

Vision Builder

Shepherd Gate
Church

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Vision Builder was designed and written by Michael H. Constantine for the glory of God and the strengthening of God's churches. Please do not copy or distribute for profit without the permission of the author.

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What Is Vision Builder?

I

The happiest, most fulfilled people are those who live with purpose .

When too many members of a congregation lack specific direction, that congregation loses its sense of purpose.

Vision. What a powerful word. With vision we see where we are going. With vision we pursue a goal that God has given us.

Simply put, a vision is *what God wants*. He gives us his vision so we will want what he wants. Vision creates desire. Desire births prayer, and God answers prayer bringing the fulfillment of the vision.

The Bible says that without a vision we live carelessly, travelling but never arriving. The visionless life will end with much regret. Indeed, the happiest, most fulfilled people are those who live for a purpose.

To have eternal life means to have an eternal purpose. In Christ we live, but *why* do we live? That question has many answers. We live to glorify God. We live to love God and to love everyone God loves. We live to defeat Satan.

All of those purposes certainly describe God's vision for the church, but to be effective we must be more specific. Too many Christians see the big picture, but they don't know where they fit in the picture. Therefore they live without personal direction. When too many members of a congregation lack specific direction, that congregation loses its sense of purpose.

In the book of Nehemiah, we see a marvelous picture of vision and fulfillment. One key to the completion of their mission was the personal, specific involvement of each person. Everyone knew the big picture, knew their part, and did their part.

The purpose of Vision Builder is to help each member of Shepherd Gate Church do the following things:

- ◆ See the Big Picture
- ◆ See the part Shepherd Gate plays as a congregation
- ◆ See the importance of individual involvement in God's purposes.
- ◆ Become more effective in their personal involvement.
- ◆ Create a desire for enlargement

The Big Picture

Seeing the big picture inspires us, connects us, and shows us the magnitude of God's plan. John and Mary worked on land belonging to their father. One day when the sun seemed hotter and the land seemed harder, their father paid them a surprise visit. "Lay down your tools," he said. "It's time for a trip to the mountains."

Some of their brothers and sisters had told them about the mountains, but John and Mary were the pragmatic type. Why spend time going to the mountains when there is so much work to do in the valley? Still, their father had called them, so they followed.

They climbed in silence, the father and his children, till they reached the pinnacle. There beneath them lay all the father's lands. The vastness of the vision overwhelmed them. "Children, everything you see belongs to me, and even more you cannot see. I am Lord of all. Your part is important, just as all parts are important. When the toil is hard, and the rewards seem small remember what you have seen today."

Why the Local Church?

What do you picture when you see the word *church*? Depending on your background and your experience you might see any of several things. Some people see a cathedral, some a small white building with a steeple. Some picture an informal gathering of sincere believers meeting in a home. Still others might have difficulty picturing the church at all, for to them the concept of the church is too grand for the mind's eye.

The church is composed of all those who put their complete faith in Christ as their Savior and Lord. Though divided by denominations and practices, it is united through each individual's faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

The church is both *universal and local*, *eternal and temporal*. The *universal church* means the entire community of believers in the world today. That means that you have fellow believers who live in huts, wear primitive clothing, and eat insects for breakfast. You also have fellow believers who live in mansions and start their day with a swim in their private pool. The miracle of the church is that every believer, whether in a hut or a mansion, a ghetto or a suburb, has exactly the same standing with God, through Christ, by the power of the Holy Spirit.

The *eternal church* means all believers in Jesus, whether on earth or already in Heaven, even those yet to be born. The *temporal church* refers to the church in our time. All believers living today, in all churches, in all places, make up the church of the Lord Jesus Christ.

We need a vision of the universal, eternal church to encourage us. But we find our true effectiveness and fulfillment through *the local church* right here and right now. The local church gives each of us a place to relate, contribute, and receive personal care.

With that introduction in mind, let's take a fresh look at Shepherd Gate Church and see how it fits into God's big picture.

Shepherd Gate Church

What are we?

an evangelical
church

If someone asks you what kind of church you belong to, what do you tell them? This section of Vision Builder will help you to understand your church, what we are, and what we believe.

To begin, let's consider a general definition:

"Shepherd Gate is an evangelical, nondenominational church in the Protestant tradition with a charismatic, full-gospel emphasis. "

Did you know we are all of that? It's a mouthful isn't it? While a definition like that won't help you much in explaining your church to your friends, it does say a lot about us. Let's examine each statement carefully.

Shepherd Gate is an *evangelical* church. When applied to a church, evangelical means more than proclaiming the gospel. Evangelical churches hold the following beliefs and convictions:

There is One God, eternally existent in Three Persons: Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.

The Bible is the inspired word of God to all people of all ages.

Jesus Christ, God's son, was born of a virgin, lived a sinlessly perfect life, died on the cross for the sins of mankind, was raised from the dead by the power of God, ascended into heaven, and lives eternally.

Jesus Christ, Son of God, is the only Savior, and absolute faith in him is the only way of salvation for all peoples in all times.

God has entrusted the church with the task of proclaiming the good news of salvation, both locally and internationally, to all people in every place.

Evangelical churches may hold other beliefs, but these comprise the basic distinctions.

a non-
denominational
church

Shepherd Gate Church is a *nondenominational* church. Throughout church history various groups have found it necessary or expedient to organize themselves around common beliefs, purposes, or practices. These groups, some small, some gigantic, we call *denominations*. Shepherd Gate Church does not belong to any of these established groups, but we do not think ourselves spiritually superior on that account. We acknowledge that there are true churches within all denominations, true believers within all churches. We have chosen to not affiliate with any denomination, though we, as a congregation, do seek out fellowship and cooperation with other churches of like

a church in the
Protestant
tradition

purpose. We are dedicated to the growth of the Kingdom of God through all local churches that honor Jesus Christ as Lord.

Shepherd Gate is a church *in the Protestant tradition*. Since we do not acknowledge the authority structure of the Roman Catholic Church as the ultimate authority, we are not Roman Catholic. Since we do not follow the sacramental practices of the Orthodox churches, we are not Orthodox. Historically we can trace our roots to the reformers, those who protested against an exclusive clergy with the exclusive right to read and interpret Scripture. In doctrine, government, and style, we are Protestant.

a charismatic
church

Shepherd Gate is a church with *a charismatic, full gospel emphasis*. The two terms, *charismatic* and *full-gospel*, are synonyms. Full-gospel is the older term, but not as old as *Pentecostal*. Christians who experienced the power of the Holy Spirit in signs, wonders and miracles near the beginning of the twentieth century came to be known as Pentecostals, a reference to the similarity of their experience and the experience of the believers in Acts, chapter two.

