

Over this past ministry year, our Sunday morning preaching has been centred around the book of James, and, 1&2 Samuel. With a few weeks left before Summer, we're going to begin a five sermon series entitled, "*The Values That Drive Our Vision*".

A vision statement, or mission statement, intends the answer the following questions: *Why do we exist?* Or, *what are we trying to accomplish?*

Tesla's vision is to accelerate the world's transition to sustainable energy. **IKEA's** vision is to create a better everyday life for the many people. **Mastercard's** vision is a world beyond cash, where technology and expertise make payments safe, simple and smart. **Mountain Equipment Coop's** vision is to inspire and enable everyone to lead active outdoor lifestyles.

These statements answer the "why" and "what" questions; why do we exist, and, what are we trying to accomplish? A vision statement function as a measuring stick, allowing organization to assess their progress.

Why does the Church exist? What is it trying to accomplish?

While Tesla and Mountain Equipment Coop have very different visions, every church that bears Christ's name has the same vision and mission—to glorify God, reach people, and see them transformed. Worship, evangelism, and discipleship; community, compassion, and healing—these things ought to mark every Christian community.

But what about *values*? On a personal level, we use the word "value" to describe what's important to us, but in the context of a vision, the word "value" has a more narrow definition. Borrowing the analogy of a road trip, if our vision is the destination, then our values are the route by which we travel. Values guide us as we go; they describe *how* we will move towards the accomplishment of our vision.

As we engage in the mission of the church—to glorify God, reach people, and see them transformed—what are the values that guide us as we go? Over the next five weeks, we are going to explore the values that mark North Shore Alliance Church. We are going to take time to ground these values in the Scriptures, but more than that, we want to story-tell, sharing how these values are working their way out in our own lives, and in the life of our broader community.

If you are relatively new to our church, I trust that this series will give you an inside look into who we are—or at the very least—who we aspire to be. If you've been a part of this church for some time, I trust that you are seeing the evidence of these values in our life together.

Without any further ado, Let me state the first value and we can jump right in.

Value #1: Reliance Upon God: We believe that the Church is at its best when it's *rooted* in the Scriptures and *reliant* upon the Holy Spirit. We affirm the authority of God's Word in our lives *and* we embrace a "pray-first" mentality, trusting the Holy Spirit to guide us.¹

¹ 2 Timothy 3:16-17; Galatians 5:25.

Rooted in the Scripture: I want to begin by sharing a little bit of my own journey in terms of being rooted in the Scripture.

I grew up in a home where both of my parents loved, and followed, Jesus Christ. Like many young children, when I was young my parents read all sorts of books to me: Dick and Jane, Frog and Toad, and who could forget Dr. Seuss?

*“Do you like green eggs and ham? I do not like them, Sam-I-am. I do not like them in a house. I do not like them with a mouse. I do not like them here or there. I do not like them anywhere. I do not like green eggs and ham. I do not like them, Sam-I-am.”*²

As I got older, and began to read for myself, I left behind Dick and Jane, Frog, Toad, and Dr. Seuss; for a brief time, a few decades later, I returned to them when my own children were small. But there’s only one set of stories that I heard when I was young that I haven’t outgrown—Bible stories. You can find it all in Bible stories: heroes and villains, rich and poor, young and old; war, scandal, suffering, joy, beauty, and mystery.

Once I took up reading the Bible, I never stopped. Some kids are sports nerds; they can name every player, on every team, and all of their personal stats. Some kids are word nerds; they memorize words from the dictionary, know their meanings, and can spell words most of us couldn’t pronounce.

But me? For as long as I can remember, I’ve been a Bible nerd. Names, dates, places—I can’t get enough. My parents bought a Bible

Trivia Pursuit game and I would bring the cards along on road trips so that I could memorize the answers.

The church I went to growing up didn’t have a Preteen teaching time during the Sunday service and the sermon was often above my comprehension level, and so, I would open the Bible and read until the service was done. I didn’t this know until long after I became a pastor, but my grandmother frequently told my parents, *“Mark’s going to be a preacher.”*

There are 66 books in the Bible, 39 in the Old Testament, and 27 in the New Testament. Although exact figures are difficult to ascertain, conservative estimates suggest that more than 6 billion copies of the Bible have been printed. The original biblical manuscripts were written in three languages—Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek—but as of today, the entire Bible has been translated into 670 different languages, and at least some portion of the Bible has been translated into over 3,300 languages.

Did you know that every minute, of every day, about 50 Bibles are sold? Did you know that the Bible is the most shop-lifted book in the world?

In spite of the fact that many North Americans are not well-versed in the Bible, we use biblical phrases all the time:

- the truth will set you free
- the blind leading the blind
- servant-leader
- the writing is on the wall

² Dr. Seuss, *Green Eggs and Ham*.

- and the ever popular sports analogy, David vs. Goliath

Under the communist governments of Russia and China, the Bible was outlawed for many years; in places like Somalia, North Korea, and Libya, the Bible is still outlawed and viewed as a subversive book.

