

Our Mission...

To know and follow Jesus Christ and make Him known to all people.

God's Vision, Our Future
September 9, 2012

At the end of last year, I was miserable physically. I had ballooned to a weight I was ashamed of. It was robbing me of the energy and stamina needed for each day. I had to change. I wanted to look different. I wanted to be in a size 38 rather than size 48. In order to do so, I had to drastically adjust my eating habits. Instead of eating for comfort I made strategic and healthy choices one day at a time. Instead of a great big bowl of sugary cereal to start my day, I began with low fat, high fiber oatmeal. I ate healthy and counted calories. By keeping below a certain calorie count each day my vision of how I wanted to look could become a reality.

I want the same for our church. We are a church in decline; lethargic and out of shape. We are going through the motions because there is no vision of what we want to look like. Today I want to paint a picture of what I believe, by God's grace, Immanuel will look like 3-5 years from now.

Before I begin, you may be asking, "Is this biblical?" Absolutely! God is always at work and His vision is being accomplished. Before He created the heavens and earth, He foresaw the Lamb of God being slain for the sins of the world (Revelation 13:8) and one day in the future, He says every tribe, language, people, and nation will worship the Lamb of God around His throne for all eternity (Revelation 7:9-10). He has a vision for your life—participating in His amazing redemption story!

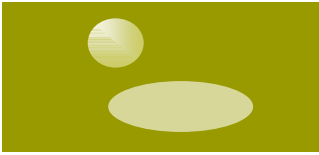
We've been talking about His Church, this church, for over a year now—looking at who we are, our values and mission. Asking God, "What is Your will for Immanuel?" We need a vision that unites us and compels us to accomplish it together for His glory. Proverbs 29:18 says, "Where there is no vision, the people perish." This is the vision God has given us! How can I know for certain? This vision has been marinating in the Great Commission and the Great Commandment. By God's grace this vision spells out, in a general sense, the healthy choices we will make to obey His commands. And Praise God, Jesus promises to be with us as we make this our hearts desire.

This Vision covers **four big ideas**. The vision paints the picture of our mission; **Knowing Jesus, Following Jesus** and **Making Jesus Known to All People**. The fourth idea pertains to the **facilities, ambiance, and schedule that can help us reach others for Christ**.

What Knowing Jesus Will Look Like at Immanuel...

Paul prayed that we would gain a spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Jesus (Ephesians 1:17). A big part of knowing Jesus is discipling believers and equipping them for the work of ministry (Ephesians 4:11-12).

Discipleship and **growing new believers was an important value** in our strategic planning conversations. Based on this we are going to be **much more intentional** about our Bible Study hours on Sunday morning. Both in-depth Bible Teaching and Discipleship Training will be provided during our worship services. Our equipping modules will include: How to Disciple a New Believer, How to Study and Interpret the Bible, How to Strengthen Relationships in the Home, Leadership Development, Spiritual Growth Classes 201-501 (teaching the foundations of spiritual growth), How to Serve within your Giftedness, How to Share your Faith, How to Lead a Life Group, and other classes as required. Youth through adults will have the opportunity to participate. Making disciples at multiple levels of maturity is crucial for us to be salt and light in a culture that needs to hear the love of Jesus. Children and Youth will continue their traditional Bible study format. Age Group Bible Study will continue to be the hub of who we are.



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Loving and caring Life Groups will meet throughout the week to study God's Word and be the lifeline for every believer. A couple of months ago I went hiking with the Youth Group. I needed it! I needed the exercise and I needed the Group! Had I not had the group experience, I would have quit early. We all need fellowship, accountability, and ministry. We plan to provide childcare on Wednesday evenings so parents in this season of life can gather together in a Life Group. This is truly the picture of the New Testament church; believers gathering from house to house studying the Apostles' teaching, participating in communion, serving, praying, and sharing all that they had with each other (Acts 2:42-47).

Getting to Know Jesus through Life Groups, particularly in homes, is critical to the future of Immanuel.

We need to help our youth know Jesus. If we are going to reach the families in our community, we need a **Youth Pastor!** Details of our Youth Ministry will be put together by a Youth Ministry Team, but **the goal for students graduating in our church is that they love God and His church.** Let's not let the High School years be the last time they see the inside of a Church. May they be sent out with a biblical worldview and heart that wants to serve God and His Kingdom, regardless of the career or education path they choose to follow.