Toward the middle of the twentieth century the term *full gospel* came into wide use for churches that experienced signs, wonders, and miracles by the power of the Holy Spirit. Why full gospel? Many churches preached Christ as Savior, but full gospel churches also felt compelled to proclaim Christ as healer and as baptizer in the Holy Spirit. Hence, full gospel.

During the early sixties, Catholic and denominational people who experienced the power of God through healing and miracles became known as *Charismatics*. The word comes from *charisma*, the Greek word for gift, referring to the gifts of the Holy Spirit. Some evangelical churches teach that gifts of the Holy Spirit stopped happening either after the first apostles died or after the Bible was completed. As a charismatic church we believe the Holy Spirit still works miraculously through spiritual gifts, and we experience those gifts today. But we also reject any notion of spiritual superiority related to spiritual gifts.

a church that
believes that Jesus
lives and that he can
change lives

So, what do you tell someone who asks you what kind of church you attend? Tell them you attend a church that believes that Jesus is alive and that he can change lives. That answer should satisfy anyone who believes in Jesus, and stimulate the curiosity of anyone who doesn't.

Without question the local assemblies of believers are the mightiest movement in the world. They alone represent the Kingdom of God on earth today. They alone offer up praise and worship to God. As a member of Shepherd Gate Church you are united with all those believers in spirit and purpose.

A Vision of Fullness

II

Whatever fills us, controls us

What fills us, controls us. If you see a man stagger out of a bar, stumble down the street, and fall face down in the gutter, you pretty well know what made him act that way. He filled himself with alcohol and the alcohol controlled him. In the same manner, observe someone who loves money. Every decision, every action, is calculated to bring the greatest financial gain. The love of money fills them, and therefore, controls them.

Now think about someone you know who loves God. Don't you see the same principle at work in them, but in a positive sense? What fills us, controls us.

As members of Christ's Body, we need a vision of fullness, for fullness is God's desire for his people. In this lesson we will discover the **fountain of fullness**— our relationship with God, through Christ, by the power and presence of the Holy Spirit.

*Fullness is the key
to fulfillment.*



One day a hiker came to a waterfall. He knew it must have a source so he climbed to the top. There, of course, he saw a river. He knew the river must have a source, so he followed it. He came to another waterfall and climbed to the top again. There he saw a beautiful lake. He knew that something must fill the lake, but he could not find its source, for the lake was filled by an underground spring. It didn't need rain. It didn't need melted snows, though at times both rain and snow fell into it. The lake stayed full because of the spring within, and its fullness flowed out through waterfalls and rivers. So is every believer.

The Fountain of Fullness

KEY VERSE: Ephesians 3:14-21, especially verse 19

KEY THOUGHT: Fullness brings fulfillment.

Read and ponder each of the following scriptures:

John 4: 14

John 7:38, 39

John 14:16, 17 - As you read this passage, consider what Jesus meant when he said, *“He has been with you, but he shall be in you.”*

II Corinthians 1:21, 22 - Notice the tense of the verbs in these verses.

Based upon these scriptures, who has the Holy Spirit?

Read Ephesians 5: 18-20. Since Paul was writing to believers, people who had believed in Jesus and received the Holy Spirit, why was he encouraging them to be *filled* with the Spirit?

To have the Holy Spirit is one thing, but to be filled with the Holy Spirit is something more. *Spirit-filled* means *Spirit-controlled*.

Here are *five results of the Spirit's presence* in our lives. See if you can find scriptures for each one.

1. The Spirit of God produces **power**.
2. The Spirit of God produces **purity**.
3. The Spirit of God produces **purpose** or direction.
4. The Spirit of God produces **promise** or expectation.
5. The Spirit of God produces **praise**.

Shepherd Gate's vision for fullness:

“As a body of believers, our goal is to see every member filled with and controlled by the Holy Spirit. The more we experience the Spirit's fullness, the more we will experience fulfillment as a church of the Lord Jesus Christ.”

A Vision for Discipleship

Becoming all God wants us to be

III

A vision without personal development will always fail.

Strong churches need strong members, for a vision without personal development will always fail. The Lord Jesus knew that and his methods revealed it. Reading the Gospels shows us picture after picture of Jesus teaching and training his disciples, for the success of the vision depended on their personal development.

In his last hours before ascending to heaven, Jesus capsulized the disciples' mission with these words:

"All power in heaven and earth is given to me. Therefore, go and **make disciples** of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

— *Matthew 28:18,19*

That commission is a perpetual commission, a commission that will not lapse until this age ends.

What is a disciple? A disciple is someone who learns by coming under the authority of a master teacher. We could appropriately translate this verse: *Go and make apprentices*. The teacher/disciple relationship is never theoretical and intellectual. It is always personal and practical. Applied to our lives, discipleship means, literally, making people followers of Jesus— people who learn, from Jesus, how to live. It's a lifelong calling, a lifelong following, and it affects every area of our lives. We do not have the option of practicing selective discipleship. Church, home, business, leisure, appetites, desires, decisions— discipleship affects them all.

A disciple is an apprentice, someone who learns by following Jesus.



Remember that discipleship is not domination. Jesus said that those who come to him would find rest for their souls. Discipleship is also not regimentation. Disciples develop into the unique people God designed them to be.

Discipleship

Personal Spiritual Development

Key Verse: Matthew 11:28,29— Memorize these verses

HOW DID JESUS TRAIN HIS DISCIPLES? Jesus had a goal: transformation! He changed the way the disciples thought and the way they saw. He gave them a new way to see God, themselves, the world, and the future. When we read the gospels we how Jesus fulfilled that goal.

As you read the following points, see if you can find a passage from the Gospels that demonstrates each one.

- ❶ He chose them.
- ❷ He committed himself totally to their training and development.
- ❸ He renewed their minds by his word and example, driving out their pride, prejudice, doubt, and jealousy.
- ❹ He stretched them, increasing their capacity for vision, for love, for responsibility.
- ❺ He challenged their mediocrity and encouraged them to pursue excellence.
- ❻ He taught them from their failures, refusing to give up on them when they did fail.
- ❼ He commissioned them, giving them a part to play in His mission.
- ❽ He showed them his glory and revealed God's eternal purposes to them.
- ❾ He loved them and taught them to love.

Jesus used three methods to train his disciples:

Declaration: He taught them.

Demonstration: He showed them.

Personal involvement: He gave them something to do, a part to play.

All three elements of discipleship are equally important. If one is missing the process of development is aborted.

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Today the Holy Spirit does in us all that Jesus did with his disciples. The local church provides a setting, **an environment for personal, spiritual growth**. We will see very little personal growth in people who do not fellowship in a local congregation. But people who do, allowing God to work in and through their lives, grow amazingly.

Shepherd Gate's vision for discipleship:

“As a body of believers, we want to see every person grow to full potential in Christ. We will encourage personal development through Sunday school classes, Bible study groups, fellowship groups, home fellowships, and one-to-one personal discipleship.”