The French philosopher, Voltaire, in the 1700's, boldly proclaimed, "*one hundred years from now the world will hear no more of the Bible.*" Ironically, fifty years after Voltaire's death, the Geneva Bible Society purchased his house and they began to print Bibles on Voltaire's old printing press.

If I were to point to the shaping influences in my life, particularly when it comes to what I value, or the way I think, everyone and everything pales in comparison to the influence of this book. The Bible does not contain the secret to quantum physics or economics, but it does provide answers to life's most important questions:

- Who I am?
- Why am I here?
- What am I worth?
- How can I find peace?
- Who is God?

On the one hand the Bible *is* an ancient document, written over a span of nearly 1600 years, with contributions from at least forty different writers. But on the other hand, the Bible is much more than an ancient historical document. The Scriptures aren't filled with human speculation about the way things are, or, who God is. The writers of Scripture didn't sit down, think deep thoughts about God and then put pen to paper. 2 Timothy 3:16 tells us that all Scripture is

God-breathed; 2 Peter 1:21 tells us that those who wrote the Scriptures "*spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.*"

And so, while the Bible certainly contains information about God, the Bible's aim isn't primarily to *inform* but to *introduce*. The primary intent of the Scripture is relational in the sense that it is *from* God to *us*, and, it's *about God*, and, *about us*. The Bible contains the story of God revealing Himself to the world.

illus: When you've been in one place for a long time, you can become blind to certain things. Threadbare carpet, marks on the wall, that picture frame that is titled slightly to the left; it's right in front of us but over time we don't notice anymore. It's not until we invite someone over, and they make a comment, that we see clearly again.

When I meet someone who is new to North Shore Alliance, I make a point of asking what they have noticed, or experienced, in their first few weeks attending our church. I've been here 11 years, and without fresh perspective, I'm not always a good judge of what is, or isn't, happening. One of the most frequent comments I receive from newcomers is, "*You preach the Bible here.*" I must confess that this comment both encourages and confuses me. The way the comment is being made leaves me wondering what other churches are teaching.

The other night I was flipping through our tv channels and I came across a televised service from Joel Olsteen's church. He is the pastor of Lakewood Church in Houston, Texas. His church is massive, and the services are televised all over the world; on a monthly basis, more that 20 million people, in over 100 countries, tune in. He's also

authored ten books which have reached #1 on The New York Times Best Seller list.

I watched him preach for as long as I could, which wasn't very long. His hair was perfect, and his teeth were so white—Hollywood white—but his message amounted to the following: have a good attitude, be nice, and you will be happy, healthy, and successful. Joel Osteen has an incredible platform, he's a pastor to over 20 million people, but he's got nothing of substance to say. He's preaching positive thinking, not the Bible. What a waste.

2 Timothy 3:16-17 says, "*All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.*"

As a church, we are committed to being rooted in the Scriptures and reliant on the Holy Spirit.

Reliant on the Spirit: From the day I was born, until the day I left for Bible School at age 20, I attended the same church. It was a great church: it was committed to teaching the Bible, to compassionate care, and to missions, but there was something missing that I didn't recognize until after I had gone. Like I said earlier, when you've been in one place for a long time, you don't always notice what's right in front of you.

I didn't grow up with very much teaching on the Holy Spirit. Because I read the Bible, and my church taught the Bible, I knew

who the Holy Spirit was, but didn't I know Him, and I certainly wasn't aware of the relationship He wanted to have with me.

(1) I want to talk for a few moments about the relationship between the Spirit and the Scriptures.

The Scriptures are God's Word, the Holy Spirit's Word, to humanity. Think again about 2 Timothy 3:16, "All Scripture is *God-breathed*". In Hebrew, the word for "breath" is "**ruach**," which can be alternatively translated as "wind" or "Spirit;" the corresponding word in Greek is "pneuma." The words "ruach" and "pneuma" are regularly used to refer to the Holy Spirit.

2 Peter 1:21 says, "*For prophecy never had its origin in the human will, but prophets, though human, spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.*" In others, what we read in the Scripture are the words of God to us; the Spirit authored the Scriptures.

And not only has the Spirit authored the Scriptures, He illuminates the Scriptures as we read them today. In John 14:26, Jesus said, "*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.*" John 16:13-14 says, "*when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all the truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come. He will glorify me because it is from me that he will receive what he will make known to you.*"³

³ C.f. 1 Corinthians 2:14.

A part of the Holy Spirit's work is to illuminate—to shed light on—the Scriptures as we read so that we can understand and experience the truth that God is speaking.

If you have ever read the Scriptures, and it seemed like something leapt off the page, or, if you've ever listened to someone preach the Bible and it seemed as though the words were meant *just for you*, then you have experienced the illuminating work of the Spirit. The Holy Spirit loves to take this ancient word, making it living and active, so that it continues to speak today. Even as we *root* ourselves in the Scriptures, we cultivate a *reliance* on the Spirit.

