

Ten Years

This lesson shall be a different one than you are used to. Nonetheless it shall be a very applicable one. It is titled “Ten Years”

A Ten-Year Reference to Past Events

The Apostle Paul referred to two events in his life which mention a time interval. The first was in relation to an account Paul wrote about in Galatians 2:1, ***“Then after an interval of fourteen years I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas, taking Titus along also.”*** This is in relation to fourteen years from Saul’s conversion, which was sometime after A.D. 33. The event to which Paul refers is to his second return to Jerusalem in Acts 11:29 which took place in A.D. 44. This is a reference to events of the past.

The second passage is in reference to a vision of Paul’s future. 2 Cor 12:2, ***“I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago—whether in the body I do not know, or out of the body I do not know, God knows—such a man was caught up to the third heaven.”*** If the letter to the Corinthians was written in 56 AD, then this event to which Paul refers to would have occurred about A.D. 40. Paul had a vision from God in which he was caught up to heaven. Paul had a severe weakness, “a thorn in the flesh”, which was humbling him (11:7).

Some say it was his anti-Christian behavior of the past which haunted him on the mission field. Others say a plausible explanation is a weakness in his eyes. He wrote to the Christians in Gal 4:15, ***“if possible, you would have plucked out your eyes and given them to me.”*** He also referred to this type of writing style as well. Gal 6:11, ***“See with what large letters I am writing to you with my own hand.”*** We don’t know for sure, but we do know that God answered the request for removal - that answer was NO. Paul’s weakness would be left to keep him humble and glorify God.

I am at the end of my 10th year at West Side. Like Paul, I want to review these last 10 years. There are also some things we need to discuss concerning a vision for the future. Let's start a review of the past and then we'll talk about a vision for the future.

The Last Ten Years Through My Eyes.

It was Wednesday January 28, 2009 when I arrived with the moving truck after making the 750-mile trip from Macon, GA. I had left Joyce in Macon for an additional month since she had to be at work the day the bonuses were handed out.

The moving truck was parked near the garage and on the selected day a large group of men and women showed up to empty the van. It took Joyce and me about a week to get everything out of the house and into the truck in Macon and it took this group less than two hours to empty the truck!! Men like Wayne Redford, Kevin Nichol, Brad Bennett, Keith Shovestull, and so many others I can't remember. I don't think I even touched a box – I was made the director. My back was very happy to receive this helpful welcome.

The Leadership

At the time West Side had two elders, Bill Linville and Ed Rezach. We also had three deacons Sam Henderson, Kevin Nichol and Keith Shovestull. We added two more Elders in these 8 years but lost Bill to death in October 2011 and Ed to AL in 2017 leaving us 2 Elders, Brad Bennett and myself. We now have 5 Deacons serving. In 2009 we had about 65 in attendance, with the majority being middle aged and older. On my first Sunday I began a series of lessons on personal service to God.

The Congregation

What was our initial observation? It was obvious that the congregation was full of encouragers, and servants with many gifts.

After a few weeks of Joyce and I observing, we saw that this congregation was special above all the others in all our years of preaching. We were seeing behavior unlike anything we had witnessed before. Joyce asked me, “When we moved to SW OH in 1982 if we had moved here instead, do you think we would have stayed?” “I said, honey if we had moved here, we would have lived our entire life amongst these Christians if it were up to me alone.”

Jesus said in John 13:34-35, *“A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.”* You have been this type of congregation to me.

Today, of the original group of 65, many have moved on or passed away. Even through all that, the Lord blessed us with so many new families, new converts and restorations. Over the years we have climbed to over 125 in attendance a few times but have stayed consistently around 80. I have talked with many preachers in many areas of this country and most cannot say that. Most are declining, and some are in danger of fading away altogether.

Youth Group

The youth group was small with just a few high schoolers, and about 12 more for the pre-high school. Pam Rezach, Karen Nichol, Catherine Myers and Jan Bailey were heavily involved in that area of education. This was one of the reasons Joyce and I chose to come here. We wanted to be part of this incredible group and participate in the many activities which ongoing.