A Vision for Involvement

God wants every believer involved to their full potential

*God does
mighty things
through
ordinary
people.*

As we saw in our lesson on discipleship, personal development and involvement are vital to the fulfillment of God's vision for the local church. God has chosen to demonstrate his power, glory, and love through common, garden variety men and women. He has no other plan, so we must have no other desire. As songwriter Dave Bilbrough said, we are "*An army of ordinary people . . .*"

In our lesson on discipleship we emphasized the changes Jesus makes in the lives of his followers. In the next five lessons we will focus specifically on five important areas of involvement.

Potential for involvement differs for each person and each family. A young couple without children or a single without children may have more time and energy for involvement than a couple with several school age children. The key principle is for every member to do what he or she can. Involvement isn't motivated by legalism. Involvement is motivated by the grace of God at work in our lives. We can enhance our potential by examining our priorities.

*The key
principle is
for every
member to
do what he
or she can.*

A friendly warning: At about this stage in our studies, you may feel tempted to become discouraged or condemned. Don't give in to those temptations! The followers of Jesus often feel challenged, often feel convicted, but Jesus never condemns us for our weaknesses and failures. As we learned in the last lesson, he teaches us from them and helps us overcome them. Only the devil wants to discourage us and condemn us. Don't let him do it!

*Don't let the
devil condemn
you or
discourage
you.*

Involvement through Prayer

IV

*Are any of us
happy with
our prayer
lives?*

Ask any Christian, old or young, novice or experienced, what needs the most improvement in their spiritual life and they will most likely say prayer. None of us feel satisfied with our prayer lives. More than that, there is something in each of us that makes us allergic to prayer, to times of communion with God alone or in a group.

Yet prayer is vital at every stage of vision. Through prayer we come to know God's heart and his desires. Through prayer we seek him for the strength and wisdom to carry out our part in those desires. Through prayer we find refreshment during trying times.

The New Testament church was a praying church, for they knew their communion with God undergirded their mission.

Prayer has never been the privilege and responsibility of a spiritually enlightened upper class. No, in the New Testament church everyone could pray, and did pray.

Prayer takes many forms. It can be spoken or merely a Spirit-prompted inner longing. It can be long or short, loud or soft. Whatever its form, prayer possesses tremendous promises for those who believe.

As we study this vital aspect of building vision, let's lay aside our fears and our sense of incompetency and pray that we will love to pray.



Help Wanted

Positions open in large company with international interests. Opportunities for far-reaching influence as well as personal involvement with the Father/Son Owners and Managers.

No experience necessary. No education required. No age restriction. People with handicaps welcome. Blind, deaf, non-speaking welcome. On-the-job training provided. Travel to foreign Lands by Holy Spirit Express provided. Excellent

Every Believer Can Pray

As you study this outline read each scripture and meditate on it.

EVERY BELIEVER HAS A RELATIONSHIP WITH A LOVING GOD. *Read Matthew 6:9*
How does Jesus tell us to address God when we pray?

EVERY BELIEVER HAS THE HOLY SPIRIT— THE SPIRIT OF PRAYER. *Read Romans 8:26,27*

EVERY BELIEVER HAS THE ABILITY TO SEE NEEDS AND LIFT THEM TO GOD. *Read I Timothy 2:1-3*
Jesus sends us into the world as the Father sent him into the world, so we have a great need to see as Jesus saw.
Every person we see needs prayer for something.

EVERY BELIEVER IS CALLED TO BE A PRIEST. *Read Exodus 19:6 and I Peter 2:5,8.*
In the Old Testament God wanted his people to be *a kingdom of priests*. What unusual language! What is a kingdom of priests? *A community of people who live to worship God, honor God, and bring others to God through their example, influence, and intercession.* Through Jesus we have become a kingdom of priests, a redeeming, intercessory community in the world.

EVERY BELIEVER NEEDS TO PRAY FOR OTHERS AND WITH OTHERS. Prayer affects our lives like nothing else:

Enlarges our hearts. The Spirit of God stretches our hearts through intercession. No matter what our physical stature, small or tall, prayer makes us bigger people!

Identifies us with God's great desires. When we know we live for a higher purpose we live with greater dignity and seriousness.

Unites us in faith with other believers in our city, our nation, the world. *Read Revelation 5:8*
We may be divided by location, denomination, or style, but prayer unites us with all the believers who have ever lived or ever will live. The prayers of God's people are mixed together into an incense that rises to heaven.

Releases us from self-centeredness and with that release, brings greater spiritual and emotional health. Any trip we make outside of ourselves is a trip worth taking!

Every believer needs two types of prayer: personal and corporate.

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Personal prayer: *Read Matthew 6:6*

Jesus tells us to pray privately. Must we have a literal closet for prayer? Many people in the world do not have such a place. Jesus used the word for the storeroom of a house as a picture of praying alone with God. Your closet may be a quiet place in the woods. It may be in your car, parked in a quiet and picturesque spot.

Corporate Prayer: *Read Acts 4:24-31.*

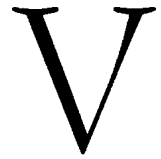
Why don't some believers want to pray with others? Why don't we attend prayer meeting?

The two types of prayer, private and corporate, help one another. What we pray when we meet together should spring from our private prayer and meditation. Our times of prayer with other believers will enrich our private devotions. We need both.

Shepherd Gate's Vision for Prayer

“ Shepherd Gate Church is committed to a 100% involvement in prayer, both personally and corporately. To accomplish that goal we will strive to encourage every member in their private prayer life and to provide corporate times of prayer that are accessible to every believer. To the glory of God, we want to be known as a praying church.”

Involvement Through Fellowship



A Christian fellowship is a group of people committed to God and to one another.

The heart of our fellowship is Christ's love and sacrifice

Acts 2:42— *“They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching, and to fellowship, and to the breaking of bread, and to prayer.”*

Many people attend church. Not all are in fellowship. Fellowship means more than attendance. The Greek word for fellowship is *koinonia*, a word that means *having a personal part with others in some organization or cause*. A Christian fellowship is a group of people committed to God and to one another. As a fellowship God calls us to love one another, serve one another, protect one another and encourage one another. But it would not please him to see us abusing, misusing, or monopolizing each other.

As a Christian fellowship, every aspect of our relationships to one another should demonstrate Christ's life, for the heart of our fellowship is Christ's love and sacrifice for each of us.

One thing we must remember. We cannot force anyone into fellowship. We can only create an environment where fellowship happens and invite others to experience the benefits of fellowship with us.

True Christian fellowship draws people like few other forces. We pray together, we worship together, we laugh and cry together, we do God's will together. A fellowship filled with Spirit-filled people is warm, joyful, invigorating, comforting . . . and very meaningful. What a privilege we have as members of Christ's church.



