

“FOR ALL GENERATIONS”

(Psalm 89:1-4)

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[Cornerstone U.M.C.; 8-25-24]

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1. Read CEB Text: Psalm 89:1-4 and Pray.
2. A "*Peanuts*" comic strip once featured a conversation between Lucy & Charlie Brown in which Lucy says that life is like a deck chair: "*Some place it so they can see where they're going; others place it so they can see where they have been; and still others where they can have a good view of where they are at present.*" But Charlie Brown's replies: "*I can't even get mine unfolded.*"

A--You know, Vision is that which gives us the ability to perceive and comprehend what's going on around us -- in a manner of speaking, it helps us understand where we've been, where we are now, and where we're going.

B--But, more than just a *physical* reality, Vision is also a *spiritual* sense that's absolutely essential not only in our own *individual* Christian lives, but also in our *corporate* life together as God's Church.

C--Yet, it's unfortunate that many churches (and sometimes many of *us*) are just like Charlie Brown: ...rather than having a Vision for the future, we can't even seem to "get our (metaphorical) chairs unfolded"!

3. Well, last week I talked about the importance, power and characteristics of a God-given Vision, and today I want to celebrate and affirm how *our church* here at Cornerstone UMC is a church seeking to live into these!

A--If you worshipped with us last week, you'll remember that I mentioned that our church's purpose/mission is to be "*A Christian community reflecting the love of Jesus by Nurturing individuals, Connecting groups, and Impacting our world.*"

B--*That* essential purpose/mission has never changed -- yes, we're articulated in several ways over the course of our 30+ year history (this being the latest version), but whatever the language, it still boils down us to it being *our* way of taking about carrying out Jesus' "Great Commandment" to "*go into all the world and proclaim the gospel to all creation*" (from Mark 16:15).

C--Yet, HOW (specifically) will we be doing this over the next *season* of our history? *THAT* is what Vision is all about -- discovering and living into God's plans for our immediate future.

4. So, to that end, as many of you already know, for the last year or so we as a church have been engaged in a Visioning process to prayerfully discover and discern what it is that we believe God wants us to focus on for the next 2-5 or so years of our ministry together.

A--During this process, our Vision Team diligently researched population trends and physical and spiritual needs in our community, and received input about these from our staff, leadership, *and* from many of you in the congregation-wide Town Hall that we held this past March.

B--Then, in late July (about a month ago), the results and recommendations of all this work were shared, discussed and adopted by our Church Council.

5. So today, I'm excited to share a bit more not only about WHAT that Vision IS, but also some observations about its biblical grounding, and what it can mean for each of us in our individual and corporate lives together as Christians.

--II--

6. Now, those of you HERE in the Sanctuary were given a handout that contains these -- and for those ONLINE, there's link in the YouTube description for you to download it.

A--But to begin with, I simply want to call attention to the short short slogan that we believe captures the essence of our Vision for at least the next 5 years

{SHOW ON BACKGROUND SLIDE ON SCREEN}...

"A church that is a beacon of unity, growth and impact for all generations, where every voice is heard and every heart is touched."

B--And we've delineated this into three "*Strategic Vision Priorities*" that many of you have already seen, and are found again in your handout. ¹

C--Yet, the essence of ALL of this boils down to being us a church that is laser focused on offering ***intentional, intergenerational ministry***.

7. You know, a lot of churches around us (especially the large mega-churches) have great ministries specifically for children, youth, or older adults -- from what I understand, for a while in our history, even *we* here at Cornerstone tried to emulate this "be all things to all people" model of ministry.

A--Yet, after God took us through a "pruning/rebirth" process a few years ago, we began discovering (out of *necessity* at first) the power and value of doing things *together* as a *combined* congregation, rather than separating people and ministry by age, life stage, or music and worship style preference like so many other churches do.

B--Not only that, but one of the main findings of the Vision Team in its demographic research was that while the *largest* segment of our community over the next 10 years will continue to be "families with young children," the *fastest growing* segment will be ages 65+ -- people who are moving here to retire; many of whom will be doing so to be closer to their children and grandchildren.

C--Now, what this told us is that there is a great door of opportunity in doing ministry that brings these two groups together (grandparents and grandchildren), and by doing things that bridge these *two* groups (i.e., "*intergenerational ministry*") we'll actually end up reaching *everyone*.

8. But what's an even more profound "God-moment" about all this is that we've also begun to realize that this "new" model of ministry is actually NOT so "new" after all, but merely a rediscovery of the *primary* model of ministry used by God's people in the Bible.

A--For instance, listen again to Verses 1, 3 & 4 of today's scripture from Psalm 89...

"I will sing of the Lord's loyal love forever. I will proclaim your faithfulness with my own mouth from one generation to the next. ...3 [God] said, "I made a covenant with my chosen one; I promised my servant David: 4 'I will establish your offspring forever; I will build up your throne from one generation to the next."

B--You see, back in the Old Testament times when these words were written, the Jewish community intentionally included (and still does *today*, in many ways) the needs and voices of *all* generations and stages of life in their work together --...

1--...Young and old, male and female, rich and poor, educated and uneducated -- were all considered part of the ONE community of faith.

2--There was not a separation/segregation of work/ministry by age or life-stage, but there was a sense that each generation supported the next, learned from the previous, and was given a voice at the table of life and work together ²

C--So my point for us here at Cornerstone is that, even though we came upon it accidentally, a Vision of being a church "*For All Generations*" (as we've named it in our Vision slogan and in today's sermon title) is not really "new," but is something God has invited/encouraged His people to do as far back as the Old Testament.