For us to have a Youth Pastor, we will need to take a step of faith. I remember calling a Worship Pastor when the money was not available. If we all give sacrificially this will become a reality. We can do that again. God will provide through all of us!

What Following Jesus Will Look Like at Immanuel...

The **greatest way we get to know Jesus** is by **obeying Him**. The Experiencing God study reminded us of this important truth. Jesus told those who were following Him to pick up their cross and be like Him.

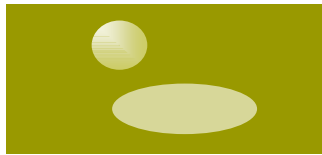
Being like Him means loving those whom Jesus loves. Loving the **"least of these."** Scripture teaches that our Lord is the God of the widow, the orphan, the foreigner among us and the poor (Zechariah 7:10, Proverbs 14:31; Matthew 25, James 1:27, etc.). **We will be much more intentional towards those Jesus is drawn to;** convalescent ministry, adopting an impoverished elementary class, stocking the Salvation Army food bank, helping single parents, clothing and feeding the poor, medical or dental help.

- What kind of ministry does the Lord want us to be doing in the Oasis housing area? Can we purchase a duplex in the neighborhood and partner with North American Mission Board to train a potential pastor in church planting? We will cooperate with our Hispanic Church and other organizations to provide important ministry to these families in need. This is where Jesus would hang out and we must be His presence!
- Single parents need a place to belong. Soon a Wednesday evening program is beginning for this much-needed ministry in our community.
- Last month we practiced providing shoes to the underprivileged. Ten pairs were given out this year but I anticipate this growing exponentially next year as word gets out that we are serious about this.
- We are joining the Child Development Center in beginning a clothing closet for families in need. Referred through Kern County resources, the Child Development Center provides care for the children of about 40 families. These families need to know the church is there for them also.
- Harvest Festival is huge for our church. We need everyone involved this year.
- Serving in the Preschool, Children's or Youth area. To reach people whom God wants us to reach requires obedience, sacrifice, and a willingness to do whatever it takes. It takes an army of volunteers.

Imagine what God will do through Immanuel when loving like Jesus loves becomes our practice!

We Will Make Jesus Known to All People—Beginning in Ridgecrest...

We are going to turn up the evangelistic thermostat!



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By the grace of God over the next 3-5 years we will make it our goal to tell all of Ridgecrest that Jesus died and rose from the grave for them. We cannot do this all ourselves but we will cooperate more with other churches through events like Be The Church, evangelistic crusades, and the Unity of Friends Conference.

By God's grace we will train each person in our church family how to share their faith. We have a fabulous resource—Spiritual Growth Class 401, How to Share Your Faith. We will refresh this resource to make it relevant to our community. We will consistently offer this course on Sunday mornings.

It is my prayer that each of us will **get to know our neighbor**. In John 4 Jesus was intentional about going through Samaria rather than making a detour around Samaria like Jews would typically do. He wanted to visit with people who needed the Lord. **Before** we can expect an unbeliever to come with us to our **church home** let's **invite** them into our **personal home**. They need to feel as if they belong before they will believe! Let's invite our neighbors into our home for dinner—just for the opportunity to know them better. People won't care how much we know until they first know how much we care. Listening to their story, doing kind deeds, spending time outside, asking how we can pray for them, "Being The Church" in our neighborhood is love.

Life Groups, let's be intentional at filling the "**empty chair**" with someone who needs to know the love of God. **Imagine celebrating with new believers, in this service, through the waters of baptism**. By God's grace we will hear testimonies every Sunday! Imagine a Life Group surrounding a person about to be baptized in this service. Just like the paralytic who was carried by caring friends to Jesus to be healed (Mark 2:1-12).

A necessary ministry to help **make Jesus known is addressing family life issues**. Marriage is in crisis and couples have no idea that Jesus can make the difference. Typically people do not understand their need for Jesus until they find themselves in crisis. I'm trusting God to call out a team of concerned couples who are passionate in creating opportunities to share hope with families who hurt. Our first Family Outreach event will be this April with Steve Scheibner, the United Airlines pilot who was supposed to have flown on 9-11 in one of the hijacked planes. It's going to be an exciting weekend. Pray that many local churches will get involved on the weekend following Easter.

