

THE BIG IDEA: We live near God in order to be sent to those far from him.

The Take-Off

Let me tell you what the goal of this morning is - or as Andy Stanley would say - let me define the win, and it's a win that all of us would agree is a good one whether or not you've ever been in the situation I'm about to describe.

Our goal this morning is to prevent this [BAD BLIND DATE PIC]

Now, I've never personally had this happen as a blind date, but I have experienced a very bad date before, and it went something like this:

I was a senior in college, had just been dumped, and on a whim I asked one of the cheerleaders on a date fully expecting that she would say no, but she didn't.

I couldn't believe my luck! I had kind of had my eye on her for a while and thought she was, well, perfect.

Barbie doll looks and she said yes! Everything was great until we actually went on the date and she couldn't stop talking about herself.

In other words, who she actually was wasn't even close to who I thought she was, and it resulted in a long night that I would have loved to gotten back.

Obviously, if I could have know she liked herself more than I liked her, I never would have asked her out.

It was like a bad blind date switch game where the person you've talked to on the phone or by email or text for the last 3 months is VERY DIFFERENT in person.

Life is too short to waste time like that, and in the end that can be pretty painful, too.

So the goal this morning is to try as best we can to share with you who The Gathering is, because we don't want you to suddenly think we aren't what you thought we were. Clear as mud?? Good. Let's press on.

Probably the place to start is with our Big Idea, because this one statement is our vision statement. This is what we feel should drive everything we do and every decision we make.

At The Gathering, **we live near God in order to be sent to those far from him.**

In order to accomplish this, we need to be defined by 4 qualities (and yes, they do spell out the word NEAR):

1. We must be NECESSARY

- a. You'll notice as we go through these qualities that none of them can be achieved at a distance.
- b. All of us have experienced the pain of a young crush moving away and we thought that we would die only to find within a few weeks we had stopped sending the emails or letters that we'd promised to send daily.
- c. Absence does not always make the heart grow fonder, especially if there was never any intentional commitment to the relationship in the first place
- d. But we want to be a church that is necessary in the world around us
- e. We want to help others see that they have a need that can be intentionally filled with 3 themes that we will always make sure we preach on and teach about
 - Jesus' death for us was necessary
 - John 3:14-15 says that he HAD to be lifted up on a cross
 - Why? Moses lifted up a bronze snake to heal the people he was leading, and Jesus was lifted up in order to provide healing from the sin that has ravished each one of us
 - Romans 3:10 and 3:23 are clear: we are sinners in need of a savior
 - Jesus' death and resurrection is necessary. You and I don't have the luxury of making it optional, and The Gathering never will.
 - Life with other believers is necessary
 - It sharpens us (Proverbs 27:17)
 - It soothes us (Psalm 133:2)
 - Lone Ranger Christians are doomed to fail because they will fall alone (Eccl. 4:9-12)
 - The power of the Holy Spirit is necessary
 - Acts 1:8 clearly states our call - to be witnesses for Jesus near and far
 - It is also clear that we can't do that without the power of the Holy Spirit
 - There are many different ways to view the Holy Spirit, and sadly many view him as the odd uncle of the trinity

- But at The Gathering, we value the Holy Spirit and preach that the gifts he gives are gifts that are necessary for accomplishing the call we've been given
 - We are a part of the Assembly of God denomination - a pentecostal denomination that began as a mission agency
 - It has existed since it's beginnings to see people near God being sent to those far from him in the power of the Holy Spirit, and that sounds a lot like what we're about
 - 1 Corinthians 12:7-11 lists some of the gifts that the Holy Spirit distributes among us, and as a pentecostal church it means that we will actively teach the body to pursue and develop the gifts that we've been given
- f. The death of Christ, the fellowship of believers and the power of the Holy Spirit are all necessary, and because we want to be necessary, we will intentionally teach these truths.

