ourselves by the streams of water.<sup>6 7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> James 1:22 says, “Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says.”

<sup>6</sup> It’s important to make something explicitly clear. The Bible does NOT in any way teach a Prosperity Gospel that turns God into a spiritual vending machine. It’s not saying, that if we live the right way, then God is contractually bound to give us whatever we want. The fact is, that many of the most spiritually mature people in the world today, are undergoing some of the most severe suffering and heartache ever known, and the blessing they’re enjoying from God doesn’t look anything like the blessing that we might expect when we first read Psalm 1. Sometimes these realities simply have to do with blessings in disguise, or blessings that only come through enduring the hard things of life, things which we would have never chosen for ourselves, but things in which we eventually find ourselves greatly blessed by God. Sometimes the hardships that Christ-followers go through are simply part of God’s mysterious ways, and His particular calling at a particular time and place, like He did with Job in the Old Testament. Still other times, it has to do with persecution, or something else. God doesn’t always explain His mysterious ways to us, but rest assured, His ways are always good. Consider 2 Corinthians 1:3-5; 2 Timothy 3:12; and 1 Peter 3:13-18, especially verses 14,17.

<sup>7</sup> What I’m saying today, is that Scripture repeatedly teaches a general principle, that walking in God’s ways will prosper us, whether that be financially, physically, mentally, emotionally, or otherwise. When we live according to God’s wisdom, it saves us from much of sin’s heartache and destruction, but we’re still

This summer my kids got me a maple tree for Father's Day, because they know that I LOVE trees! Unfortunately though, I planted the tree out in the middle of our yard, nowhere near any water source. And wouldn't you know it, right after I planted it, Bemidji hit a dry spell. For a while there we'd been getting wonderfully steady rain, but not during that last part of June (at least, not at our house). So my tree began to wither, badly!

By the time I finally noticed it, every leaf on my beautiful little maple tree had dried, brown edges, and I was sure that I'd lost it! However, against all odds, I began diligently watering it for the rest of the summer, with "streams of water" (aka our garden hose). And... I think, it may survive – but it was a close one! Here's the point, if "withering leaves" is an



accurate picture of our spiritual lives, then what are we going to do about it? How do we ever expect our faith to GROW strong and tall, "like a tree planted by streams of water," if we're not regularly watering it!? If we're not rooted in the teachings of God's Word, and rooted in the gospel of Christ!?

With the warning and blessings of Psalm 1 fresh in our minds, let's take a closer look at our Discipleship Pathway. Last Sunday we looked at our first G: GATHER. We emphasized the immense importance of gathering with other believers, and in the words of Hebrews 10:25, "not giving up meeting together..." The fact is, the English word that we translate as "church" in the New Testament, is the Greek word, "Ekklesia." This is the word the New Testament writers chose, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, to best represent the church. "Ekklesia" literally means: an assembly, a gathering of people with a shared belief, a community, a congregation.<sup>8 9</sup>

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within range of much of the collateral damage of living in a broken world. Nonetheless, when walk in God's ways, He blesses us for our obedience and trust. This isn't an exact transactional exchange, but rather a nuanced way that God works according to His good, pleasing, and perfect will for each one of us.

<sup>8</sup> The Greek word for church is Ekklesia, which literally means an ASSEMBLY of people, a GATHERING, or a CONGREGATION. Church = ἐκκλησία "① a regularly summoned legislative body, assembly, as generally understood in the Gr-Rom. World... ② a casual gathering of people, an assemblage, gathering... ③ people with shared belief, community, congregation... ④ of OT Israelites assembly, congregation... ⑤ of Christians in a specific place or area (the term ἐκκλ. apparently became popular among Christians in Greek-speaking areas for chiefly two reasons: to affirm continuity with Israel through use of a term found in Greek translations of the Hebrew Scriptures, and to allay any suspicion, especially in political circles, that Christians were a disorderly group)." William Arndt et al., A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 303.

<sup>9</sup> This is where theologians get their word "Ecclesiology," which simply means "the study of the church."