Jesus has given us a God sized task—fulfilling the **Great Commission**. Not only are we to make Him known in Ridgecrest but in Mojave, Menifee, Studio City and to the ends of the earth. **Missions through church planting** will continue to be a priority. We will join church planting coalitions and support planters who are passionate about reaching those whom Jesus died for. By God's grace we hope to help plant one church per year. We will plant churches that have the mindset to plant other churches. Teams will be sent regularly to these budding new plants to encourage the missionary and help **cultivate the plant God is establishing both here and abroad**.

If we are committed to the Great Commission and Great Commandment, Jesus will grow His church! Not us—JESUS!

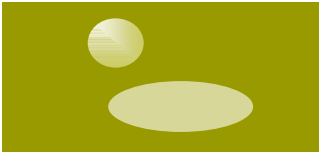
Which brings me to the Fourth Idea...

Facilities – What Does God Want this Ministry Tool to Look Like?

Know for certain He wants us to enhance the facility He has provided for us.

It can be intimidating coming into this environment for the very **first time**. Recently Susan and I went to our first health food store. As you can tell, it's not an establishment we visit often but we were in search of a product that we knew little about, let alone pronounce. The last thing we wanted to do was look foolish! People looking for Jesus for the first time feel the same way coming to church! When they come, let's make their first impression be a lasting one.

That begins with a warm and receptive entrance. Our Greeters ministry is wonderful! They provide such an important impression for all who arrive but especially those here for the first time. **We will help enhance this ministry** with a new look to our Chapel Lobby and fellowship area. Our front door atmosphere will warmly and lovingly say, "Welcome Home" with greeters who love to wear a smile and an ambiance that supports this.



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Our family worship venue needs to be updated to an environment that truly glorifies God and reminds us of Jesus' great sacrifice. I'm reminded of the little girl who was lost in her community and she didn't know her address. A police officer wanted to help but wasn't sure how. Finally, the little girl told the officer, "If you can take me to that church with a big cross on it, I can find my way home from there." It's only at the cross that we can find our way home. The Immanuel family will gather at the cross for worship in a transformed chapel that's inviting and can celebrate through baptisms and testimonies of how folks found their way back home to Jesus. We need a baptistery here!

We Need to Adjust Our Sunday Worship to Reach More and Provide More Seating

Beginning October 7, Worship service times and styles are being modified. **WHY?** We need to balance the attendance of our services and provide additional seating at the later service. We often reach the 80% seating capacity threshold and this prevents us from reaching more. As you leave today, you will receive a schedule of proposed Worship Service and Bible Study/Life Enrichment classes as well as a hard copy of the presentation of this vision. We will have a Town Hall/QBM tonight to answer all your questions.

Rest assured the content of our services will be all about Jesus, the amazing Gospel story. Our only hope is found in an Old Rugged Cross and an Empty Grave! This will be crystal clear in each service.

At the beginning of this year I wanted to look different. To look different, I had to daily live differently. Can you see the possibilities for our church's future?

These are the healthy daily choices God wants us to make...

- Be laser focused on our Core Values
- Disciple and grow believers
- Invite our neighbors into our home and get to know them
- Fill the 'empty chair' in our Life Groups
- Help the home; help mom and dad to love each other

Last night there were children who went to bed scared because of the shouting and the abuse and the addictive behavior of a mom or dad. We have the answer and Jesus wants us to be the answer.

- Let's equip mom and dad to raise their children to love God, and their children to love and honor mom and dad
- We will plant churches who will plant more churches
- Live with a willingness to be flexible; be willing to die to self

Friend, you are a seed in God's hand.

John 12:24

Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.

The only way your seed can make a difference for the Kingdom is by allowing God to bury it. May we be seeds willing to be buried, dying to our own desires and living only for His. If we do, our baptistery will flourish with life and you will hear testimonies of how God has used you to bring hope to those who had no hope. As we do, we will not be the last generation doing God's work. There will be a generation behind us that we can pass the baton to. This is what I see our church's future being like. This is the vision God has given us. By God's grace, let's all own it!!!

Our Core Values...

- ◆ *World Missions* ◆ *Worship* ◆ *Preaching, Teaching and Personal Study of the Word of God* ◆
- ◆ *Community* ◆ *Family* ◆ *Obedience to God's Commands* ◆
- ◆ *Reaching the Lost and Helping Believers to Grow* ◆