**Direction for 2025**

In the past We have held events called New People Lunches where we introduce to new friends in the church what our church is like, so people have a clear understanding of what they are getting involved in, but we have such an influx of people this past year – we have doubled in size in a year from the 40s to the 80s , I thought we could do that presentation here and now for new people and a reminder for those who have been here a lot longer.

It is for those reasons that we dedicated this time today to looking at who we are and where we are going to this year.

And I hope that you will see that you are part of this, and that you may see areas where you can serve God. Those areas may not be the ones we are already doing, but a new ministry that fits with who we are. We are keen to hear your thoughts.

There are two things we ask when we are considering whether or not to join a group, whether it is a church, a club, or a business. First is “who are you?” And the second is “where are you going?”

Today I hope to give some information in answer to those two questions in relation to this church.

The answers to those questions may help you determine whether this is the place for you and whether it is a place that you want to invest your time, energy, and life in.

And I hope at the end of this, you will say “I buy into the church here and want to contribute to making God’s vision come about in this place.” I want to partner with this group of people who are following God.

Then the questions will change from “who are YOU” to “who are WE?” and “where are WE going?”

Let me start with the first question.

You are in a Christian church, surrounded by people who seek to follow Jesus.

All of us are on a journey toward Christ. None of us are perfect.

We who believe on Jesus Christ are adopted children of God; we are part of God’s family. He chose us to be part of his family.

And the church is called in the Bible as the bride of Christ.

Henri Nouwen writes: As members of a Christian community, we are not primarily for each other but for God. A Christian community is not a closed circle of people embracing each other, but a forward moving group of companions bound together by the same voice asking for their attention.

I believe that.

And from the NZ Baptist historian Martin Sutherland: The church glorifies God not by being perfect but by being the site on which God is at work.

Again, I believe that.

And from Charles Colsen: Even though the church itself is shot through with an individualism that cripples our witness, even though the church today is made up of sinners like you and me, it is the one institution in society that still has the capability to challenge culture by bearing witness to God's transcendent standards of absolute justice and righteousness.

Again, I say Amen to that.

Those quotes give a broad-brush response to the first question.

All these statements are true for any Christian church proclaiming Jesus Christ as their saviour, but I want us to look at “who are we” – Eastside Baptist Church in Invercargill. In other words, what makes Eastside Eastside.

EBC PPTS

Turning to the second question “Where are we going?” we all know the verse in Proverbs 29:18 that says that without a vision, people perish, and we believe it to be true.

And we know that we are called to a purpose by God. However, as we have mentioned over the last few weeks, God and his purposes are huge, and we can become overawed by the sheer immensity of it.

Even our church mission statement is very large in scope: “to follow Jesus, grow in wholeness, and bring others to Him.”

We need to know where God is particularly working within that broad statement so we can partner with him so that our teaspoon of marmite is well spread.

In January, the leadership team met together to hear the will of God for this church for 2025.

It was not about changing the mission statement, but asking God where, under that umbrella of that statement, does he want us to focus our energies. Where are we to spend our time, money, and energy?

But before I address that second question, I need to answer another question:

Why do we need such a vision at all?

Oswald Chambers in his devotional My Utmost for His Highest gives us the answer to that: 

“It is easier to serve God without a vision, easier to work for God without a call, because then you are not bothered by what God requires; common sense is your guide, veneered over with Christian sentiment. You will be more prosperous and successful, more leisure-hearted, if you never realize the call of God. But if once you receive a commission from Jesus Christ, the memory of what God wants will always come like a goad; you will no longer be able to work for Him on the common-sense basis.”

Some will ask why a church needs a specific vision. Surely, Matthew 28 gives us the great commission and we need no more.

Matthew 28:19-20 *go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.*

However, that alone does not cut it at the micro level. The mandate is Matthew 28 is so wide that we cannot do it all in a church of eighty people in the southernmost city in NZ. We need focus. We need bite size pieces of the elephant.

As Campbell Morgan wrote: We await the Divine vision and the Divine voice and the divinely marked out path; we wait until we hear God saying, I am going there, I would have you come with me, - then the Holy Spirit can exercise his gift in our lives.

It is not for us as a Leadership team to decide the vision. We listen for God and his vision, hence the day we set aside to have a focused listening time.

The leadership’s job is to communicate God's promise to the people, not create the vision and then strive to enlist followers to buy in to it.

It is said that if a vision must be sold to others, it is not compelling and is probably not divinely inspired. Spiritual leaders don't sell vision; they share what God has revealed to them and trust the Holy Spirit to confirm the vision in the hearts of their people.

A divine vision is not dependent upon us making something happen. It is dependent upon God making something happen.

A vision is dependent on us focusing on God.

God ordained visions will often appear to be impossible from a purely pragmatic perspective.

Visions are always bigger than we think we can do, and always not within our human capacity to achieve.

A vision is inspirational; it drives us on to a place we never thought we would get to.

A vision gives a context for the labour or service that goes beyond the mere doing of it. The vision inspires workers, envisioning a future that they want to see come about.

Suffice to say that a vision cannot be achieved by the ministry leaders and Elders alone, but by participation by all who call Eastside Baptist Church their spiritual home.

Helen Keller is quoted as saying: Alone we can do so little, together we can do so much.

Over this year starting today, I will unpack in more detail what we heard from God in January.

Vision PPTs