So any church that's trying to determine its Strategic Plan, must first understand that, by its very nature, it's a gathering, it's an "Ekklesia." But here's the kicker, just because we've GATHERED, that doesn't automatically make us a church. Last week we talked about how one of the first requirements for any local church to thrive, and for each person in that church to GROW in spiritual maturity, is for everyone to be present - and that's absolutely true. But just because we've gathered, that doesn't automatically guarantee that we've grown. Our gathering won't lead to growth, unless we're all involved in the things which help us to grow. If we gather, but we aren't intentional about how we grow in spiritual maturity, then there's little point in gathering. If we just physically gather in a room, with no authentic worship, or instruction in God's Word, or genuine gospel fellowship, then we might as well be a bunch of chickens, gathering in the hen house. "Cluck, cluck, clucking away!" Now that might be great... if you're a chicken! But, if we're here to become deeply devoted followers of Jesus, then we need to gather for gospel purposes, so that we can grow, grow, grow in our faith.<sup>10</sup>

This part of our Discipleship Pathway on growth is where it's important for us to keep in mind how it interconnects with our Mission, Vision, and Core Values along the left column of our infographic. Let's take another look at our green and white infographic. Our MISSION of "becoming deeply devoted followers of Jesus together" will be realized, when we become a church that looks like the five bullet points under our VISION.

**WE WILL BE A CHURCH WHO...**

**GROWS spiritually as it "Glorifies God in all of life."**

1 Corinthians 10:31 says, "So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God." As we GROW in spiritual maturity, we'll develop the heart, and the habits, of people who "glorify God in all of life." We'll learn how to glorify God at home, at work and at school, and everywhere else, wherever we happen to be, and whatever we happen to be doing, 24/7. This overlaps with our first Core Value: "God's Glory." God's Glory is a key biblical belief that empowers and guides all of our ministries. This also overlaps with our Core Value of Congregational Worship. Ephesians 5:18-20 says, "...be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another with psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit. Sing and make music from your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ." In other words, "glorifying God in all of life," often finds its greatest crescendo, and its most consistent expression, in our Sunday morning Congregational Worship. This is a Core Value for us because it is one of our most precious ways of

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<sup>10</sup> I can't help but think of the old kids song, "Neglect your Bible, forget to pray, and you'll SHRINK, SHRINK, SHRINK... Read your Bible, remember to pray, and you'll GROW, GROW, GROW!" There are some very endearing links of kids singing this song:  
[https://www.google.com/search?q=neglect+your+bible+forget+to+pray&sc\\_esv=](https://www.google.com/search?q=neglect+your+bible+forget+to+pray&sc_esv=)

glorifying Him together. We find great joy in gathering on Sunday mornings to express our worship through music that is sung from our hearts. We have so much for which to give God thanks, and so many reasons to praise and glorify Him. We worship through songs, through financial giving, through prayer, and the preaching of His Word, and in so many other ways as well. There's just something special about growing in our faith, while we're gathered together for Congregational Worship. That's why it was such an immense blessing to have our combined worship service together this summer.

**Our VISION goes on, WE WILL BE A CHURCH WHO...  
GROWS spiritually as it "Is transformed by God's Word."**

1 Thessalonians 2:13 says, "...when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as a human word, but as it actually is, the word of God, which is indeed at work in you who believe." Jeremiah 23:28-29 says it this way, "...let the one who has my word speak it faithfully. For what has straw to do with grain?" declares the LORD. "Is not my word like fire," declares the LORD, "and like a hammer that breaks a rock in pieces?"<sup>11</sup> We're not gathered here to grow in human knowledge, or in our own personal opinions about truth. We're here to grow through God's transformative word. Our 2<sup>nd</sup> Core Value is a "Biblical Foundation." Any genuine, spiritual growth must be built on the foundation of God's Word; otherwise, it absolutely will not have any lasting value. In the words of the Prophet Isaiah: "The grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of our God endures forever."<sup>12</sup> <sup>13</sup> Opportunities to GROW through God's transformative Word are plentiful at E-Free Bemidji! We make instruction in the Bible a top priority for each and every person, for all generations. We GROW...

- Through our sermons in the sanctuary
- Through our Kids/Children's Church
- Through our Sunday School classes
- Through our Wednesday night Kids/Youth ministries
- Through weekly adult Bible studies
- Through our many adult Life Groups, and on and on...