The next time you make oatmeal take a look at the man in the black hat who smiles at you from the front of the box. He is, of course, a Quaker, a member of a Christian group that has certain distinctive beliefs and practices. Did you know that the Quakers have another name, their official name? They call themselves The Society of Friends. There's something charming about that name— the Friends. Whether we know how they came to it, or what it means to them, we can certainly learn something from it, for every local church should be a fellowship of friends.

Every Believer Has a Part

FOUR WAYS TO SEE THE CHURCH

The New Testament gives us at least four ways to see the church. Each one tells us something important about our role in fellowship. As you read the following verses, do three things:

- ❶ Notice what each passage says about the identity of the church.
- ❷ Think about the significance of each passage to you and your relationship to the church.
- ❸ Complete this statement for each point: If I am a member of a (family, army, etc.) I will . . .

Example: If I am a member of God's family, I will learn to appreciate my brothers and sisters.

The church is a **Family**: Galatians 6:10

The church is an **Army** : Ephesians 6: 10-18

The church is a **Body**: Romans 12:5; I Corinthians 12:12-27

The church is a **Temple**: I Corinthians 3:16

One -Anothering:

Virgil Allen, one of the elder's of Shepherd Gate Church, taught a lesson in a home group a few years ago. He called it *one-anothering*. Read the following verses briefly noting what each one tells us to do for one another.

Note: Although there are more than thirty verses in this section, it is easy to see the point of each verse. It's living them that requires time.

All verses in this first set tell us the same thing. Read each one, allowing the Holy Spirit to use the repetition to impress your life.

John 13:34; Romans 12:10a ("a" refers to the first clause of a verse, "b" to the second, etc.); Romans 13:8; I Peter 1:22; I John 3:11; I John 3:23; I John 4:7; I John 4:11; I John 4:12; II John 1:5

For the following verses, jot down what each one tells us to do for one another.

Romans 12:10b-

Ephesians 5:19-

Romans 12:16-

Ephesians 5:21-

Romans 14:13-

I Thessalonians 5:11-

Romans 15:7-

Hebrews 3:13-

Romans 15:14-

Hebrews 10:24-

I Corinthians 1:10-

Hebrews 10:25-

Galatians 5:13-

James 4:11-

Ephesians 4:2-

I Peter 3:8-

Ephesians 4:32-

I Peter 5:5-

As you can see from those Scriptures, **believers are believers**. We belong to God, and we belong to the fellowship of His people.

Shepherd Gate's Vision for Fellowship

"As a body of believers, Shepherd Gate Church recognizes the great benefits of healthy fellowship and strong interpersonal relationships. We will build strong relationships and restore broken relationships. We will encourage personal participation in small groups and seek to make Shepherd Gate Church a fellowship of well-connected believers."

Involvement In Worship

VI

We all agree that we should worship God, but we have many different ideas about how we should go about it.

Worship. It doesn't sound like a word that should cause trouble and division does it? What could unify us more than worshipping God together? Yet like many other good things, beautiful things, worship has become a divisive issue in the churches of the Lord Jesus Christ.

We all agree that we should worship God, but we have many different ideas about how we should go about it. Should worship be loud or soft? Should a congregation worship for thirty minutes or should they worship for an hour? Should everyone sing in tongues together, or is such singing in tongues a violation of biblical instruction? And what, exactly, does worship include? Is preaching part of worship or does worship lead up to preaching? Over those issues, and many others, people of God have divided, each group claiming that what they want *is* what God wants. We even find scriptures to support our personal understanding of piety and practice.

Shepherd Gate Church is not untouched by such challenges, for like every local church, we are a collection of people with varied personalities, experiences, and preferences. Some of us would like more fast songs, more dancing, more shouting. To others such activities create distraction. What's a body to do?

How do we, as a local church, develop unity about our worship experience? How do we *become* a people united in worship and *maintain* our unity in worship? At the heart of the matter are two personal characteristics that will, if we have them, protect us from strife. The first is *humility*. Humble people unite their hearts and find common ground. Proud people insist on their own way, leading to division. The second is *flexibility*. Flexibility, not rigidity, marks the Christlike person. We can adapt, appreciate others, and expand our experience of worship if we are flexible.

We have resources. We have the Word of God to teach us and show us examples of other believers meeting God. We have the Spirit of God, and he is the Spirit of worship. If we do not grieve him, he will direct us in our worship. With those resources each of us can become a worshipper and all of us can worship together, bringing glory to God and satisfaction to each heart.

Humility and flexibility will lead to unity in worship.

Our greatest resources: God's Word and God's Spirit.

Every Believer is a Worshipper

KEY VERSE: John 4:23-24

Based on these verses, *what kind of worship is God the Father looking for? Who can give the Father true worship?*

To be a real worshipper requires spiritual integrity— honesty, not pretense, not a show. Read **Matthew 15:8,9** and **Isaiah 29:13** *What did Jesus say about the worship of the Pharisees?*

WORSHIP DEFINED: “The response of my heart to a loving, holy, and faithful God.” Every part of this statement is important:

Worship is **a response to God**, the Eternal Person, not a mechanical action. All relationships create responses. Worship is our response to the person of God.

Worship is a response **from my heart**. Real worship comes from the heart, not just from the mind or the mouth.

Worship is a response of my heart to **a loving, holy, faithful God**. Our worship is regulated by how we see God.

Because we are responding from our hearts to a loving, holy faithful God, **we respond to Him on all levels of emotion and expression.**

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TRUE WORSHIP MUST HAVE THREE DISTINCT, BUT CLOSELY RELATED, EXPRESSIONS.

Read each of the following verses and consider what each one tells us about worship.

I worship by giving my life. Romans. 12:1, 2

I worship by sacrificially devoting my time and energy to God's purposes and desires.

I Corinthians 10:31 Hebrews 13:16

I worship by ministering to the Lord with songs, hymns, and spiritual songs, and quiet adoration, whether alone or with other believers. Colossians 3:16,17

Real worship means God has no competitors. Read II Chronicles 14:5. What did King Asa remove from the land of Israel?

Worship's first purpose is to minister to God, not to enjoy ourselves, or express ourselves. We do express ourselves and we should enjoy our worship, but God Himself, with all his attributes and actions, is the reason for worship.

Shepherd Gate's Vision for Worship

"Shepherd Gate Church is dedicated to true, spiritual worship. We will encourage every member to be a worshipper through personal surrender, practical involvement, and devotional experience. We will make our meetings opportunities for the people of God to minister to God in praise and adoration."

*Our generous
Heavenly Father
wants to make us
generous too.*

*Every local church
must teach and
encourage giving.*

Look for evidences of Christ's life and you will always find generosity. *Generosity*, and its noun form *generous*, come from an old Latin word which means *of noble birth*.

Apparently it was once so common for the noble to share what they had with others that the word for noble became the word for unselfish giving.

