

“Know the Father”

Dear Friends, greetings (once again) as we begin this New Year together as a family of faith.

Every organization - every business, every establishment, every government, every non-profit (whatever it is) - if it's to be successful in accomplishing what it was created to do, it needs to understand why and (for what purpose) it exists.

It doesn't matter what it is: a school, a store, a restaurant, a start-up in hi-tech, (an individual life), if it fails to remember why it was created and what purpose (or niche) it was intending to fill, it won't be long before that purpose (or niche) it was (created to fill) is no longer being filled.

What's true in business (and in life) is also true in the church. The church needs to understand its reason for being. It needs to be clear about why and (for what purpose) it exists. If it doesn't, if it fails to remember - the moment a church loses sight of why it exists and what its purpose is all about is the same moment it fails to accomplish what it was created to do.

Beginning today (and for the next two Sundays) we're going to be focusing our attention on why we exist, what we were created to do, and what God has in mind for us as we move forward into this coming year. In so doing, we're going to be looking at (and reviewing) the Vision God has given us here at St. Timothy's.

This is what we're calling our “Banner Series.” It's designed to lift up and examine the banner (under which) everything we do (as a congregation) is placed. It's a series we're planning to do (each year) at the beginning of the year as a review of what our reason for being is all about.

Our congregational Vision is rather simple. By design, it's worded in a way that (we hope) is not hard to remember. Our Vision is to “Know the Father, Grow as disciples of Jesus, and Go with the Spirit.” (Say it with me.) Our Vision is to “Know the Father, Grow as disciples of Jesus, and Go with the Spirit.” (Say it again.) Our Vision is to “Know the Father, Grow as disciples of Jesus, and Go with the Spirit.”

That's our Vision. Now, let me give you a little test. In relation to what we just said, (our Vision), I have a math test, a theology test, and a faith test; a math test, a theology test, and a faith test.

First, the math test. Raise your hand if you can tell me how many verbs there are in our Vision; how many “action words” in this Vision we've adopted. “Know the Father, Grow as disciples of Jesus, and Go with the Spirit.” (How many verbs in our Vision?) Three: Know, Grow, and Go...three action words tied to what we're all about. That's the math test.

Now, the theology test. (Theology has to do with what we believe to be true about God.) And so, in relation to what we believe to be true about God, (our theology), how many persons in the Trinity (our three-in-one God) are named in the Vision? “Know the Father, Grow as disciples of Jesus, and Go with the Spirit.” How many persons in the Trinity are named? Again, there are three: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. All three persons in our Triune (three-in-one) God are included in our Vision.

Now, the faith test...and this is what brings it together. Here's the question. What needs to happen with those verbs (those action words) in relation to our theology (what we believe to be true about God) for the faith (we profess) in our life to become real? What needs to happen with those verbs (as they relate to our theology) for our faith to become real? The answer is: they have to be applied. The answer is: there has to be action (tied to our theology) for there to be faith.

Think of this way. You can have all kinds of action in your life (things you're willing and wanting to do), but if it's not connected to good theology, (what's actually true about God), then your action, your life, it's nothing more than living for a cause.

And you can have good theology (right thinking about God) and understand how it all works, but if it's not backed by action, things you're doing in your life (as a result), then your theology (and right thinking), it's nothing more than establishing a claim.

But when you (bring the two together), good theology (right thinking about God) backed and supported by action (things you're willing and wanting to do) – instead of simply having a cause (in life) or making (a claim in life) - what you have is a lifelong conviction and course that can be challenged and contested and

questioned (by others and the world), but that will never change, because it's tied and connected to your faith, and it's built and established on what's true.

Now, hang with me, because what we're saying here is important. The three biggest mistakes churches make when it comes to setting a Vision, and you see it all the time (all the time). One, in setting it (their Vision), they lose sight of why they exist. They forget why (and for what purpose) they were formed, and (as a result) their Vision never connects with (their purpose) and they become irrelevant.

Two, they learn the theology (have all the right thinking), but fail to apply the verbs, do nothing with what they know to be true, and (in so doing) they have no impact.

And, three, because they lose sight of why they exist (and become irrelevant) and they fail to apply the verbs (and have no impact), they end up setting a Vision (for their congregation and its people) that ends up being insignificant, because it's too small.

Now, don't miss the point. What's true in business is true in the church. What's true in the church is true in your life. Set aside our congregation (and its Vision) for a moment and think about your own life.

In your own life, if your life's vision, what you hope to accomplish with (the years you have to live), if it's going to avoid (eventually) becoming irrelevant, having no impact, and being insignificant, it needs to be tied to the reason you were created, to what God had in mind (for you) when he formed you as he did, and backed by the things you actually end up doing with your life.

Here's the list. Just think about the things (in life) we end up doing. (Here's how life plays out.) It's more complex than this, but (in some ways) it's not.

Here's the list. What do we do? We go to school, we get a job, we get married, have a few kids, raise them to become (responsible and productive) adults, and then we retire and enjoy whatever years we have left. That's what often happens in life. That's the list...it's the Vision.

Now, let me be honest, if that's your life's vision, then (to accomplish it), your life's vision, you don't need God. (You don't.) Now, you do...but you don't, not to accomplish that vision.

If that's your vision (for your life) then you don't need God to reach it and to make it happen. You can do all those things (in your life) and God doesn't need to be there for it work. If you don't believe it, just look around at what's happening. We see it (in the world) all the time. That's what people do. And they're doing it without God.