A church that's being "transformed by God's Word," is filled with Christ-followers who are like trees, "planted by streams of water," like these ministry opportunities.

I recently had dinner with some folks up in Blackduck, and there was an incredible selection of amazing food: main dishes, side dishes, desserts,

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<sup>11</sup> Hebrews 4:12 reminds us, "For the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart."

<sup>12</sup> Isaiah 40:8.

<sup>13</sup> Consider Psalm 127:1; Matthew 7:24-27; and 1 Corinthians 3:10-15.

and more! And there was a phrase that I kept hearing from the various family members; young and old alike, they all knew the saying: “If you go home hungry, it’s your own fault!” So let me put it this way E-Free Bemidji: “If you go home spiritually hungry, it’s your own fault!”

**Our VISION continues, WE WILL BE A CHURCH WHO...**

**GROWS spiritually as it...**

**“Serves and cares for each other in love.”**

**“Welcomes all people and cares for our neighbors.”**

**“Personally shares the gospel locally and globally.”**

I would love to go through each one of these last three points of our VISION statement like we did the first two, and show how each one connects with Scripture, but we don’t have time today. However, we have set aside time in the weeks ahead. Next week we’ll talk about our 3<sup>rd</sup> G: GIVE. We’ll talk about giving toward the gospel with our time, talent, and treasure. And we’ll see how GIVE connects with “serving and caring for each other in love,” as well as how we can BE A CHURCH WHO “welcomes all people and cares for our neighbors.” The following Sunday, Pastor Eric will talk about our 4<sup>th</sup> G: GO. We’ll talk about being a church who “Personally shares the gospel locally and globally.”

For today, let’s close with a challenge regarding our 2<sup>nd</sup> G: GROW. One of the best ways for an adult to GROW spiritually, is by being active in a small group. That’s why we have so many different small groups at E-Free, because they’re so effective in helping us GROW in spiritual maturity. Now they’re all good, but if you’re not already in some sort of a small group, then let me highly recommend joining one of the eleven Life Groups we currently offer at various times throughout the week, in various locations.

If we’re honest, sometimes we attend church for 1 hour, and that’s it; we don’t do anything else to GROW. We don’t put any further effort into our own spiritual growth, nor do we do anything to help others in their spiritual growth. All we do is attend, and consume what’s here, and then go home. So yes, technically we accomplished the 1<sup>st</sup> G on the Discipleship Pathway: we GATHERED. But that’s not even close to what Ekklesia is all about. One of the best ways that we can go deeper in our devotion to Jesus Christ, beyond just attending on Sunday mornings, is by participating in a small group. We need to gather with a small group of people, who can really get to know us, and be known by us, so that we can do some in-depth spiritual growth together. We need fellow believers in our life, who personally understand our joys and sorrows, and our strengths and weaknesses. We need a group who sincerely prays for our deepest hurts and needs, and who holds us accountable for any sin in our life. And we do the same for them, so that each and every one of us can GROW, “becoming deeply devoted followers of Jesus together.”

# STRATEGIC PLAN

EVANGELICAL FREE CHURCH OF BEMIDJI



## MISSION

*What we are supposed to be doing as a church.*



## VISION

*A picture of what the mission will look like when it is realized.*

**BECOMING  
DEEPLY DEVOTED  
FOLLOWERS OF  
JESUS TOGETHER.**

## WE WILL BE A CHURCH WHO

- GLORIFIES GOD IN ALL OF LIFE
- IS TRANSFORMED BY GOD'S WORD
- SERVES AND CARES FOR EACH OTHER IN LOVE
- WELCOMES ALL PEOPLE AND CARES FOR OUR NEIGHBORS
- PERSONALLY SHARES THE GOSPEL LOCALLY AND GLOBALLY

## DISCIPLESHIP PATHWAY



*A plan to guide disciples toward maturity in Christ.*



## CORE VALUES

*The biblical beliefs that empower and guide our ministries.*

**GOD'S GLORY**

**BIBLICAL FOUNDATION**

**CONGREGATIONAL WORSHIP**

**CARING FOR THE BODY OF BELIEVERS**

**CONNECTING WITH THE COMMUNITY**

**EVANGELIZING THE LOST**