As children of the King, we have a generous Father, a Father who gave his Son for our salvation. He has also given us his Spirit to make us like him. So we, like our Heavenly Father and our Lord Jesus Christ, become noble, generous people— people who live to give.

Every local church must teach and encourage giving, for through the giving of God's people the work of the Lord progresses and increases. Giving is also a key to each family's financial freedom. Even though some Christian ministries have taken advantage of God's people, we must teach about giving without apology and without defensiveness.

God wants his people to develop holy habits. His grace is at work in us to develop those habits. Giving is one holy habit that blesses everyone: God, his people, and ourselves.



"As the people of God we have enormous financial challenges before us, don't we? But magnificent goals are achievable if our spirits are happy and our morale stays high. The quest for character includes generosity. Let's make this year our all-time best. Let's give to the work of the Lord as we have never given before. With great gusto. With contagious joy."

-Charles Swindoll

The Believer's Guide to Generous Giving

In II Corinthians, chapters eight and nine, we find the most complete discussion of giving in the New Testament. *Read these chapters carefully and prayerfully.*

Powerful Principles of Giving

☆ **GRACE. 8:1-9**— Grace is the greatest motivator in the world! Grace will do more in and through our lives than the Law could ever do.

8:1— Grace was the Macedonian's motivation for sacrificial giving.

8:7— Paul refers to the *grace of giving* (NIV translation).

8:9— Grace motivated Jesus to give himself (become poor).

The grace that makes us believers, also makes us givers. All believers have grace to be givers, though not all can give the same amount.

☆ **DESIRE. 8:10-12**— Grace creates a desire to give, a willingness.

Do what you can, according to what you have. If you desire to give, start now with what you have. *Desire without commitment lacks effectiveness.*

☆ **EQUALITY. 8:13-15**— If we all respond to grace and desire there will be equality. No one will be overburdened when everyone shares the burden.

☆ **RESPONSIBILITY. 8:16-24**— Every church and ministry must be financially responsible, and our giving must also be responsible.

A good safeguard: Give through your local church and if you have a question about any ministry, ask your local leaders.

We need a responsible way of giving to fulfill our desire. It is easy for desire to be diminished without a responsible plan.

Promising Results of Giving

☆ Giving motivated by grace frees us to believe God. How poor our lives are when we rely only on our own resources. Read **II Corinthians 9:6-11**

☆ Giving releases us from the love of money. Read **I Timothy 6:6-10**

☆ Giving expresses love and honor for God and others in a tangible, practical way. Read **I John 3:16,17**

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- ☆ Giving releases us from financial self-centeredness.
- ☆ Giving releases us from isolation and strongly connects us to our fellowship. We feel strongly connected to what we financially support.
- ☆ Giving releases us from a poverty mentality. People who do not give often complain that they never have enough.
- ☆ Giving releases supply to where it is needed.
- ☆ Giving releases blessings and provision from God the Father. Read **Malachi. 3:10-12, Proverbs. 3:9,10.**

What about tithing? The word *tithe* means *ten percent*. In the Bible the Hebrew word translated tithe also means a tenth. Is tithing legalistic? Is it a binding principle for believers today? Does God want every believer to tithe? Where should the tithe go? Can I divide it up as I feel led?

Tithing was a requirement under Old Testament law. It was even practiced four hundred years before the law was given, for Abraham gave a tenth of all he possessed to a priest of God named Melchisedek. (See **Genesis 14**). In the New Testament tithing isn't commanded, neither is it negated. Perhaps the best way to look at it is this: grace always goes farther than the Law. It encompasses the Law, but it goes farther. If those under the Law gave a tenth, should those of us under grace do any less?

How Should Every Believer Give?

- ☆ Every believer should give, first of all, to their local church. The local church is fundamental to all God's purposes and to every believer's spiritual health. The local church also provides support and enrichment for each believer.
- ☆ Every believer should give freewill offerings to support mission outreaches and the needy.
- ☆ Every believer should prayerfully consider the appeals for funds that come from other Christian ministries.
- ☆ Every believer should give in expectation of God's blessing on their life and family.

Shepherd Gate's Vision for Giving and Financial Responsibility

"Because we want to see God's work and God's people enjoying prosperity, Shepherd Gate Church is committed to sound financial teaching and sound financial accountability. We encourage full participation in planned, systematic giving."

Involvement in Evangelism

VIII

How do our friends view God, Christ, and the Bible?

Think about someone you know, perhaps a friend from work or a neighbor. How does that friend view God, the Bible, and Christ? Comparing your friend's view with yours you might find something like this: You believe that all people are born sinners and are, by nature, separated from God. Your neighbor knows he isn't perfect, but he doesn't think he's so bad. You believe that the Bible is the inspired Word of God. He or she believes the Bible is a good book with some good things to say. Totally inspired by God? Doubtful. You believe that God sent his Son into the world, that the Son came as God in the flesh, and that he, Jesus, died for the sins of the world, including the sins of twentieth-century suburbanites. Mr. and Ms. Suburbanite? They think that Jesus was a good man who died an unjust death at the hands of the establishment, another misunderstood revolutionary (After all, many of them did that "hippie thing" during the sixties and seventies.). But believe he was and is God? Believe that the death of that one man was the necessary sacrifice for my personal sin? Believe that Jesus rose from the dead? That's taking things a little too far. In their view, you're nice enough, but a little too fanatical about your religion.

The message of the Good News of Jesus Christ has a penetrating power that surpasses all philosophies.

Thankfully, the message of the Good News of Jesus Christ has a penetrating power that surpasses all philosophies. Whatever a person's lifeview, or paradigm, the gospel of Jesus Christ penetrates it like a laser. We simply must believe that the Word of God can bring our friends and neighbors to new life in Christ, no matter how they see life right now.

Evangelism is our Supreme Task.

In West Africa there is a group of churches called Church of God Mission International. Founded by an African evangelist about twenty-five years ago, their congregations now number in the thousands. If you visit one of the churches you will notice their signboard always displays these words: Evangelism is our Supreme Task. They mean it. Every Church of God Mission congregation is a daughter of another church, and every daughter church aspires to become a mother church. How do they build new congregations? They evangelize, sharing the Good News of Christ wherever they can. Through their obedient efforts, God adds to the church daily.

Without our involvement in sharing the Good News, no one will

Do we have the same dedication to evangelism? Probably not. Does God want us to have that dedication to evangelism? Definitely.

In a later Vision Builder lesson we will study enlargement and expansion. For this lesson we want to focus on the individual believer's involvement in the supreme task of evangelism. One thing is certain: without our involvement in sharing the Good News, no one will believe the Good News.

Many believers feel ineffective in sharing their faith in Christ with others. Is there hope for people like you and me to bring other people like us to Jesus? There is hope, but for that hope to find realization, our fears must die. It isn't difficult to tell someone else about Jesus. We just have to care more about their soul than we do about our own

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Every Believer Is A Witness



Warning! This lesson will make you uncomfortable. Take the risk and experience the change.

