

Author: Patrick J. Griffiths ©
 Title: God has not, does not, and will not fail to keep His promises
 Text: Joshua 21:45; 23:14; Matthew 16:18
 Theme: God will keep His word to build His church. You and I are a part of something that cannot fail.

“There failed not ought of any good thing which the LORD had spoken unto the house of Israel; all came to pass” (Josh. 21:45).

“And, behold, this day I am going the way of all the earth: and ye know in all your hearts and in all your souls, that not one thing hath failed of all the good things which the LORD your God spake concerning you; all are come to pass unto you, and not one thing hath failed thereof” (Josh. 23:14).

“I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church; and the gates of Hades will not overpower it” (Matt. 16:18).

“The reports of my death are greatly exaggerated.”

The text of a cable sent by Mark Twain from London to the press in the United States after his obituary had been mistakenly published.

Unfortunately as the pastor of this fellowship, I some times hear talk about us struggling or even dying as a fellowship. I assure you that struggle is normal and dying we are not. Like Mark Twain, “The reports of our death are greatly exaggerated.”

Each year it is necessary at some point to review where we have been, where we are at and where we are going. Today’s thoughts will consider these three ideas.

As I began composing a letter to the church I was arrested by one word, “Wow.”

The appearance of "wow" in the WRITTEN English language was in 1513, presumably because of its SOUND. [It] Sound’s like the meaning [it] conveys. **“Wow” is an exclamation of surprise or awe.** It probably existed in our language for many years BEFORE 1513, but that year was its actual inclusion in the language in WRITTEN form. <http://en.allexperts.com/q/Etymology-Meaning-Words-1474/word-WOW.htm> (emphasis added)

The ideas of “surprise or awe” perhaps best capture the events of 2007. What “things” have been for me wow producing? There are four distinct areas I would like to consider this morning.

I. Where We Have Been

A. I am wowed by God

I am wowed by God's continued outpouring of love, acceptance, forgiveness, and "reward." He is always giving me more than I deserve. This is true for me as an individual and for us as a church. No matter how difficult our circumstances might appear to be, God's actions towards us are "wow." In Mark's Gospel this idea of being overwhelmed by God is noted in several passages.

1. Astonished (1:22; 6:2; 7:37; 10:26; 11:18)

"To be astonished, to be amazed, to strike a person out of his senses by some strong feeling such as fear, wonder, or even joy. The people were amazed at Jesus' teaching. It means they were struck with astonishment. In this word lies a sense of; 'It was too great for them to conceive.'"

2. Marvel (5:20; 15:5, 44)

3. Amazed (1:27; 10:24, 32)

There is nothing ordinary about God. He, in His words and works, is extraordinary. The response to Jesus words and deeds has overtones of fear and alarm; it reflects an awareness of the disturbing character of His presence. Friends, we have lost the awe that deity demands. We have, through ignorance, failed to fear and tremble in His presence. We are too flippant and too vulgar. May we never lose the wonder and marvel of our faith and its founder.

Our eyes are veiled to God, but He is no less extraordinary now as He was then or will be in the imminent future. It is my pray that my eyes would be opened to the utter unimaginable magnitude of "Christ in me, the hope of glory." That I would be stunned into silence at the sheer enormity of God and His redemptive work.

4. Fear (4:41; 5:15, 33, 36; 6:50; 9:32; 10:32)

The sheer magnitude of God should cause us to tremble. I tremble before Him because He is God. I melt before the radiance of His glory. I bow before the majesty of His being. Because of who He is, I fear. Although I will spend more time on my second point, I never wish to take this for granted. And I hope I never become insensitive to it.

B. I am wowed by the journey made by this community of faith.

I am wowed by what we, as a church family, have gone through. Much of this culminated in my mandated month long Sabbatical. There were four large areas addressed in 2007.

1. Theological Labeling (Luke 9:49, 50).

⁴⁹ "John answered and said, 'Master, we saw someone casting out demons in Your name; and we tried to prevent him because he does not follow along with us.' ⁵⁰ But Jesus said to him, 'Do not hinder him; for he who is not against you is for you'" (Luke 9:49, 50).

We have struggled through and remained unified over theological labeling. Although many inside our community of faith identify themselves with theological labels, we are embracing the greater diversity within the believing community and celebrate the individual's soul liberty to believe differently in areas of theological non-essentials.

2. Corporate Worship.

Also, we have struggled through and remained unified over corporate worship that was crippled by music style preferences. There appears to be a real spirit of refreshment visiting our corporate worship as it relates to the music ministry. We are thankful to God for those who have enabled us to push past our preferences and build on the principles of theological accuracy and grace.

3. Elder - Deacon Ministry.

In addition, we have struggled through and remained unified over the biblical understanding of elder, deacon and what this means to the community of faith. Our quest as elders is to push toward a biblical understanding and expression of the elder/deacon relationship. All of the elders and deacons believe this will lead the fellowship into a state of health and into a persistent pattern of healthy growth.

4. Numerical and Financial Changes.

Finally, we have experienced, as a family, people leaving and with them their gifting. It has never been a church split, but it has been a church leak. All three of the previously mentioned areas have affected us as a fellowship. The elders are aware of these changes and continue to seek God's wisdom and strength in addressing concerns. The elders believe by speaking to the above noted areas stability and growth will happen.