In 2009 the congregation decided to renew its effort in holding a VBS after some years of not having one. I don't remember the numbers of kids that came but the enthusiasm of the congregation was amazing, and it affected the congregation positively.

Over the winter of 2009, 2010 and 2011 we added many new families with children to the congregation which changed the entire dynamic of West Side. In the last ten years we have graduated more than 20 students. We now have a wonderful group of young people that are taking an active part in our work and worship. We have kids going to two camps every summer and we have begun a very active Lads to Leaders program.

Missions

In 2009 West Side had ministries besides the youth group. West Side supported the Rosie family in Madagascar and several women were working actively involved in a deaf ministry. Today we are still with the Rosie's who have moved to Venezuela. Our deaf ministry has grown from several women to nearly a dozen that are either actively signing or learning to sign. This is a wonderful ministry that requires a huge commitment of time and overcoming the fear of being in front of a group of people. We are also sharing sermons and doing some support for brother Raju in India. His work is growing nearly every week. The Elders are actively looking for ways to get even more involved in mission work and many in the congregation are involved privately in supporting brother Raju.

Ministries

In the past eight years there have been many other ministries added to the tool box for the church family.

- Meals Ministry: I have never seen a congregation better at providing meals for families in need. They say the way to a man's heart is through his stomach. If that is true of a congregation, then you have the heart of many. Thanksgiving baskets as well as a food pantry.

- Other Ministries: There are also many other ministries, some which have come and gone in that time. The clothing ministry, a greeting ministry, VBS and others. We are a congregation which enjoys being busy for the Lord in the kingdom.

From a preacher's point of view, you are an encouraging and active congregation in the kingdom, willing to make a difference for the world around us. As Jesus said, *“Well done good and faithful servants.”*

Ten Years and a Vision for the Future

Seeing where we have been and where we are, I want to discuss a vision for the future. As a preacher, I have a vision in my heart. I did not have to go to the “third heaven” to gain it, but simply to the pages of the same Bible which y'all have. The vision is not one of a miraculous nature, but of a biblical nature. There are some very important points to the vision of a congregation.

1) It is an Evangelistic Vision

We are to take the gospel of Jesus Christ to every person upon whom we may have influence and are given opportunity. The Gospel is so powerful that it gives us the potential to *“turn the world upside down”* (Acts 17:6). As a church family the goal of converting the lost as defined by Jesus should have a high priority for each of us. Together if we can have a mind to work (Nehemiah 4:6) there is no limit to what good we can accomplish in the kingdom. The Lord's church is meant to have a vision of being evangelistically minded.

2) It is a Retentive Vision

Not only are we supposed to be evangelistic, but also to teach converts whatever Jesus commands of us (Matthew 28:19-20).

With this teaching we grow in respect to salvation (1 Peter 2:2), develop leadership (1 Timothy 2:2) and provide longevity for the present generation of Christians (Hebrews 2:1-2). We must hang onto the souls we convert. We must also have an eye on future generations and keep our young people engaged and strong in service to the Lord.

This has and always will be the vision of Christ's church. We either share this vision with Christ or we don't. That leads to a very important question. How can we know that we at West Side really share this vision with Jesus? Since a vision is that of the future, the only evidence we would have of this is the plans and goals for the future. Is it in West Side's master plan that we can overcome obstacles and make it possible to attain it?

That leads to the biggest question of all: What is the current plan for the church at West Side? We are actively taking steps to involve more members in the work here. We continually look at resources, talent, and need to exercise our plan to involve members in the process.

The Elders know that we need more communication, not less. We need to get more feedback on the work and ideas for the future. Therefore, we are going to have more congregational meetings beginning in January 2019 with plans to have a congregational meeting every quarter. We will post a sheet of paper to be used as an agenda for these meetings. Put your ideas for discussion on this paper and that idea can be brought before the congregation in our next meeting.

The Elders WELCOME input into this process. It is vital to the future of this congregation as well as being vital to the souls of those not yet saved. I pray that God will bless each of us in this endeavor.