In each of the following scriptures, we see some important truths about evangelism. Read them carefully and answer the questions that follow each verse.

SOWING THE SEED: In **Matthew 13** Jesus spoke about sowing the seed. Read the parable and the Lord's interpretation of it. Why should this passage give us hope for our efforts in sharing the Good News with others?

FINDING THE LORD'S SHEEP: Read **John 10**, noting the passages where Jesus speaks about his sheep and his voice. What did Jesus say about his sheep and his voice?

How does that give us hope for our evangelistic efforts?

Now read **Luke 15**. We might call this *the lost and found chapter*. You will find three different illustrations in this chapter. What are they? What do they all have in common?

As a child were you ever lost? Describe what it feels like to be lost. How did you feel when someone found you?

Do you think people always know when they are lost?

MAKING DISCIPLES: Read **Matthew 28:18,19**. In an earlier lesson we talked about making disciples. What is a disciple?

Can anyone be the disciple of two masters?

What do you think is the first step in making someone a disciple of Jesus?

PROCLAIMING THE KINGDOM OF GOD: **Romans 10:12 - 15** is a key passage on evangelism. Read it carefully. What is the one thing that makes it possible for people to believe and call on the Lord?

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RESCUING THE PERISHING: Read the following verses and notice the use of the word perish or perishing:
I Corinthians 1:18 ; II Corinthians 2:15,16 ; II Corinthians 4: 3,4 ; John 3:16 ; II Peter 3:9.

What does it mean to perish?

Does God want anyone to perish?

What is the only alternative to perishing?

Do you know anyone who is perishing?

DEMONSTRATING THE LOVE AND LIFE OF GOD: We witness by how we live and act. Read **Matthew 5:13-16**. What does Jesus call his people in these verses?

Jesus tells us that salt can become tasteless. How does that happen to us? How do our lives lose their power to influence others for Christ?

According to Jesus, what is the only way to keep light from shining? Where can light best be seen?

Has God called you to any dark places? How can you let God's light shine in those places?

Shepherd Gate's Vision for Evangelism

"As a fellowship of believers Shepherd Gate Church has a divine mandate to reach our friends and neighbors for Christ. We are committed to

A Vision for Victory

*Victorious
Christians
seldom live in
isolation,
separated from*

*Victory means
achieving God's
purposes through
overcoming all
opposition and
obstacles.*

Victory! Is there any word that can stir our hearts more? Even more so when we have actively participated in the battle. Listen to the shouts, watch the faces of the victors. They had a mission, they prepared themselves, they paid a personal price . . . and they won a victory. Whether in a bowling league, a wrestling match, a music contest or a chili cook-off, nothing is sweeter than victory.

The Word of God is a book of victory. From Genesis to Revelation we see the conflict between Satan and God, love and hate, good and evil. Yet at the end of the ages, and at the end of the Bible, we see a mighty conqueror, Jesus, King of Kings and Lord of Lords!

The local church is the setting where each believer becomes personally involved in the battle. Jesus has won the victory, but we have many victories to win through His Name. In each of our lives God wants us to experience personal victory over sin, Satan, and the world. The local church equips us and supports us. Victorious Christians seldom live in isolation, separated from other believers.

Victory means achieving God's purposes through overcoming all opposition and obstacles. As a community of believers under the Lordship of Christ, we have obstacles to overcome and God-given goals to achieve. As we trust in God's power, utilize his strategies, and give ourselves to him, he will be victorious in us and through us.

In the following section of Vision Builder we will consider two vital areas of victory for every local church: victory over passivity and victory over division. Victory in these two areas will lead to many other victories as well. Let either passivity or division defeat us and we lose our effectiveness as a local church.

**DID WE IN OUR OWN STRENGTH CONFIDE, OUR STRIVING WOULD BE LOSING;
WERE NOT THE RIGHT MAN ON OUR SIDE, THE MAN OF GOD'S OWN CHOOSING.
DOST ASK WHO THAT MAY BE? CHRIST JESUS, IT IS HE!
THE LORD OF HOSTS HIS NAME, FROM AGE TO AGE THE SAME
AND HE MUST WIN THE BATTLE!**

—MARTIN LUTHER

Victory Over Passivity

IX

Passivity is epidemic in much of the Lord's Church.

Private victory always precedes public victory.

Passivity has little to do with personality.

Why begin our section on victory with victory over passivity? Because the plain fact is that unless we overcome passivity, the gravity that holds us down, we will not win any other victories. It is possible for believers to hear rousing messages, rejoice in the truth of those messages, and still remain ineffective through passivity. It happens all the time, so much so that passivity is epidemic in much of the Lord's Church.

Private victory always precedes public victory. Individual victory always precedes corporate victory. If an army wins a war that single victory is made up of thousands of personal victories. If a church fulfills its vision, the same is true. Believers win victories in their personal lives— victories over fear, laziness, self-disqualification. Because they win those victories, the ministry and outreach of the church succeeds.

Passive people create excuses. Proactive people create solutions. If they cannot find a solution they find someone who *has* found a solution and help them implement it. Passive believers often say, "If only *someone* would do *something*." Active believers ask love's question: "What can *I* do to help?" They answer that question through their involvement.

Passivity has little to do with personality, but passive people often use their personality as an excuse. Quiet, introspective people can and do play important parts in the community of faith. Far more important than personality is our desire to be involved in the Lord's work in whatever way we can.

An Irish preacher had the habit of praying the same prayer over and over. "Oh God," he would pray, "remove the cobwebs from our minds! Remove the cobwebs!" He prayed this prayer in many gatherings, until another preacher became tired of it. "Enough prayers about cobwebs," he said. "Kill the spider!" To put his exhortation in other words, *enough of the symptoms, let's deal with the root problem.*

As we look at the Word of God and at our own lives in its light, let's ask the Lord, not to clear away the cobwebs, but to kill the spiders that made them. In many cases we will find that the spider is a faulty attitude about self, God, or his purpose for the church.

Take my life and let it be, consecrated, Lord, to Thee.
Take my hands and let them move, at the impulse of Thy love.

Take my lips and let them be, filled with messages from Thee.
Take my silver and my gold, not a might would I withhold.

Take my will and make it Thine, it shall be no longer mine.
Take my heart, it is Thy own! It shall be Thy royal throne.

The Believer's Guide to Proactive Living

KEY VERSES: I CORINTHIANS 15:58; EPHESIANS 4:14-16

KEY THOUGHT: Active involvement brings fulfillment and pleases God, our Father.

PASSIVITY DEFINED: Passivity is the attitude of one who does not participate readily or actively. Now that we know what it is, what can we do to overcome it?