2. We must be EQUIPPING

- a. If you've been with us any length of time, this next statement won't come as a surprise: we are a teaching church.
- b. You're holding an outline right now that you may or may not be using, but The Gathering takes seriously our call found in Ephesians 4:11-13.
- c. We are called as leaders in the church to equip you to do the ministry, and that's one point that is non-negotiable.
- d. We don't believe that something magic happens because you got the right pastor to pray for you, but we do believe that God wants to move in power through each member of the body and so we are committed to not only teaching you, but developing you.
- e. How a church practically and organizationally works out the command to equip is not really specified in scripture, and that allows each church to work out what is best for them in their culture or situation.
- f. At The Gathering, we feel that the best leadership according to the Bible is eldership, and we've seen elders mentioned many times in the book of Acts as well as other letters written to New Testament churches.
- g. Many of us have attended and even been members of church that were congregational rule where everything got voted on. That's very American, but in our understanding, not very Biblical.
- h. The Biblical model seems to be that everyone has a voice, but not everyone has a vote.
- i. Let me give you a few verses to help shed some light on our perspective:
 - 1 Corinthians 2:14 - some things are only spiritually discerned
 - Matthew 11:15 (among many) - do all have ears to hear truth?
 - Mark 4 - the parable of the sower - only 25% of the seed was fruitful
- j. The point? Just because someone is in a church doesn't make them spiritually wise or discerning.
- k. Do they have a voice? Absolutely. Do they have the power of a vote to determine spiritual matters? No. Can they? As an elder.
- l. In our early stages, the elder process has been 3 men that were approved early on and then 2 more men that the elders prayed about and then appointed.
- m. In the future, we'll follow that same process but also allow the body to share with the elders those who you feel would be good in the role of an elder and also concerns about people the elder board is considering. Ultimately, then, the elders would decide. All have a voice.
- n. Immediately we think of the worst case scenarios, don't we? The power-hungry elder bent on getting shag carpet, but these men wouldn't be qualified to lead as elders biblically if they weren't willing to lay their lives down for the body.
- o. People who are willing to die for you can be trusted to make decisions concerning you.
- p. But elders don't do everything, because we're called as a church to equip YOU to do the ministry, and the simplest way to get started finding out what you were made for is to start serving on an iOS Ministry Team.
- q. iOS simply stands for "I Offer Service" and these are the people you've seen wearing the orange shirts, and there are PLENTY of opportunities for you to jump right in and begin to serve Jesus and his church.
- r. Do you have to be a member to serve? Sometimes.
- s. What we mean by that is that the more intimate the ministry is to the life of the church, the more important it is that you're all in with us.

- t. I'd let a stranger help me grill food for my family, but he wouldn't say bedtime prayers with my kids. You get the point.

3. We must be AUTHENTIC

- a. So to fulfill our vision of being near God and then sent to those far from him, we've got to be necessary and equipping. We've also got to be authentic, because the people you and I are being sent to have great BS detectors.
- b. At The Gathering, our faith is made authentic through COMMUNITY, and specifically, through Community Groups.
- c. How does community help us develop authentic faith? Friction.
- d. We use the word family around here a lot, because that's a great metaphor for who we are.
- e. We tend to have good times and bad times. We laugh together and then rub each other the wrong way.
- f. It's not much different than your family or mine, but guess what happens in that process?
- g. 1 Peter 1:6-7 says that the friction makes your faith like gold and gives God glory
- h. John 13:35 says that when we truly love each other authentically, the world sees Jesus
- i. People like to be alone because it's easier, and I'm saying that as an introvert. I actually LIKE being alone!
- j. But being alone will never make me the best I can be. I need friction for that, and you provide it!
- k. And in case you think that's harsh, it's actually Biblical.
- l. Hebrews 10:24 says to "spur" one another on to love and good deeds. The word for spur actually means "to irritate."
- m. You're welcome.

4. We must be RELATIONAL

- a. This seems like a no-brainer, but nothing we've talked about to this point happens very well by shouting at each other from a distance.
- b. Being necessary, equipping, and authentic only happen in relationship, and that's why we will boldly and unashamedly encourage attendees of The Gathering to become members of The Gathering.
- c. Something happens when we put our roots down in one place.
- d. We live in a culture that encourages people to attend a handful of churches but never belong to one, and that short-circuits the desire Jesus has for his church.
- e. Look at the awesome promises found in Ephesians 3:17-21
 - He wants you to have power
 - He wants you to filled and overflowing
 - He wants to do more in and through you than you can even imagine, and
 - He wants to bring glory to himself through the church that will last forever!
- f. And everyone of those promises won't happen unless we take the first step found in verse 17: we need to be rooted and established.
- g. In other words, we need to be PLANTED.
- h. And in case you're thinking you can have all those promises on your own - and you probably can to a lesser degree - take a look at who Paul is giving these promises to in verse 10: the church.
- i. This relational aspect is why we use a word like COVENANT on the backside of your notes sheet. It implies what we give regardless of what we get. It speaks of relationships more than rights.

The Landing

So this is who we are. it is what we are all about at The Gathering, and today we want to give you the opportunity to say yes to being planted here and serving here and growing together in faith here.

I'd like to close this Discover The Gathering morning out by reading through the COVENANT with you and then allowing you the time to take the next steps on the separate sheet that you were given as you walked in this morning.

After I've read the covenant, we'll take a time to pray and receive communion, and then we'll take the steps together.