D--And while it may be unique in *our* culture and community TODAY, it IS something we believe God is calling us to embrace and live into here at Cornerstone UMC.

9. Some of you may know that I'm honestly not (yet) a great fan of A.I. (artificial intelligence). ³ But it IS growing on me.

A--And one example of *why* is... when our own Andy Unger took the three adopted "Strategic Vision Priorities" & (just for fun) ran them through an AI generator (& our Vision Team did this again at a recent meeting), listen to what it spit out (close your eyes)...

"Imagine a vibrant community where every generation thrives together, where our church is not just a place of worship but a dynamic hub for local engagement. We are committed to fostering intergenerational ministry, bridging gaps and creating lasting connections between young and old. Our unique location and versatile space are more than just a building—they're a catalyst for community interaction, offering opportunities for local events, outreach, and support. By strengthening the ties between our church and its internal partners like our preschool and Scouts, we're building a cohesive, supportive network that enriches lives and empowers everyone involved. Join us in transforming our church into a beacon of unity, growth, and impact for all generations, ...where every voice is heard and every heart is touched." ⁴

B--[**Open your eyes...**] I don't know about you, but *that* describes a kind of church that *I* want to be part of!

1--And your leaders here believe that its the kind of church that both *you* as congregation members AND *others* in our community and world will want to be part of all, as well!

2--In other words, drawing on the qualities of a Godly Vision from last week's message, it's a specific, selfless Vision from God that can propel us into God's future for us!

--III--

10. Now, of course, what I've shared today doesn't provide *everything* we need in order to accomplish that Vision, which is why our Church Council also adopted a set of "*Short-term Objectives*" ⁵ (over the next 12 months, which you can get a copy of by contacting the church office), along with some tools to help hold this Vision *before* us as we plan events and ministry activities. ⁶

A--Plus, our Vision Team is *still* working to discern specific *mid- and long-range objectives* (to be accomplished over the next 5 years) which we'll share later this Fall or next year when those are ready. ⁷

B--But in the meantime, today I simply wanted to share my observations and excitement about our "new" Vision of *intentional, Intergenerational ministry* -- of being a church "*For All Generations...*" -- and how it can help us in this next season of our ministry to live into God's calling to be "*a Christian community, reflecting the love of Jesus.*"

11. [PRAYER]

12. [Closing Song: UMH#451, *Be Thou My Vision*]

ENDNOTES:

¹ Our three adopted **Strategic Vision Priorities** are:

- #1--Intentionally develop Intergenerational ministry
- #2--Build better connections with our internal partner ministries (like our Preschool, Scouts, GriefShare, etc.), and...
- #3--Be more intentional about using our facility/land as a tool to market intergenerational ministry in/with our local community

² A modern example of this is a contemporary Seder meal, where even part of the Seder ritual (i.e., the question portion where children ask set questions about "why do we do...?") is intentionally intergenerational and age-inclusive.

³ I don't like how A.I. tends to circumvent individual and personal creativity in order to accomplish something that we as *individuals* need to know how to do OURSELVES (vs. letting a computer do it FOR us).

⁴ The last phrase ("*where every voice is heard and every heart is touched*") was actually something generated by A.I. when the next to last sentence ("*Join us in transforming our church into a beacon of unity, growth, and impact for all generations*") was put through another A.I. generator at one of our Vision Team meetings. You may recognize that those last two sentences made their way into the final version of our Vision statement because we felt that -- even if it was created by a computer -- it nevertheless still did accurately portray and reflect the essence of God's Vision for us!

⁵ These *Short-Term Objectives* are seven, relatively easy "low hanging fruit", so to speak, which believe can be accomplished by Summer 2025:

- #1) Host at least 4 **congregation-wide Affinity Events**
- #2) Offer at least THREE **community-connection events** per year
- #3) Create **Pre-Approved Project List for Scouting** Ministry Partners
- #4) Create a **new team for focus on church marketing and re-branding** (including a new logo), and the creation of a "Marketing Publicity Form" (perhaps will take longer than 12 months)
- #5) Better **highlight work of partner ministries during worship**.
- #6) **Reach out to Partner Ministries** to learn what THEY need and how WE as a church can best support THEM (vs. US just wanting things from THEM)
- #7) Ask all new and existing congregation-wide and community-connection ministry events to utilize new "**Guiding Questions**" document to guide their planning and work

CONSIDERATION for all seven of these: We need to focus on what we can do best without overreaching. We do not need to try to be "all things to all people."

⁶ We also created a "Guiding Questions" form for use by all church groups who want to host an event that is either congregation-wide or for the community. The purpose for this is so that any new or existing ministry, program or group that is seeking to host congregation-wide and community-connection events/programs need to think about the things in this form to support and help us achieve the three Strategic Vision Priorities -- so that these priorities can become a "lens" (if you will) through which we consider and do ministry in our community and world.

⁷ These mid- and long range objectives are more bold than the easy, may take up to 5 years for us to complete, and will require much more time, energy, and people and financial resources than the short-term objectives. Some will be new ministry *programs* and projects that we'll implement. Others may include the development of both our *existing* and potential *new* facility and property infrastructure. And still other mid- and long-range objectives will include the development of specific plans to fund and support the accomplishment of these objectives. Again, the exact scope and nature of these are yet to be worked out, but we'll be sharing them later this Fall as soon as they're identified and adopted by Church Council.