COMMON CAUSES OF PASSIVITY:

Self-centeredness— People who care only about blessings for themselves become passive members of their local church. Here is a biblical antidote for self-centeredness:

Romans 12:1,2. *Although we looked at these verses in an earlier lesson, read them again, this time concentrating on the second verse. In a self-centered world, how does God want us to live?*

Inferiority. Many believers have an inferiority complex about their involvement in the vision of the local church. Actually, it's a convenient thing to have, for we can hide in it. *To help you overcome inferiority read and meditate on the following verses: Romans 12:4-8. As you read let the Holy Spirit impress the truth of this passage on you. Is anyone unnecessary in the Lord's church?*

Bystander mentality or spectator mentality. Cheerleaders are good, but being on the team is better. Cheer, but cheer as a team member awaiting your turn to play.

Fear of man: This one question, "What will they think of me?" has woven more webs around more believers than perhaps any other attitude. *Read Proverbs 29:25. What does that verse say about the fear of man?*

Misconceptions about God. If we feel that God is a perfectionist we will never think that what we do is good enough for him. Hence, we don't do anything.

Laziness. Laziness does not refer to appropriate rest and leisure. It refers to a willful, decided disinterest in the purposes of God. *Read Matthew 25: 14-30. What excuse did the servant with one talent give for burying his talent? What was the real reason one of the servants didn't use what his Lord had entrusted to him?*

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Lack of Confidence. Lack of confidence paralyzes.

The Four Pillars of Confidence

The Word of God: *Read Psalm 1.* Meditating on God's Word increases our confidence in God. *What are some of the promises in the first part of this psalm about confident living?*

Training: *Read I Corinthians 9:24-27.* Much of training is repetition, but with the repetition comes confidence on the day of battle. *How is God training you right now? Why is the Lord training you?*

Experience: *Read Hebrews 12:11.* For those who follow Jesus, all of life is vocational training. We learn God's ways through experience and gain confidence. *What does this verse say about discipline? Who benefits from discipline?*

The Spirit of God: The Spirit of God gives power to our message and to our ministry. We are not doing the work of God on our own, but through the power of the Holy Spirit. *Read II Corinthians 3:4-6.* *In these verses, Paul speaks about the source of his confidence. What did he say about the Holy Spirit in this passage?*

Shepherd Gate's vision for a proactive congregation:

“Because we know the times we live in, and because we know God has a purpose for us, Shepherd Gate Church is committed to seeing every member fully activated and fully involved.”

Victory Over Division

X

Come with me to a special place, a place of prayer, a place made even more holy because of the one who is praying. It is Jesus. He is near the cross, and he is praying to his Father. He knows what he came to do. He knows the price he will pay. Being the perfect man, the only sinless man, he will feel the agonies of the cross with perfect and acute sensitivity. Yet he will die, die for the world, die as the Lamb that takes away the sinner's sin, making sinners into saints through his death.

Now, in the presence of his disciples, he prays to His Father and the disciples listen to his heart. He prays for the ultimate success of His mission of redemption. He prays for his followers, both those in the room with him, and those who would believe in him in the centuries to come. He prays for us. *"Holy Father, protect them by the power of your name—the name you gave me— so that they may be one as we are one."* A few moments later . . . *"I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one: I in them and you in me. May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me."* (John 17, excerpts)

We have heard the prayer of Jesus. Can we ever be the same? Can we ever think of ourselves in the same old ways? When we see the importance Jesus places on unity, how can we value it less than our Lord did?

Yet history and experience testify more to our disunity than to our unity. A leading Christian attorney went to speak to the leader of a Muslim nation. He was asking the government to give more recognition and privileges to the church. The official asked him one penetrating question: "Who is the church? Do you mean the Catholics or the Anglicans, or the Methodists? Who are you?"

Quite a question isn't it? How can the world know who Jesus is when we don't know who we are? The unity Jesus prayed for isn't a denominational unity. It isn't a liturgical unity. It isn't a unity based on personality, or race, or gender, or economic status. It is, as William Barclay says, *a unity of relationship*.

We can look at unity from two viewpoints. Let's call them *macro-unity* and *micro-unity*. *Macro-unity* describes the unity of the church universal. We are one with all who believe in Jesus as Savior and Lord worldwide. We have millions of brothers and sisters. It's a glorious thing to ponder.

Then there's *micro-unity*. Micro-unity relates to the unity we develop and maintain with our fellow believers in our local church fellowship. Here we dare not be idealistic, for the reality is that we don't always agree or act agreeably. Paul had good reason to urge believers to be kind to one another and to forgive one another. (Ephesians 4:32) It seems that God's church is made up of very imperfect people. As someone said, "If you find the perfect church, don't join it. You'll only ruin it."

Jesus prayed for our oneness, our unity, for he knew that division and disunity were a denial of his Father's desires and a denial of His mission. If he prayed for it, shouldn't we make it our desire as well? This lesson of Vision Builder will help us find strategies for victory over division.

Victory Over Division



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The Believer's Guide to Living In Unity

KEY VERSE: **Romans 15:5** (*Memorize this verse.*)

GOD'S PLAN: Victory through unity.

SATAN'S PLAN: Defeat through division.

Here are some passages from the Bible that speak about unity and oneness. Read each one carefully.

I Corinthians 1:10. Although the Corinthian believers thought they were spiritually mature, they were actually immature because of their divisive attitude. *Can any church be truly spiritual if they do not have unity?*

Ephesians 4: 1-6. Especially notice the seven “ones” in this passage.

Philippians 2: 1-11. Paul speaks about the mind of Christ. *How does having the mind of Christ enhance our unity? What is the heart of our unity?*

I Peter 3:8. *What instruction does Peter give us for maintaining unity?*

THE ABC'S OF HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS

Accept one another. Acceptance does not imply total approval. We can accept a person as a spiritual sibling without accepting their lifestyle.

Believe the best. Human nature tends to look for the worst and believe the worst. Believe the best instead. Will you ever be fooled? Probably. But better to be fooled than to live as a constant critic, a cynical saint.

Concentrate on understanding, not just on being understood. It's harder than you think, because most of us spend more energy trying to get our point across than in understanding someone else.

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(Continued from page 35)

Destroy prejudice. Prejudice means passing a judgment before you really know the person. It means deciding not to like a brother or sister without giving them a chance.

Encourage openness. Openness cannot be forced, but it can be invited.

Forgive impulsiveness. All of us say words we would like to have back.

“Forgiveness is a gift of high value, yet its (monetary) cost is nothing.” — Betty Smith, A Tree Grows In Brooklyn.

Grant grace. Another Christian does or says something to upset you. If you were in their place, how would you want to be treated? That's what it means to be gracious.

Humble Yourself. You cannot humble anyone else. You can humiliate them, but you cannot humble them. Humility invites humility; arrogance invites arrogance.