But (take those same things) – your school, your work, your marriage, your family, your retirement – tie them to your theology (what you believe about God), back them by a life of action based on what you know (to be true), and those same things, instead of eventually (and ultimately) becoming irrelevant, with no impact, and in the (grand scheme of things) insignificant, instead, they become the most relevant, impactful, and eternally significant ways you can use your life.

Instead of just going to school and finding friends, find a way (when you're at school) to share (with your friends) what you know to be true about God. Instead of going to work to make a living, make ways (at your work) to have an influence (with your co-workers) for Jesus. Instead of simply getting married, raising a family, and looking forward to retirement, (while you're doing those things), model the Christian life, become an example (in and for your family), and use your retirement to honor and bear witness to Christ.

If you do those things, in those simple ways, (and here's the point, why this all matters), not only will your life become relevant, impactful and eternally significant, but (to accomplish and fulfill) that same life vision, (and don't miss this) you will need to daily and diligently and determinedly depend on God...and that's what drives our Vision.

“Knowing the Father.” (That's the first part.) Let's talk about how that happens and why it's so important. And (in doing so), let's go back to our theology, to what we believe to be true about God.

What do we say every week? What do we believe about God as our Father? What we say, (in our Creed), as a confession of our faith, we say, “I believe in God, the Father almighty, Maker of heaven and earth.” (I believe in God, the Father almighty, Maker of heaven and earth.)

Now, we could spend all morning talking about what that means and what it implies: “God, the Father almighty, Maker of heaven and earth.” Some of the words we use to describe God, his qualities, characteristics. We say God is almighty; he's able to do anything. We say he is omniscient; he knows everything there is to know, even before it happens. We say he is omnipresent; he can be everywhere, all at the same time. He's

loving. He's caring. He's forgiving. He wants what's best for you and for me and for our world. And he created our world. This world (and your life) belong to him. It's all his. That's what we believe. That's our theology.

What we're saying in our Vision is that this same Father, the one in whom we believe, who created us and can do all these things, what we want is to know this one who is a Father for us. We want to "Know the Father."

Now, maybe you're saying, "I already know the Father. I know everything you just said, and I believe it...and it's all good" (Check it off the list...on to the next...sounds easy...it's simple.) It's not that simple. Let me give you an example.

How many of you know me? (Raise your hand if you know me.) Alright, most (if not all of you) know me. I'm Pastor Dan. I've been here for 22 years. I'm married, have four kids, smart guy, good sense of humor (thought I'd sneak that in), enjoy fishing and playing golf. Alright, you all know me.

Now, let me ask you. Do you really know me? Do I really know you? (For most of you), I know your names. I know where many of you live. I know things about your family and your work. (Some of you I know better than others.) But do I really know you? Do you really know me?

There are a lot of people (in this life) I know, but only a few people (in life) I really know. They're the ones I spend time with. They're the ones I hang out with. They're the ones I talk with and share with and open up with. There are a lot of people I know, but only a few I really know.

It takes time to get to know somebody, to really get to know somebody. You can be on Facebook and know them, but to really get to know them, it takes time. You need to spend time. You need to make time. You need to open up and share, and be willing to be open enough for them to share with you.

In our Vision, when we say (it's our Vision) to "Know the Father," we're not just saying that what we want is to know all of those things we just shared: God is almighty, he's our Creator, he's omniscient and omnipresent, and he's loving and forgiving and he cares, and he wants what's best. Those are important, but that's not our Vision. It's not.

Our Vision is that we truly get to know the One who is all of those things (for us) and more. And we truly (get to know him) because we spend time with him, we make time for him. We open up to him and share with him, and we open our lives (to him) so that he can share with us.

How does that happen? It happens (with God) like it happens with anyone else we really know. It happens by listening and by talking and by paying attention to what he has to say, and to what he's done and what he is doing.

But it doesn't just happen. It takes a commitment. It takes a desire. It takes a willingness and a discipline to know (everything you can) about this One who knows everything about you.

When that happens (and you spend the time) and you make the time, reading his Word each day, talking with him in prayer, opening yourself up to him and paying attention to what he says, that's when you will begin to "Know the Father" in a way that will ultimately and eternally change your life.

When that happens, that's when the Vision we share (as a congregation) will become the same Vision that shapes your life. Consistent with why you were created, tied to what you know to be true about God, and applied and lived out in whatever you end up doing with the years you've been given. When that happens, all kinds of good things will begin to happen. That's the Vision...the first part: that you and I really begin to "Know the Father."

Let me close with a challenge. At the beginning of this New Year, time for a fresh start, let me give you a "5, 5, and 5" challenge for your life. As a place to start – not as an ultimate goal, not as a way of becoming right with God. In Jesus, you already are. Not as a goal (or as a way to become right), but as a place to start: a "5, 5, and 5" challenge. Five minutes in your Bible, five minutes in prayer, five days a week. (Five minutes in your Bible, five minutes in prayer, five days a week.)

If you're doing more than that (already), then keep it up. If you're doing it and it's becoming routine, then do something to change the routine. The goal isn't to just read; the goal is to spend time, (to pay attention) and to listen. If you're doing it, keep it up. If you're not, then now's the time to start.

That's the challenge: "5, 5, and 5" starting today, because, it's not enough to know about the Father. What the Father wants is that we truly know him. "5, 5, and 5"...for all of us...starting today. Amen.