(2) Prayer: Let's shift gears for a moment and think about the nature of prayer. The Bible is the Word of God, but God's Voice predates the Scriptures. Long before the Bible came to be, God was speaking. It's not as though God was silent, suddenly found His voice, authored the Bible, before lapsing back into silence. It's in God's nature to speak and reveal Himself to us.⁴

And yet, growing up, I never thought about God speaking in the present; I only thought of Him as speaking in the past. In every other relationship that I had, I fully expected to engage in conversation—speaking and listening. Even people who are mute, or deaf, communicate by way of sign language; one might argue that a relationship without communication isn't a relationship at all.

Looking back, I now see how strange it was, not expecting that God would ever speak to me. Keep in mind that I was a Bible nerd, and the Scriptures are filled with stories of God revealing Himself to

Moses, Hannah, David, and Mary. I was encouraged to pray, and pray I did, but the form of prayer I was taught was monologue, not dialogue.

I would bow my head, open my mouth, and speak to God; when I ran out of words—or time—I would say, “Amen,” and get on with things. I never thought to pause and listen, because I never imagined that God might want to speak with me.

Now I know better. All of my life I've looked to the Scriptures for wisdom and guidance, and I continue to do so, but I've learned to recognize the voice of the Spirit. I want to be *rooted* in the Scriptures and *reliant* on the Spirit.

Sometimes I'll be walking down the street, or driving in my car, my mind a jumble of random thoughts, when out of nowhere a specific person will come to mind. In the past, I would brush the thought aside as a strange interruption, but I've learned to heed such “interruptions” as a prompting of the Spirit.

Spirit, how would you have me pray for this person? Now I wait in expectation, paying attention to any thought, word, or feeling that comes to mind, and then I pray. In most cases, after praying I call, text, or email the person to tell them *that* I prayed and *what* I prayed. When I reach out I often find out that I was praying for something that was both deep and unspoken.

“*How did you know?*”, they ask. I didn't know, I couldn't have known, but the Spirit knows and loves you so much that He put you

⁴ Tozer, 60-61.

on my mind.

(3) Transformation: One final thought before I conclude. Apart from the presence and power of the Holy Spirit, Christianity is little more than a moral philosophy, and an impossible one at that.

Jesus once said, “*Love your enemies and do good to those who hate you.*” He didn’t qualify the statement...*love you enemies*...full stop. How do you love the person, or persons, who has made it their personal mission to destroy your life? How do you bless the person who has cursed you? How do you forgive the person who has wounded you so deeply, on purpose, without remorse?

You might be able to ignore your enemies, or to refrain from responding in kind, but to *love* one’s enemies is unnatural; it’s beyond us—we don’t have it in us. Only God can love this way, and unless God lives in us by His Spirit, we will never live out Jesus’ mandate.

Obedience and holiness are painful words apart from the presence and power of the Holy Spirit. Any attempt to follow Jesus, apart from a radical reliance on the Spirit, will result in frustration and failure. No one can transform themselves, nor should we try.

The Apostle Paul argues frequently, and vigorously, that we cannot live a life of obedience in our own strength; we may be willing, but our flesh is too weak. We need to break free from the power of sin, we need a new heart (new desires), we need God’s power to work from the inside out.

If you’re living with the lie that your value is based on your performance, positive thinking will only take you so far; you need God’s truth to resound from within you. *You are fearfully and wonderfully made. Before the creation of the world, I chose you. Nothing can separate you from My love.*

And I haven’t even said anything yet about the work that Jesus assigned to for us to do. *You will do greater things than I have done.* Jesus the Healer, the miracle worker, said this very thing to His disciples. How is this possible apart from the presence and power of the Holy Spirit. Human ingenuity, personality, and hard work cannot produce the work of God—we need God, to do the work of God. We need the the ministry of the Holy Spirit in us; the world needs the ministry of the Holy Spirit through us.

Conclusion: We believe that the Church is at its best when it’s rooted in the Scriptures and reliant upon the Holy Spirit.

All of us can grow in our rootedness in the Scriptures; all of us can grow in reliance on the Holy Spirit. Perhaps this morning as I’ve been speaking, you’ve sensed a need to grow in a particular area; can I ask you to share that need with a friend or spouse, a small group leader or a pastor, in the next week?

As we take steps forward in serving our North Shore community, this value stands at the centre. As our culture shifts around us, and we face the pressure to compromise or conform, we will remain rooted in the scriptures and reliant on the Holy Spirit. When we are stretched beyond our resources, when we don’t know what to do, we will remain rooted in the scriptures and reliant on the Holy Spirit. As we invite people to follow Jesus, our commitment is to call them to a rootedness in the Scriptures and a reliance on the Spirit.

This is central to who we are as the people of God at North Shore Alliance; we implore you, come with us, run ahead of us, and let's live this out together.

Pray

Worship

Invitation to Prayer Ministry

Benediction