The surest way for the devil to defeat the work of God is through division and disunity. A local congregation standing together in Christ's love and humility is virtually assured of victory.

Shepherd Gate's vision for unity and victory over division

“As a fellowship of believers with different gifts, personalities, and backgrounds, Shepherd Gate Church will encourage submission to Christ and humility towards one another. We will learn to appreciate our differences, be patient with one another, and forgive each other. By so doing we will protect the church from division and see the work of God succeed.”

A Vision for Expanding Our Influence

XI

Many years ago a young man heard rumors about a church with extraordinary influence. This church had equipped and sent many people into full-time ministry. It sent out many missionaries and started several other local congregations. The young man was eager to see this mighty, influential church, so when opportunity came to attend a retreat there, he leapt at it. After a gruelling drive in wintery conditions he and his friends arrived. To their amazement they found this fountain of influence meeting in a converted house with scarcely room inside for a hundred people. Though small in numbers they made a world-wide difference.

The moral of the story? Size and influence are not the same thing. We believe that God wants Shepherd Gate Church to grow in size through bringing new people to new life in Christ. We also believe that God wants Shepherd Gate Church to spread the fragrance of Christ near and far.

How does expansion, our present study, differ from evangelism? In our section on evangelism we looked at every believer's role in reaching the lost. In this lesson we concentrate on expanding the local church's righteous influence on the world and society. Every local church must spread the fragrance of Christ, like a holy perfume, far and wide. Through the influence of local churches the knowledge of the glory of the Lord is filling the earth.



"In a world full of shadows, it is sometimes difficult for us to believe that we can make a difference. Sometimes our little lights seem small indeed. Sometimes the darkness looks overwhelming. But throughout history the church has always shone as a community of light that cannot be quenched. In a thousand dim arenas of need around the world, the light shines, and the darkness cannot extinguish it . . ."

—Chuck Colson, *The Body*

Expanding Our Influence

*Read **Matthew 13:31-33**. In these three verses Jesus gives us two pictures of the Kingdom of God. What are they?*

Can you see anything in common between the mustard seed and the yeast?

Every local church is an expression of the Kingdom of God on earth. So, like the seed and the yeast, we must expect our influence to grow and spread.

*Read **Matthew 6:9-13**. As you read this prayer, concentrate on what Jesus told us to pray about the Kingdom of God.*

Since the local church is an expression of the Kingdom of God, how does that prayer affect the local church?

EXPANDING OUR INFLUENCE FOR THE GLORY OF GOD

Expanding our influence through world missions. The work of reaching the world with the message of Christ springs from the life of the local church. Local churches expand their influence in world missions through prayer support and financial support as well as through sending their members as either short-term or long-term missionaries.

*Please read the following scriptures: **Psalm 67:1,2 ; Matthew 24:14***

As a member of Shepherd Gate Church, in what ways are you involved in expanding the influence of the gospel to other nations?

Have you ever considered the possibility that God may want you to serve him in another culture or country?

If you have children, are you willing to see your children serve the Lord in another country our culture?

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(Continued from page 38)

EXPANDING OUR INFLUENCE THROUGH CARING FOR THE POOR AND NEEDY. The people of God have always been the champions of the poor, the needy, and the oppressed. *Read the following Scriptures to better understand our role in reaching out to those less fortunate: Isaiah 58:6-10 ; Proverbs 14:21 ; Proverbs 14:31 ; Proverbs 31:9*

As a member of Shepherd Gate Church, what role are you playing in helping the helpless?

Expanding our influence through community involvement for righteous causes. If a cause means something to God, it must mean something to us. The churches of the Lord Jesus Christ should lead the way in challenging abortion, racial prejudice, unfair economic practices, pornography, and other evils in society. *As you read the following scriptures, ask God to increase your burden for justice.*

Deuteronomy 27:19 ; Proverbs 18:5 ; Proverbs 29:7 ; Isaiah 59:14,15 ; Isaiah 61:8

As a member of Shepherd Gate Church how are you involved in seeking justice and representing God's interests in society?

Shepherd Gate's Vision for Expanding Our Influence

"As a body of believers in the Lord Jesus Christ, Shepherd Gate Church is committed to an ever-expanding involvement in world missions, helping the helpless, and community involvement for righteous causes. We believe that God has made us lights in the darkness and salt in the world— a redemptive influence on our society in our time."

In Conclusion

In Conclusion

*Has it helped us?
Time will tell.*

Vision Builder was designed to cause us to look at the local church, look at our own lives, and see the part we play in fulfilling God's vision for the local church. Has it helped us? Time will tell, for Vision Builder's effectiveness can only be measured by our increased understanding and involvement in God's vision for the local church.

*The local church
is a family, an
army, a temple,
and a school, all
at the same time.*

The local church, whatever its size and style, is vital to God's plan. In and through the local church people learn about Jesus and decide to follow him. The local church is a family, an army, a temple, and a school, all at the same time. As a family we learn to love our Father and to love one another. As an army we stand in God's power against all enemies. As a temple we experience God's presence among us when we gather, and we worship him. And as a school we teach God's ways and learn to walk in his truth. But the distinctive feature of the local church is how we fulfill those roles. We do it through everyone's involvement. Although the church has leaders and full-time workers, their job is equipping the members to do the work of the ministry. Every member plays a part.

A commonly quoted statistic states that in the average local church twenty percent of the people carry the bulk of the responsibility. The other eighty percent enjoy the benefits of what the twenty percent do, but they are more or less passive, not active. When a church experiences revival more members take more responsibility resulting in greater effectiveness and greater thanksgiving to God. Prayer increases, giving increases, involvement increases . . . and the church rejoices!

Every church must have a three-fold focus: upward, inward, and outward.

Every church must have a three-fold focus: upward, inward, and outward. Upward, to God our Father and to Jesus our Savior. Inward, to see one another's needs and to care for one another. Outward, to see the needy world we live in and to take the Bread of Life to every hungry person. Our success as a community of believers will be directly related to the clarity of our three-fold vision- and our personal involvement.

Where do we go from here? From time to time, review one of the sections of Vision Builder, asking the Lord to help you grow in your understanding and effectiveness. Ask God to show you how he wants you to become more involved in the vision of your local church. What you cannot do today you might do well in the future.

Let's be thankful to God for the church family he has given us, and let us do all we can to see God's purposes fulfilled through us.

"Of course every believer is part of the universal church. But for any Christian who has a choice in the matter, failure to cleave to a particular church is failure to obey Christ."

"It is within the [local] church that we commit ourselves to intimate relationships with fellow believers and submit ourselves to accountability, duties and responsibilities. In this community our Christian character is shaped; it is the context in which our spiritual gifts are developed and exercised. It is [our] family. It is the training camp that disciples and equips believers to be God's people against the world and for the world."

—Charles Colson, *The Body*