I believe the greatest need for sheep is to have a shepherd(s) (Mark 6:34). God has assigned the elders to shepherd His sheep (Acts 20:28). We are committed to this. We believe in God, and we believe He is working and will work mightily in our family. I look forward to the years in front of us and am grateful for the years behind us. May God continue to knit our hearts together in our common pursuit of our uncommon Lord.

Each of these four areas addressed in 2007 also define us as to where we are currently at. However, let me offer you two additional areas before concluding this study.

II. Where We Are At

How Do We Identify Church Health?

There is an absolute deluge of resources available that believe they are the answer to declining attendance. They want us to believe that it is as simple as $w + x + y = z$. They want us to believe there is a formula for church growth. I will begin this article by simply noting that there is nothing *in the New Testament* that will guarantee numerical growth. There is perhaps a lot that can be done to market the church or “sell” the church in order to grow numerically, but this is not the New Testament picture of a healthy church.

In this short read I would like to consider what is meant by church health and what that might look like. Let me begin by noting three initial thoughts.

- There is a necessary and legitimate distinction between church growth and church health.

Church growth speaks of numbers, but church health speaks of maturity through discipleship. Please hear me out. I want a numerically large church, but I will not sacrifice church health for church growth.

- Healthy relationships are not void of problems.

All relationships have problems even healthy ones. In healthy relationships problems are addressed without attaining “critical mass” status. Critical mass is the scale or volume at which processes become self-perpetuating. In an unhealthy relationship problems take on a life of their own. In an unhealthy relationship problems escalate to significant explosions with much fall out. The elders and deacons are aware of various concerns and each group is addressing these concerns. If we are healthy, we will be able to do this without significant fanfare.

- Healthy relationships are not void of change.

All healthy relationships are dynamic. All healthy relationships grow and thus change. In healthy relationships there can be uncertainty as to the future, but such uncertainty does not mean instability. We have changed, and we will continue

Think about those relationships where health is present. Think about those relationships that would be identified as unhealthy. There are certain dynamics present in both.

When we think of church health we must define such an idea by the New Testament and there is probably no better passage than Ephesians 4:7-16 [PLEASE READ]. From this passage let us consider five marks for identifying church health.

- A. A Biblical Structure for Elders, Deacons, and Ministry Expression (Eph. 4:7, 11 “apostles, etc.”)

There is a biblical structure that reflects the New Testament church. Elders are to be ministers of the word, prayer, and shepherding sheep, whereby the saints are equipped for the work of the ministry. Deacons are to free the elders from administrating ministries, and the congregation is to engage in the work of the ministry that simply celebrates who they are where they are.

- B. A Biblical Relationship between all Members and the Larger Body of Christ that is Marked by Biblical Love (Eph. 4:14-16 “mature man. . . building up itself in love”)

The body of Christ is to be marked by humility, teach-ability, and charity. Charity or love is to be the defining characteristic of Christ’s body (John 13:34, 35).

- C. A Biblical Pattern for Expositing the Scripture through Exegesis, Biblical Theology, and Systematic Theology (Eph. 4:12 “equipping of the saints”)

The Word of God is to be the defining document for the making and maturing of Christ’s followers.

- D. A Biblical Message that is Christ-Exalting, Word-Centered, Global-Impacting, and Grace-Based (Eph. 4:13 “knowledge of the Son of God”)

This core value is the non-negotiable theme of the New Testament/Covenant church.

- E. A Biblical Understanding for Discipleship that is Marked by the Making and Maturing of Disciples Resulting in the Strengthening of Existing Churches and the Establishing of New Churches (Eph. 4:15, 16 “grow up”)

The question of whether or not you are a disciple was answered the day you were saved by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. If you are saved, you are a disciple. It is now for you to be clearly identified with the body of Christ.

III. Where We Are Going

How do we determine church direction? We believe the direction of a fellowship is to be established by the truths of the New Testament.

The New Testament Church is *to be a church planting church locally, nationally, and globally by strengthening existing churches and establishing new ones through the making and maturing of disciples who share the WBC core values.*

Our core values are four-fold: Christ-Exalting, Word-Centered, Global-Impacting, and Grace-Based.

Vision versus Goals

- Vision - where we are going - BIG PICTURE
- Goals - how we get there - ACTION STEPS - tangible

Our Vision is to be a church planting church locally, nationally, and globally by strengthening existing churches and establishing new ones through the making and maturing of disciples who share the WBC core values.

IV. How Will We Get There

This is what we will be considering during our annual meeting. We invite all of you to attend. The goals we establish as elders and deacons are the action steps we desire to take as a community of faith in the fulfilling of our Church Vision. These goals are dynamic in that they change from year to year. Our intent in 2008 is to establish goals that will strengthen Waukesha Bible Church and enable us to be a church planting church. These goals will operate in four distinct areas: pre-evangelism, evangelism, discipleship, and church planting. In the next hour, we will share our goals for this community of faith for 2008.

APPLICATION: (Where do we go from here? What's the NEXT STEP?)

Let me suggest 4 simple actions steps.

1. Join the church through membership
2. Attend church regularly
3. Give regularly
4. Start using your gift for the strengthening of this local church

May this short study encourage us and guide us as we celebrate the diversity of His body. May God turn our hearts toward Him. May He continue to knit our hearts together in our common pursuit of our uncommon God.